

The Siege Of Lewiston

An Interview With Lady, Soldier Against Fascism

Lady/David Van Deusen (Co-Founder of The Green Mountain Anarchist Collective)

2005



Members of The Green Mountain Anarchist Collective, David Van Deusen holding banner far left, Lady center, fist in air, lead Black Bloc march against fascism, Lewiston Maine, 2003

On January 11th, 2003, a mass contingent of anti-racists squared off against the forces of irrational hate as encapsulated in the Midwest based, neo-Nazi, World Church of the Creator (WCC), and the West Virginia based National Alliance (NA). [1] The WCC and NA targeted Lewiston for recruitment

following racist public statements by the city's mayor aimed at the local Somali community. The confrontation took place on the outskirts of the working class city of Lewiston, Maine, in front of a National Guard Armory. There, 500 anti-racists pushed themselves through police barricades in order to stand witness against the 30 or so fascists meeting, under heavy police protection, inside the armory. In addition to this protest, an estimated 5000 Lewiston residents partook in a "diversity rally" across town.

Of the 500 protesters at the scene, 50 marched in a tight Black Bloc formation. While the Bloc itself, primarily composed of Northeast Federation of Anarcho Communists (NEFAC) and Anti-Racist Action (ARA) members, may have been relatively small, it served an indispensable role in the overall action. In the front line of the Black Bloc was the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective (GMAC); first among GMAC was "Lady."

Lady, 25, is currently [2005] a member of NEFAC-Vermont, and was a longtime member of Columbus ARA (Ohio). She is a veteran of numerous Black Bloc actions, and has been influential in the class struggle anarchist community for many years. She was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, and moved to Vermont after the Quebec City riots in 2001. She works as a waitress in a diner.

David Van Deusen: You, as a member of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective, were one of the primary organizers of the Lewiston Black Bloc. Can you tell me why you took on this project on?

Lady: Vermont does not currently have any white supremacist groups that are organizing publicly. When we heard about Maine and their situation, I was approached by a womyn who was formerly interested in ARA, I immediately knew that I could be an asset. People tend to think that Vermont and Maine are a lot alike, and they aren't. So I was eager to jump into this one, not only because my boots were getting dusty, but because I didn't want those boneheads to come towards Vermont.

Van Deusen: To what extent did you find support among the locals in and around Lewiston?

Lady: There was a group of political communal living kids who called themselves the J.E.D. collective who were eager and supportive to try new tactics. They hadn't done this type of organizing and they were surprised that they now had to. As far as the other townies were concerned, there were three types: 1. the people who were preoccupied with the peace rally that was being organized (liberals, police, religious folk) 2. Somalian people and they were cautious but definitely aware of who was coming to town, and 3. Working class people who weren't affected in their daily routine.

Van Deusen: How do you think the overall action would have gone if there was no Black Bloc?

Lady: It's usually not the case that I say this, but some community members would not have heard about this. We got information out days before the protest, as well as flyering a follow up the day after. I honestly believe that the three Somali men, a few independent media types, and at least 20 local kids, that were with us would not have come out to where the National Alliance was recruiting that day.

Van Deusen: Peace rally? Is that like a protest against the white supremacists?

Lady: At every anticipated fascist hoopla, where the police think a good amount of attention will be drawn, these rallies are organized. They are always away from where the white power dudes are, and almost always in a closed off building. Two things right away should key you in to the fact that this is an attempt to pacify people: 1. The police and liberal groups work together, and; 2. A closed off building (i.e. no traffic or pedestrians notice you, and you can't get outta there very easily). They are organized in good spirit, but distract from the real problem. The issue at hand that day was not the peaceful people in the gymnasium, but the white supremacist organizers hovering at the end of the neighborhood trying to pick off some welfare white boys who agree "Yeah! How come the Somali's get all the jobs and food stamps?! I'm hungry! I can't find work!" White power organizers become powerful because people pray inside closed doors when they have public rallies.

Van Deusen: You were also present in York, Pennsylvania, during the street fighting with the Hammerskins. How did Lewiston compare to your experiences in York?

Lady: Lewiston was a lot more focused in terms of outreach to the community. Because York had previously seen this sort of thing happen, and had a deadly history with white supremacists, we took for granted that people knew what was up. But we should have, as always, done more community outreach in the way of flyering and perhaps door knocking. York was constant defense and offense. Hammerskins are street thugs, and we stepped to that in York. There's always penis' hanging to the grounds who are game to jump in the mix, but the kind of dialogue we got going among townspeople in Lewiston took effort. The kind that anyone can do, no matter what age or size. Some of the conversations I had with people were amazing. Don't get me wrong, we need [anti-fascist] skinheads and random thugs to roll with us on the street, but there ain't many who are material to talk to community members with me. I think they prefer it that way, so it all works out.

Van Deusen: What other Black Blocs have you marched in?

Lady: WTO (Seattle) in 1999, DC-IMF 2000, Boston-Debates 2000, Cincinnati-TABD 2000, Quebec City 2001, York-2001, Lewiston-2002, and about ten in between of smaller, non-memorable blocs.

Van Deusen: In your opinion, what are the differences between Black Blocs at anti-fascist actions compared to broader, larger, anti-globalization actions?

Lady: They make so much more sense to me. Hello? I want to, like, win and stuff. I've had to fight so much of my life, that I don't exert the energy unless I know I can make a difference somehow. After Quebec City 2001, I finished my anti-globalization stride. It's not that blocs can't be effective in these type of demonstrations, but after 9-11 I seriously question if I'm gonna make more of a difference joining in against the 40,000 well equipped New York City pigs, or sitting in my local bar talking to the fat republican dude on the barstool next to me. I seem to have more luck with the fat dude. I just don't have enough macho angst to throw random rocks anymore. I like to hit people with them! Blocs have been so much more useful when it comes to anti-fascist street work. That's how they started out anyways. It's a tactic—use it but don't over-use it.

Van Deusen: What makes for effective Black Blocs?

Lady: I don't really know how to answer this question. You have to believe in what you are fighting for. You have to put petty political differences aside and realize what you agree on, and you have to have a plan that is not only realistic, but collaborated on by at least a few experienced people.

Van Deusen: What is the relation between the struggle towards anarchism and militant street actions?

Lady: You can't believe in anarchism if your only efforts are reading and writing about it. That's great to have your head straight on the subject, but you don't have your heart in it if you can't integrate the belief into your everyday life, as well as notice what already exists around you. I never started reading about anarchism until about 5 years ago, but I've been involved in local street work for at least 8, hell my family was a local struggle. Usually, but not always, it's the poor kids who live the struggle and rebel against the class system, while others read about it. And ultimately, it's those who really make a difference that you see willing to interact with the general public, and not just the AK Press catalogue. Don't get me wrong, I'm not putting down reading, it's just a lot more valuable to figure out how to integrate the ideas into conversations with people at work, grocery stores, Taco Bell, and the bar; because those are the people who would get out on the street with you, not the intellectual types.

Van Deusen: How do you see Black Blocs developing in the future?

Lady: Honestly, I'm not sure. Unfortunately, I see some of the calls that get put out and some of the people involved and I worry that youth are misled into believing that black makes them invisible. It is a tactic, a dangerous tactic, and it is not always appropriate. On the other hand, I see anarchists bashing it because of the violence it can entail, and how people tend to take on leadership roles. These people have usually never been in one, do not know that they work sometimes, and do not see that violence is being used as a tactic. Because of this, it should be seen as a little brigade where, naturally, a few may facilitate connections with the group. But all bloc'ers go into a Black Bloc with this presumption. It is not the absence of order a street crew desires or its pacifism that will accomplish the goals set out by the bloc. A certain amount of trust is necessary, but I am certainly glad a few step up for duties at every action or it wouldn't work.

Van Deusen: I understand that you have been involved in a number of labor/union struggles both in Ohio and now in New England. Can you elaborate on this?

Lady: Because I am a class struggle anarchist, I am realistic in understanding that to make any headway I need to work within pre-existing unions and agitate for democracy. So, I have always worked with labor unions on a local level. I've done everything from stocking food pantries for locked out steelworkers in Mansfield, Ohio, to agitating for unions in a city-wide campaign.

Van Deusen: Do you believe that there is a place for Black Blocs on union picket lines?

Lady: Absolutely. If you think about it, the most effective picket lines are organized like so. They do not wear black nor are they very obvious about breaking laws, but much is the same. You got a person who is always yelling in the bullhorn and seems to get the rest of the people riled up, you got a plan before hand with specific goals, and you got police on the other side. You got signs, and, depending on the picket, several people ready to throw down if necessary. They want their jobs back. They want to keep the scabs or delivery trucks from getting in. They also, like Black Blocs, need to convince the community to get behind them on their issue.

Van Deusen: To what extent is community organizing (i.e. anti-war, unions, etc.) important to the overall social movement, and to what extent are Black Blocs and other forms of militant street protests important for the overall social movement? Are they mutually exclusive or complimentary?

Lady: The most successful Black Bloc will be complimented with community organizing. However, the most successful community organizing does not mean deploying a Black Bloc. Like I keep saying—it is a tactic to be used when other means will not be effective by themselves. There has to be a willingness to fight for what you believe in (literally) but people have their strengths and weaknesses. Community organizing is as simple as encouraging a dialogue between you and your neighbor about what's going on in the world, and saying something that sticks and gets repeated. A combination of dialogue and willingness to fight in public are essential qualities to anyone who believes in contributing to social change.

Van Deusen: What personally draws you to Black Bloc actions?

Lady: What currently draws me to them is other people's belief in me as a political womyn. I offer help to anyone who asks me for it, but other than that, and my uppity nature, I am drawn to them when I believe they are necessary to achieve the goal at hand, or when I think other people are overlooking it as a possibility.

Van Deusen: What sort of environment did you grow up in? What is your class background?

Lady: There were 5 of us kids in a 2.5 bedroom house in the Midwest. I grew up in a community that was 50% white and 50% black and 100% working class. Poor people were always looking for the next poor sucka to rob. We weren't a loving family—it was traumatic—but we agreed on the things we thought were wrong with the world. The pigs, lifestyles of the rich & famous, and not having

health care. And we agreed on the things that made life easier too: bicycles, waterparks, *Married With Children*, and pot. My mom wasn't affiliated with any political name badge. She never registered to vote in her life because she thought it didn't matter. She understood the dichotomy between upper class and lower class though, as most working class people do. She just wasn't strong enough to be a mom and stay alive for the toils of work as a poor womyn. I can't blame her. My class background is still the same today, but now I send money home to support my sisters and mom.

Van Deusen: What will it take for working people to overcome capitalism?

Lady: Are you serious? Um, world peace? Well, I don't think working people will ever overcome it, even if I wake tomorrow and the revolution is here. There will always be greedy people in the world. But when the social system has changed enough here to quell some of the every-person-for-themselves attitude, then we can begin to re-learn what was common to communities before capitalism became so advanced. These social system changes have to include the basic necessities such as food, health care, childcare, education, housing, and transportation. When these necessities are spread out more, we will see a drop in working class people pitted against each other, things like theft and drug related casualties (whatever it takes to get money and whatever misguided acts of violence used). We can begin to shift from a competitive (we will still have sports of course, working people need sports!) to a nurturing and more sharing way of community life. Only then can we begin to see a shift in the effects and thought patterns on capitalism. I've always said that revolution is what I want in this country, but it won't happen in any of our lifetimes. Success in making a complete change in our economic system (that is, capitalism to socialism) will occur in steps. I can agitate for those steps every day in my life, and am realistic about the outcome. I might kick racist organizers out of my neighborhood, I might keep a Starbucks from opening, I might help unionize my workplace, I might pass out literature every chance I get, I might give someone something I don't need, I might have children some day and pass on my wisdom and convictions; it's all about taking steps—it's not a sprint, but a marathon. Sometimes people can't see the miles in front of them.

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A version of this interview was first printed in the second edition of *The Black Bloc Papers*,
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Lady continues to be engaged in anti-fascist organizing throughout North America.

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