

# Diversity of Tactics Means Don't Throw People to the Cops



*Notes on Street Marshaling & Peace Policing at the  
2024 Chicago DNC*

birds of a feather distro  
chicago, august 30 2024

Ahead of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago, the Coalition to March on the DNC (CMDNC) announced their intent to adhere to the Saint Paul Principles in [a public Instagram post](#) (8/12/2024). The Coalition comprises groups such as Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR), U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN), and Anti-War Committee among many, [many others](#).

## ***What are the Saint Paul Principles, and how did CMDNC say they would be used?***

The Saint Paul Principles (SPP) were established in Saint Paul, Minnesota by groups that were organizing to shut down the Republican National Convention (RNC) in 2008.

They are as follows:

1. Our solidarity will be based on respect for a **diversity of tactics** and the plans of other groups.
2. The actions and tactics used will be organized to maintain a **separation of time or space**.
3. *Any debates or criticisms will stay **internal to the movement, avoiding any public or media denunciations of fellow activists and events**.*
4. We oppose any state repression of dissent, including surveillance, infiltration, disruption and violence. *We agree not to assist law enforcement actions against activists and others.*

The SPP were compiled by a spokes council: a consensus decision-making structure comprising numerous groups horizontally organizing together. The coordinating groups hoped the SPP would serve a number of purposes, including inviting action by groups with different theories of change, and preventing COINTELPRO tactics from generating conflict within the movement.

The SPP were also designed to change the narrative around "violent demonstrations" by generating consensus on the illegitimacy of state violence and the legitimacy of countering such violence with all types of tactics, including confrontational, escalatory, and destructive acts that aimed to put a material stop to the 2008 RNC. To this end, participating groups made a further agreement that the city of Saint Paul was to be partitioned into sectors allowing different groups to choose their risk tolerance and organize their actions apart from one another: multiple different tactics operating at different risk thresholds acting in unison.

In the years since their creation, some have critiqued the SPP as being difficult to enforce—what happens in real time if a group or individual violates a principle?—and impractical, over-estimating the practicality of separating tactics by time and space—e.g., what if one group's tactics change the police presence in the area, changing the effectiveness of another group's tactics?

The CMDNC did not publicly comment on how they would implement the SPP, much less offer groups outside their coalition an opportunity to participate in a spokes council to agree to adopt the principles. But in the same public Instagram post, the Coalition did say, "...we do not collaborate with the police in

any capacity," and "we will not condemn the various forms of protest that people will engage in throughout the week of the DNC."

## How did CMDNC act in practice?

Whatever one's view of the Saint Paul Principles—and whether it made sense for CMDNC to invoke them in the context of organizing marches against the 2024 DNC—one thing is clear: **the CMDNC's rhetorical appeal to the SPP was hollow, manipulative and dishonest**, amounting to a weaponization of the idea of unity in a mass mobilization, under-girded by the threat of exiling protestors who stepped out of line with the march organizers' orders.

This reality was borne out by the actions of CMDNC organizers and marshals on the ground, **and by the group's own internal communications**, which were leaked in the week leading up to the DNC.

A [video released by Unicorn Riot](#) documenting the March on the DNC demonstration on Monday, August 19th shows the de-escalation protocol in action. A contingent of the protestors chant "peace police go to hell" as CMDNC marshals link arms and block protestors from initiating a breakaway march to get closer to the United Center, where the DNC was being held. The marshals ignored protestors' attempts to discuss objectives and kept the crowd moving away from both the breakaway group of protestors and the elites gathering at the United Center.





By linking their arms and creating a human barricade, the marshals sought to marginalize these demonstrators, putting them in a vulnerable position where they were alone with the cops and no protection from the crowd. Moreover, the marshals visibly and verbally discouraged others from engaging with those who attempted to disrupt the DNC. Witnesses describe scenes of marshals physically grabbing protestors, pushing them closer to cops, and yelling out to the cops to get the protestors.

While disturbing, these violent actions in the name of "safety marshaling" were not surprising. The week before the DNC, an [internal document](#) that had been circulated within CMDNC was leaked. The leaked notes detail the Coalition's so-called "de-escalation protocol" for use in their mass marches. The protocol offers guidelines and tips for how protest marshals ought to respond to "bad actor(s)," "counter-protester(s)," and/or "individual protestors or small groups who might attempt to escalate confrontations with police." The protocol instructs marshals to eject such people because, in their words, they have "br[oken] with the Saint Paul Principles" and thus "have forfeited to participate in the peaceful demonstration" (typo in original). Specifically, marshals are instructed to "link arms...to keep them separated from the marchers" and "prevent them from returning to the march."

These instructions are problematic and logistically incoherent on a number of levels. For one thing, the document blames protestors for the actions of police, assuming that individuals are "attempt[ing] to escalate confrontations with police" with no acknowledgment that, by and large, it is cops who bring violence to protests. The state uses routine and acute instances of violence *every day* to assert racist, colonial social control. The police don't just react or escalate in response to certain types of actions that the Coalition deems unacceptable.

Further, the instructions amount to cooperation with the state to isolate some types of protestors—starkly in contrast to the original goals of the Saint Paul Principles. As anyone who has attended a mass protest knows, being isolated from the crowd as an "individual...or small group" is a highly vulnerable and dangerous position to be in, leaving one susceptible to being grabbed by cops.

Unfortunately, as videos from the week's marches demonstrate, CMDNC marshals dutifully followed these orders, and went even further, shoving demonstrators who didn't follow their orders toward cops and pointing them out to officers. Saint Paul Principles aside, these actions are in clear contradiction with CMDNC's public commitment to not collaborate with police "in any capacity" and to not condemn other forms of protest.



Fortunately, CMDNC's hollow weaponization of the SPP was not entirely successful. At the August 19th march, a smaller breakaway march did eventually form, and it breached the outer security fence at the United Center. Some demonstrators and press entered the area between the two outermost layers of the DNC venue barricades. It was a defiant moment that seemed to carry the spirit of the Palestinian solidarity movement's calls to escalate for Gaza.

## Moving Forward

The model of authoritarian peace-policing by CMDNC marshals is a cause for concern. Their collaboration with state forces to police any autonomous action outside the scope of what they were directing the crowd to do put pro-Palestinian protestors in danger; encouraged other protestors to police one another in the same way the state polices us; and stopped thousands of people from enacting any kind of real tactics that would directly confront state power. Even Superintendent Snelly [noted in the mayoral conference](#) on safety during the DNC that "the organizers have done a very good job policing themselves and policing each other."

There are a couple of ironies at play when the CMDNC and their marshals side with the police against protestors seeking to confront politicians with Palestinian blood on their hands. Not only do such organizations side with those who are paid to protect these politicians, but just as zionists and their allies ignore the historical context of colonial oppression surrounding October 7 in order to justify

genocide, CMDNC street marshals justify their acts by ignoring the context of racist and repressive policing in Chicago. Ignoring this context enables them to frame those engaged in confrontational tactics as the primary threat to the safety of the crowd. And just as we don't side with Israel against the Palestinians, we should not side with the CPD against those demonstrating in solidarity with them.

We must stop policing each other. If taking care of our people in the streets is a practice we want to embody, our focus should shift towards things like making sure there is food and water, legal aid, anti-repression practices, affinity group building, respecting a diversity of tactics, practicing de-arrest tactics, and more. When a march is surrounded by riot cops and immense amounts of state surveillance, there is no such thing as safety; **the violence has already been brought to the streets by the cops and the yellow vests working in collaboration with them.**

It is important that we move beyond these repressive and uncaring ways of fighting against genocide and the state and shift to using tactics that actually help us care for each other at street actions and allow for more effective escalatory strategies. The following is a list of resources and ideas to consider when thinking about how to keep each other safe without using street marshalls:

**Black Blocs:**

[https://ia800201.us.archive.org/21/items/BlocsBlackAndOtherwise/blocs\\_black\\_and\\_otherwise-screen.pdf](https://ia800201.us.archive.org/21/items/BlocsBlackAndOtherwise/blocs_black_and_otherwise-screen.pdf)

**Affinity Groups:** <https://www.sproutdistro.com/catalog/zines/organizing/affinity-groups-essential/>

**Blocing Up:** <https://ia601706.us.archive.org/5/items/blocing-up/blocing-up-reading.pdf>

**Peace Police are Police:** <https://trueleappress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/vest-zine-digital.pdf>

**Escalate for Gaza:** <https://mondoweiss.net/2024/05/flood-the-gates-escalate/>

**Fight the Man and Get Away Safely:** <https://www.sproutdistro.com/catalog/zines/direct-action/fight-the-man-and-get-away-safely/>

**A Civilian's Guide to Direct Action:**

[https://ia802708.us.archive.org/19/items/ACiviliansGuideToDirectAction/direct\\_action\\_guide.pdf](https://ia802708.us.archive.org/19/items/ACiviliansGuideToDirectAction/direct_action_guide.pdf)

**Health and Safety at Militant Actions:**

[https://ia600908.us.archive.org/20/items/HealthAndSafetyAtMilitantActions/health\\_and\\_safety\\_militant\\_actions.pdf](https://ia600908.us.archive.org/20/items/HealthAndSafetyAtMilitantActions/health_and_safety_militant_actions.pdf)

**Warrior Crowd Control and Riot Manual:**

[https://ia800209.us.archive.org/0/items/WarriorCrowdControlRiotManual/warrior\\_crowd\\_control.pdf](https://ia800209.us.archive.org/0/items/WarriorCrowdControlRiotManual/warrior_crowd_control.pdf)