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We spent four hours walking around the “Peoples Convoy” Trucker encampment at the Hagerstown Speedway in MD. Anyone dismissing this as a failed event by the crazy fringe is missing the big picture.

Here are five important take-aways. ■

(Photos by @\_Noelle\_Cook). <https://t.co/M7e3CLqbTK>



1) There were thousands of people there. About a hundred semi-trailer cabs and hundreds of convoy pick-up trucks and SUVs filled nearly every spot in the huge Speedway parking lot. Tents were everywhere. On top of this, thousands of locals came for the day from MD, PA, WV, VA. <https://t.co/LUoOOKSrvp>



2) There was a clear attempt to appear more mainstream. The focus was a big-tent ideology of “Freedom.” Although started by anti-vaxxers, it was re-framed as “protecting our liberties” in ways that allowed for diverse beliefs. Christian Nationalism mixed with QAnon spiritualism. <https://t.co/1sKRw6TAAG>



It was pitched as being "open to all people, regardless of party, race, religion..." Plenty of Proud Boys, etc., but few overt expressions of white nationalism. (Note: Lots of Trump gear, but no one was talking about him. Not one person mentioned Russia or Ukraine all day). <https://t.co/J80H3zjfmD>



3) This was White America. Despite the "everyone is welcome" framing, it was 99% White people. The talk was about uniting Americans across class lines. The rally was "led by our blue-collar boys" (heard often) but was "bringing blue-collar and white-collar America together." <https://t.co/GlvevsKSq6>



4) This was a movement-recruiting event. It was designed to draw people in with a family-friendly, carnival atmosphere. Free food & drinks. Booths, activities, a prayer tent. Revving engines, honking horns, bright lights. "Sign My Truck" with sharpies. T-shirt and flag vendors. <https://t.co/eD7zutpGyv>



The convoy had its own entertainers: several DJs & a country music singer with a new CD about to drop. After dark, there were high-quality fireworks & a ceremony with truck headlights and giant flags. There was funnel cake. It was like a county fair without the rides & livestock. <https://t.co/VRNNqoNEuj>



There were people meeting & networking. Everyone seemed to be a Podcaster. Social media contact info was posted on dashboard signs. People stood in circles, bragging about past rallies & protests. "J-6ers" wore their participation in the Capitol Insurrection as a badge of honor. <https://t.co/1e5NtYtCk>



Part of the recruiting was electoral. Republicans were portrayed as freedom's hope, Democrats its enemy. A guy riding an electric scooter with a bullhorn declared "All Democrats are pedophiles, no exceptions." Much talk about the importance of voting at all levels of government. <https://t.co/jDevqAnG8u>



5) It's non-violent...for now. Bad press and paranoia about FBI infiltration seemed to drive calls for non-violence. Organizers called off the drive to DC because: "It's a trap!" The main organizer: "We know there are people here for the wrong reasons and we know who you are!" <https://t.co/bMsdQMuLWC>



Still, there were violent undercurrents. Lots of talk of resorting to other (unspecified) means if non-violent protest didn't work. Random shouts of "Fetch the Rope" and "hang him" greeted the reading of the names of US Senators who voted to uphold pandemic restrictions. <https://t.co/Ry2tvjE2yo>



The most worrisome moment was when a crowd surrounded a Black reporter for DC's ABC affiliate. They asked why a Black reporter was sent. They demanded he say, "Truckers are heroes!" on air. When he refused, a man repeatedly shouted "LEAVE!" in his face. He left, visibly shaken. <https://t.co/XG31s0lqWg>



Nevertheless, this was clearly a new effort to mainstream far-right beliefs by muting the white nationalism and violence of the Capitol Insurrection and prior protests. This was rebranding the right in broad, vague ways to recruit followers and mask internal differences. <https://t.co/ic9eoC7075>



The People's Convoy wasn't a failure. It was a movement-building event that drew thousands to Hagerstown & to overpasses & convoy stops across the US. These are exactly the kinds of hands-on, personal experiences that build connections, solidify commitments, & recruit new members <https://t.co/6orBSd5pUI>

