

“Sooner or later you will all be in trouble”

Balkan Anarchists of Northern Europe

2007

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As it turns out, the words of an undercover cop in Berlin's Kreuzberg district during the street fights of the Walpurgis night some weeks before the G8 summed up the German police's reasoning in repressing our counter-summit. We saw how tactfully they treated Saturday's 2nd June mass demo and the blockades that followed. And yet the violent raids of housing collective projects and old haunts of Berlin and Hamburg outlined that they had decided to attack, and did so successfully, in two levels. First, they targeted those who got in trouble later, comrades known to them from the past: Anarchists, leftists and other activists were given the hint by house raids days before the summit. Then there were those who got in trouble sooner, that is, as they joined the movement. All it took was making the mistake of finding oneself at the front line: Water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets proved the undercover cop of Kreuzberg right. For those who have been in trouble some time now and for those who confronted the police for the first time the counter-summit of Rostock was surely some key point. You could see this in the eyes and words of people who, even before starting off their journey to Germany, spoke out clearly: If mistakes of recent summits were to be repeated, Heiligendamm could easily, without any sense of exaggeration, mark the end of this movement — what we like to loosely describe as the movement against the globalisation of sovereignty.

So what happened? The next few paragraphs comprise a first attempt of writing down and analysing our experiences from the counter-summit of Heiligendamm. The text might, at some points, seem aggressive; yet this is only because we have an agony and lust to see all of the energy concentrated in Northern Germany in early June finally get channelled through more effective directions. We therefore ask that the stark style of the text is not misunderstood: This is nothing but a cry for thinking more before we act. Yes, mistakes were made; yet the fact that we all found ourselves there, that we are still standing, talking of our experiences, is a statement in itself: Not only are we not finished, but we are arising again and sooner or later we'll be stronger than ever!

The Limits of Activism

Imagine: A young demonstrator arrives at one of the three camps that hosted us, all in the perimeter of the red zone. In which of the three they ended up was probably decided by random yet it largely mediated their experience of the counter-summit. For example, the atmosphere in the camp of Rostock (largely dominated by people of the organised/reformist Left) was entirely different to that of Reddelich (with a mass presence of individuals from the anarchist/anti-authoritarian scene) and that, in turn, must have been entirely different to the Wichmannsdorf camp, for which we have no personal opinion since we did not make it there. All in all, we did not find each other; this was the precise problem in an otherwise perfectly organised plan of actions. True: since our aim was set as being the complete blockade of the red zone our scattering in three camps, one convergence centre and tens of small affinity groups was necessary and largely effective. Yet in the name of a largely symbolic success (the temporary blockading of the red zone) we sacrificed a much more important process of communication and networking. Surgery-like-repression that followed now appears almost like a direct outcome of our very own scattering and self-exile. By denying ourselves the mass element in our protests we break up in small groups and individuals that are highly vulnerable to the attacks of the police. By fetishising activism we act under the handicap of being unable to select the terrain of the clash. Worse

even, whatever attempted clash then takes place under near-military terms — at which we are (thankfully!) incompetent.

On Counter-violence, Once Again

So in what ‘are’ we “competent”? This is a good time to look back to our experiences from previous counter-summits and see where they were successful. A common point of all counter-summits (Rostock included) was that the black block acted largely as a people’s defence against the police. This is something recognised by most: During the 2nd of June demonstration in Rostock, the vast majority of the demonstration’s participants stayed and mixed with the black block once the clashes started, making any serious attack from the police impossible. This is a fact the police were quick to realise and act upon, hence Rostock did quite likely signal an end to the old distinction between peaceful and violent protesters. From now on, cops attack both.

This change in the attitude of the police contributed to the most important change in this summit compared to the counter-summit of Scotland: The big blocks (e.g. those of the Block G8 coalition) were significantly more diverse than in 2005 — bringing together anyone from NGOs to activist groups dealing with specific issues, giving a less reformist touch to the mobilisation as a whole. Should these blocks have been entirely reformist, they would have avoided clashing with the police — which is not what happened. In this regard the Campinski agreement worked: Each group acted in the manner it chose to, respecting the choices made by other groups, giving a notable diversity to the actions that occurred. It is needless to say that it comes as no surprise that ATTAC “condemned and apologised” for the actions of other groups on their behalf: We could expect no different from an organisation with so strong pro-systemic characteristics and attitude.

Precarity and Internalised Repression

The vast majority of people who found themselves at Rostock transcended the limits set in previous counter-summits. They were successful in acting in a subversive and a unifying manner — at least avoiding clashing with other elements of our movement. In this sense, the conditions were ideal for Rostock to become a high point in the long journey of counter-summits. This never happened. Why not? We tried to answer this question: Why wasn’t the German police not trounced, even if their ‘tough’ reputation collapsed? During this process the words of Kreuzberg’s undercover cop came to mind. People get in trouble sooner. The police’s strike is one step before pre-emptive repression. Starting by crushing the Autonomen’s movement in the late eighties the German State was careful to secure that whatever new generation of Autonomen would not easily arise. Beyond the typical direct attack against known persons and groups repression was much more effective when targeting basic infrastructure of our movement in Germany. The treacherous and highly effective “legalisation” of squats in the late eighties means that in 2007 many such spaces are under the immanent threat of normalisation. Even when that does not happen individuals and groups might resort to their self-policing in order to avoid outside threats. In this way the excessive defence of our private spaces deprives our public actions from their necessary dynamism. Signatures put on legalised squats’ contracts in the eighties were at the same time signing the agreement for the self-policing of our movements two decades later.

Smash the cities, not the crops!

The return to the city creates expectations. For more than half a year, the word on plan B had circulated around anarchist/autonomous circles. Constantly, throughout all “preparations” the voices of this alternative suggestion were heard loudly, sneaking their way into nightly circles and arousing fantasy and creativity! Our targets are not the pre-set meetings of the sovereign, where the entire repressive mechanism awaits us. Our targets can only be the structures challenging and limiting us daily. The bank’s local branch, that MacDonalds outlet poisoning young kids, those forces gentrifying the town’s historical centre. Those who design the New Berlin, which in order to exist, will have to be sold, bit by bit, to the hungry eyes of clueless global elite tourists. Our targets are many and so are the brilliant ideas (many comrades travelled all the way to Berlin only for these ideas). They returned to Berlin bidding to strengthen the cry for help from locals dreaming of a sudden break of light in-between the increasing darkness of the statist plans to exterminate all subversive action.

The trains from Rostock are heading towards Berlin in full capacity – group tickets instead of carriage occupation, perhaps an indication of low spirits? Departures already start from Thursday afternoon, second day of the blockades, and then there’s another split, we are leaving despite tens of comrades still being piled up in the detention units. Back in Berlin, we’re finally playing at home, we can finally breathe freely, the kind of air only available in the camp after June 2nd. At night the first fliers calling for a reclaim the streets party at Berlin’s Hackescher Markt appear, figuring masked up people running with their fists in the air, the tension rises, how could we sleep, we wonder around Oranienstrasse, meetings with groups of comrades from all corners of the world, what kind of plans are there, what plan are you going for... On Friday the whole of Kreuzberg is full of fliers, everyone’s waiting for the party, the affinity groups are reaching the apogee of co-ordination, everyone has decided where they stand, more or less convinced of the validity of their decision. Last meetings before the action and ... void. Local groups pull out of the plan, why, because of insufficient planning? Excessive risk? Overridden capacities? Some void. But we keep going. The rest of us are at guard. The reclaim the streets party breaks out and asks for the city’s attention, of the police, the air force... The night passes tortuously slow, you keep looking at your watch, much-promising meetings, we are blockading the centre of town until the promises are fulfilled. Yet one after the other disheartening news arrive. The tune of a violin in Rosentaler Platz, the only musical background to our party! People we did not invite ask to join the feast, they come to support what we left without any support. Why didn’t we invite the whole of the city to our party? Our Reclaim the Streets never turned into the demonstration we wanted to see, it never turned into a party, there were too few of us and we were on our own. A social movement’s confinement. Plan B had ended before it even started, it died inside us because we never believed in it. Once again, self-policing.

We painlessly return to our homes, our squats, our neighbourhoods. We dive deep into each others’ gaze to see if we can feel what we had felt... Some leave the country to report back to others, many remain to organise anti-repression. There is no need. The punishment is instant: wasserwerfer, pepper spray, baton hits, broken noses, arrests, detention units. Passive presence is punished at equal with active resistance. The unprecedented stance of the cops, “there are no peaceful protesters” brought about a new concept in the insofar “peaceful” demonstrators’ circles: “There are no peaceful protests!” In the night of June 8th and after the last few delegates had retreated from the zone, our last comrades were also released from the dungeons of democracy,

only to face the paranoia of neo-Nazism waiting for them outside the detention centres. Once again our lawyers came to our rescue, the law now standing as the sole escape route from a paranoid reality, holding us by the hand and leading us to the path of legality... And so the week to follow has nothing to ask from us, from the convergence space, the occupations; after the withdrawal of the powerful, it is all over.

Lights out, the spectacle is over but the stage is not yet empty, it stays full of our daily local struggles. The summits of resistance give us the chance to communicate, exchange and organise our next actions. We don't see them as the milestone of our fight but as an opportunity to enrich the form of our local struggles and maybe as a reminder that we don't need the spectacle at all in order to unite our resistance globally.

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