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G8 SECRETS: WE ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN WE CAN POSSIBLY IMAGINE

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I moved back to Scotland wishing I hadn't committed myself to getting involved in the G8 resistance. I'd made that commitment a year beforehand when I was under a lot of stress at work and home. Since then, my life away from Scotland had improved. I didn't want to be here. I had been happy living with Rose and Maurice in their beautiful crumbling old house with its well-tended vegetable and fruit garden. I felt privileged to share the lives of these inspirational people who'd spent their time working for peace and justice. It was a welcome change living with independent people who respected my space. My colleagues' childcare duties had become less of an obstacle to their presence at work. Just before I planned to leave, I met a man who I fell for in a big way. And I felt very bad about leaving the local peace movement, a group so small that the departure of a fully committed activist could leave a gap that might not be filled. 'I don't want to do this' ran through my head constantly. My mind was focused on the middle of July when I'd be free to go back south and see my lover Marco again.

Alex had come to see me in March just before I moved back. He seemed to think I was one of the only people who could make a difference between stuff happening and not happening. It looked like there was a big gap that needed to be filled. I sensed a certain amount of desperation in him, which upset me. But I thought he was placing far too much faith in my abilities and I was sure I couldn't help that much. I didn't say so, although I thought so all along, right up to the

morning of July 6 when I sat in the van listening to the traffic news. I thought so when he and Pat came to tell me about the secret blockades plan. And I couldn't honestly see how we'd get all the practical stuff together to make the plan work.

It seemed important not to voice my doubts, so as not to dent anyone's confidence, especially in meetings where I was the only person from Scotland present, and so had to put forward some kind of framework for other people's efforts. It was obvious that Pat and Alex were under huge pressure getting this plan to work; I didn't want to add to their stress by saying I thought it wouldn't. The fact that it did work is a huge testament to the trust that activists placed in each other, in themselves, and in people they never even got to meet. Lastly, Alex's admiration means a lot to me. I didn't want to disappoint him and risk losing that – no matter how misplaced I feel it is sometimes.

Despite my personal feelings, it was clear that this was our chance, all of us in Britain and beyond, to show some determined, concrete resistance to the machinery of capitalism. We had to take it!

Certain things kept me going through the weeks before July 6. The thought of going away afterwards. The thought that it would all be over. The possibility I might learn to drive the site crew truck. The steady flow of activists into Scotland as the weeks advanced. The morale-boosting effects of Dissent! gatherings, meetings and contact with other activists. It was a tough time, but there was never a moment when I was ready to walk away. I spent time getting fit and put some energy into the hillwalking action, encouraging Lesley to organise trips to the Ochils. This enabled me to explore some of the roads and terrain around Gleneagles. Pat, Alex and I met frequently, or talked in abbreviated phone calls, to refine the plan and work out how to get practical stuff done. They had the entire scenario worked out in an impressive way. Often I just acted as a sounding board to enable them to fine-tune the details.

The action was organised by what was effectively a spokes-council, which the initiators had gathered around them. Each spoke was a link to a different affinity group, or groups, which was to take on blockading a specific location on the roads around the summit. Some spokes were links to the public part of the blockades – the large numbers who would arrive a few days beforehand ready to take part in direct action but without a plan or knowledge of the area. The spokes met a few times, and communicated, with a good deal of secrecy and caution, and as far as we know these communications weren't infiltrated.

Gradually my part of the actions – blocking a road with a vehicle – started coming together. I chose a point to blockade and visited it several times to check visibility, traffic levels, and road width. Sally said she'd join me. Later she changed her mind, but by then she and Pat had put me in touch with George and Alan, who were keen to be involved. We had an affinity group! We had access to all the equipment we needed, except we didn't have a vehicle. I lay awake at night worrying about it. How was I going to obtain a vehicle with only a week or two



to go? By this stage I'd stopped caring about losing my driving licence, having found that Allie had done something far more dangerous and had only been banned for a year. I reckoned I could handle that.

Ironically after making the effort to get fit, thinking I'd be walking over the hills to storm the gates of Gleneagles, I did an action that involved driving and sitting still. However as Marco said later, racing drivers keep extremely fit. Most people assumed I was helping to organise the hillwalking action – sorry, Lesley. I might have coined the phrase 'Gore-Tex bloc', but I think the blockades idea was better.

Taking a calculated risk, I left buying a van until the last minute in the hope that the change of owner wouldn't register until after July 6. This may have worked, because I overheard the cops wondering whose it was. I'd had the *Evening Times* for a few days before ringing some adverts. The first one I contacted was exactly what I wanted – old, taxed and MoT'd, for £280. Only problem – it was about 40 miles away. Even luckier, the owner was going abroad shortly and had moved out of the address on the registration document, so there was less chance she'd get hassled. She agreed a £25 discount for cash, and I did a mammoth bus and train mission all next day to collect it. In the meantime I'd been at the convergence centre in Stirling helping build the site. I never got around to putting my tent up there, just slept in the car park in a site crew truck. The next few days were a nightmare of worrying if the van had been broken into, moving it to remain incon-

spacious, insuring it, which cost a lot, but there's a 14-day cooling-off clause where you can get a full refund. Filling it with all the equipment we needed was another cause of panic – 'Road Closed' signs were too big to go in the back, and so had to be put in view covered in dog blankets. A volunteer unexpectedly turned up at George's workplace while we were modifying and loading the signs on a Sunday afternoon – luckily, preparation for building an extension was a good enough explanation.

Throughout the planning stage we kept everything secret, even from our friends. We couldn't talk openly among ourselves unless we were sure no one could hear. The secrecy was a huge strain, and we all wanted to be able to have a normal conversation again. Further paranoia was induced by a huge police presence, including a camera van in the same place all week from which a motorcyclist followed me one day. It seemed every time I went out a police car appeared behind me. I took to driving convoluted routes to avoid it.

We decided to stash the van north of the Forth Bridge a day or two before. At last it was ready to go. I drove around the outskirts of Edinburgh while the Carnival for Full Enjoyment was getting the crap beaten out of it by the Met. As I paid for some petrol several carloads of police pulled up, refuelling on their way off duty. There were police on the bridge. I parked under CCTV at a convenient station, still nervous the van would get stolen; that model was a prime target for break-ins. There were police on the trains and stations on the way back, fearful of a threat to the rail bridge.

That morning I'd had a visit from Jackie who had put me in contact with an affinity group which was ready to help with our action by meeting us the next morning and joining the blockade.

Writing about it brings back the nervousness I felt. If I hadn't been doing a lot of this alone, I'd have felt less scared. Having few people to talk to about it, and having to be careful of being overheard with those in on the plan, made it more frightening.

I spent the last day getting food and equipment together and worrying whether Alan had been arrested at the Carnival. Then it was time to go. More police were on the trains and cruising the small town where we met. There was confusion about which bus stop to meet at, and everyone was late. Finally we were all in the same spot – and Alan had recruited Kate to join us! I retrieved the van and circled a roundabout three times waiting for the others to catch up. They got in. We were off!

We had a lot of time to kill. We had a chilled-out picnic on a beach, thanks mainly to Kate who'd brought lots of nice food like hummus. We looked at maps and decided on our route, along minor roads. We talked about interesting things like the clown army. At last, I felt like this could work, buoyed up by the warmth and friendship of my fellow blockaders, who were all really up for it!

At nightfall, which is at around 11.30 this time of year in Scotland, we walked

back to the car park. We tested both lock-ons inside the van and found the best places for them.

My prime concern for this action had been safety. I knew I was capable of safe driving. I'd picked the spot on the road we blocked where the traffic would be slowest and we'd be most visible. I wanted to make sure we could move once in place, if necessary, and that we could get out fast. So we had keys to our padlocks handy and we didn't superglue the locks or otherwise disable the vehicle. We had food and water. Although I felt nervous, I managed to drive calmly and safely. Alan and George did a fine job with the maps, navigating perfectly all the way.

We left the beach and headed inland, hoping to find somewhere to park up and sleep unnoticed. We found a lay-by on a secluded driveway and stopped there for a few hours, sleeping reasonably well in the circumstances. At dawn we set off, driving through villages, finding the most minor, remote road we could over the motorway in case of police patrols, and meandering gradually towards our destination. We drove down a forest track and stopped for a while, surprising a motorist who was probably off fishing. By this time George and Alan had their fluorescent jackets on, so I guess we just looked like a carload of forestry workers. Just before seven o'clock we reached the last B-road before our destination. I turned down it and saw a blue flashing light in the distance. My heart sank. Had we been sussed? I turned the car, intending to find another route, hoping that, as it had rained hard during the night, the police car was merely there to warn of a flood. I think I was right. We doubled back and took another road, turned onto the main road and passed the stationary police car at a respectable 50mph, the yellow jackets probably giving the impression of everyday travel to work. I slowed for the junction and turned onto our chosen road. I stopped the car, George and Alan jumped out in their hard hats, and everyone frantically unloaded road signs, cones and red triangles. As soon as enough cones were in place I turned the car to block the road. A handful of international activists leapt over the wall with lock-on tubes and attached themselves underneath the car. Kate and I clicked our padlocks shut and we waited to see what would happen. Alan and George had the difficult job of dealing with irate drivers. A few of them squeezed by on the pavement. We had never wanted to stop local residents going to work anyway.

Kate and I grinned at each other. I was elated. We'd done it! In spite of all my misgivings, we'd succeeded.

The police arrived soon afterwards. I spent the next five hours locked on inside the car, watching the queues of traffic slowly easing past us on the pavement. We were joined by more friends and supporters, thanks to the communications that others in the spokes-council had worked out. Some people, held up on their way to the G8 Alternatives demo in Auchterarder, stopped and joined us for a while. Having the advantage of a car radio, we listened to Radio Scotland travel news at full volume so that people outside could hear. All roads leading to Glen-eagles had been blockaded, apart from some minor roads; the railway had been



blocked in two places. Our blockade was now a crucial link in the plan. I heard later that we had caused a long tailback. Traffic reporters were warning motorists to avoid central Scotland. Crieff, Kinkell Bridge, the A9, M9 and M80 and Yetts o' Muckhart were all reported as being blocked, as was the railway. A minor road at Forteviot had also been blockaded.

It was as if all my training, all my learning and previous experience had led me to this point; as if it was all preparation for this one, decisive act of resistance to capitalism. This was the biggest, most important action I felt I'd ever been part of.

After five hours the cutting crew arrived to break our blockade. They had been prevented from reaching us by all the other blockades and it had taken them time to cut people out of steel lock-on tubes. They broke the window and opened the doors. After some investigation of gaffer tape and carpet, they easily cut through our bike locks and lifted Kate and me out. We both refused to walk, saying we had cramp. After dealing with us, they investigated the lock-ons underneath. Luigi and Monika had locked themselves together with a steel pipe, one on each side of the car, but not locked to the car itself. Very clever as they prevented the car being moved. They eventually unlocked themselves.

Kate avoided being charged. I was charged with Breach of the Peace. There was no evidence I had committed any driving offences. Alan, however, got arrested trying to lock onto the towing hook at the back of the car, and Dieter, a German

who claimed to come from Legoland ('You mean Heligoland?' 'No, Legoland') was nicked trying to de-arrest him. Luigi and Monika were also charged with breach of the peace. Sally and Margaret had come to support us and kept track of where we were taken. I spent 34 hours in Perth police station, sleeping, talking to cell-mates and every so often jumping up saying 'We did it! We stopped the G8!'

The plan I'd been so doubtful about had succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. My feelings changed completely – I didn't need a holiday, I wasn't bothered about getting away to see Marco, I wasn't interested in learning to drive the truck – I just wanted to go back and do another action with the same amazing bunch of brave, clever, determined, inspiring activists. Alex kindly reminded me that I probably needed a break, though I'm sure he worked far harder than I did.

This almost unbelievable success has been a huge lesson to me. We are more powerful than we can possibly imagine. It's been a lesson in not being deflected from achieving my aims by fear; in not letting doubts get in the way of an obviously good plan; in not paying attention to feelings of discouragement when I know I'm doing the right thing; a lesson in trust, in love, in anarchy. Here's to our continued collaboration in creative resistance to capitalism – as anarchists, as accomplices, as conspirators, as friends.

I'm still experiencing the emotional repercussions of the G8 mobilisation. I didn't get beaten up by the police, witness violence or any other traumatic events. But I'm not completely in touch with how good it felt to succeed. If I could feel like that all the time I'd be walking about ten feet off the ground; I'd know we were powerful enough do anything; and I'd love everybody.