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THE CARNIVAL CONTINUES...

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‘The worst street disorder in Edinburgh since the Porteous riots of 1736’, trumpeted the Scottish press after the Carnival for Full Enjoyment. For those with little knowledge of 18th century Scottish history, this refers to an event when crowds rioted against the execution of a smuggler and ended up hanging the official who had passed the sentence.

Well, no public officials met their end on July 4 2005. But there are other ways for an event to leave its mark. We were certainly fighting for much more than the right to party – but how much of this came across? Like many others who took part in the anti-G8 mobilisation, we were aiming for more than a flash-in-the-pan spectacle. We were looking for new kinds of action that would inspire continuing resistance wherever we work and live.

LOCAL ACTIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

Inspired by recent activity in Italy and Spain, we wanted to express resistance to increasingly insecure and precarious conditions of work and life; to low pay, pressure and stress for those in employment; forced labour for those who are unwaged. The organisation, control and exploitation of work is central to capitalism, and we aimed to subvert that basis as we took to the streets against wage slavery, benefits slavery, debt slavery and army slavery. We raised the banner for full *enjoyment* as opposed to full *employment*.

After a big demo you often hear people saying ‘forget about those spectacular mass actions – we’ve got to organise in our local community.’ Many of us have been active on a local basis for years, and will continue to do so. But lately we’ve had to ask: what do our local ‘communities’ consist of? Communities, like work, are increasingly transient and previous approaches to community organising can become just as limited as tired tactics in other spheres. Yes, milling around in a crowd and getting penned in by the cops can be depressing and does nothing to improve our daily lives. But localism by itself can also become a demoralising swamp – ask anyone who’s spent time sitting in draughty halls at tenants’ association meetings hearing the persistent drone of some council official, or endured rainy afternoons leafleting outside a job centre in the company of two mates and a dog. In organising the Carnival, we hoped to take steps towards bridging the gap between local/workplace struggles and mass actions.

ENJOYMENT ZONE

Some inspiration also came from an action in 2000 in Bristol opposing the introduction of an ‘employment zone’ – where local unwaged people become guinea-pigs for time-wasting ‘pilot’ schemes and social engineering attempts to create a desperate and docile workforce. According to the Bristol Benefits Action Group (BBAG), activists ‘turned the local Labour Party office into an “Enjoyment Zone” to protest against the introduction of employment zones, the cutting of benefit entitlements to asylum seekers, the extension of the New Deal, the cutting of social security spending in the budget and to have some fun...’ The occupation/party lasted half an hour. BBAG then distributed leaflets at the job centre and invited other claimants and action groups to join in the fun and to set up enjoyment zones in their areas.

We decided to do this on a larger scale and mark the beginning of the G8 summit – when leaders meet to discuss how to organise the exploitation of the world’s population – with a mobile party ‘visiting’ institutions that plunge us into poverty, overwork and debt. Targets included organisations implementing the New Deal and workfare, employment agencies, sheriff’s officers (bailiffs), shit bosses and army recruitment centres. Many of us were already involved in claimants’ and debt resistance, and saw this as a chance to raise these struggles from marginalisation and beleaguered localism to vibrant transnational resistance. We also wanted to link opposition to war with a local campaign against ‘economic conscription’, where unemployed youth are pressured to sign up for the armed forces.

We saw this as a move away from the moralism encountered in some anti-G8 propaganda. For example, an early statement on the G8 Climate Action website suggested: ‘We have a unique opportunity and a global responsibility to take action for the millions of more repressed people, for ecosystems and for future generations.’ To be blunt, this sounded too much like a direct-action version of



Geldof's patronising posture. Solidarity is a different thing altogether. We saw resisting the G8 – in the words of one of our leaflets – as ‘an opportunity to link everyday struggles against the bosses and politicians here in Edinburgh with the struggles of working class people throughout the world.’ If we approach social cuts, privatisation and compulsory work schemes as part of a worldwide enclosure of resources and means of living, we have a concrete basis for connecting our own liberation to struggles of the dispossessed in the ‘global south’. Ultimately, the bailiff at your door is a not-so-distant cousin of the cartel forcing peasants off common land elsewhere.

Furthermore, we weren't just trying for a rerun of J18. The 1999 ‘Carnival Against Capital’ in the City of London (marking a G8 summit in Cologne, Germany) was a watershed action and many of us have fond memories of the day. However, J18 was very much focused on finance capital – which was a good place to start. But six years later, it was time to move on and think of how we can subvert and attack the actual *social relations* of capital.

Our interest in Standard Life, the biggest employer in Edinburgh, was not only tied to its role in finance capital. It was also related to the exploitation of temporary staff, with denial of benefits and increased pressure for all workers. Some of us knew people who had worked there, or we had worked in similar companies ourselves. In response to media lies that *carnivalistas* planned to attack staff, we passed out leaflets at Standard Life addressing working conditions. We

invited workers to join the Carnival and 'take an extended lunch break... Better still throw a sickie all day and get your own back'.¹ We had a positive response and, in the end, many workers did get a day off!

COPS 'N' CORDONS

We knew there'd be lots of cops in our way. As well as the publicised meeting point, we had other informal meeting places so that people could converge and break through any cordons the police formed. Unfortunately, many people did get 'kettled-in' despite the plan. It was frustrating to be held back by police lines that could have been broken by some basic, well-organised (lightly) padded tactics. As with other situations, better networking with affinity groups could have also brought more people out where they were needed.

Still, the police weren't able to keep total control of the area as mobile crowds circulated around Princes Street, grouping and regrouping. The most inspiring aspect of the day was how 'locals' outside the activist orbit joined in. This went beyond the traditional second shift of 'kids' who appear just as many knackered anarchists are resting in the pub. People of all ages massed on Princes Street from the afternoon onwards. Later, it was local anger at the police that fuelled the most direct resistance.

Many activists were concerned that arrests on the Monday could deplete the ranks for the blockades. Some even said that the Carnival was a diversion. Events proved them wrong. As one Stirling-based participant later wrote: 'The Carnival for Full Enjoyment set the stall out for the hugely successful blockades that were to happen later in the week. The refusal of people to be penned like sheep was a good indication that the state was not going to get everything its own way. Most of all, perhaps, the Carnival helped to cement a bit of solidarity, and that in itself is always inspiring.'

Taking on board the need to stay free for blockades on Wednesday, many activists headed towards safer places around 4–5pm. Meanwhile, 'locals' were going to kick off the action again around Rose Street. It was ironic that many Edinburgh people didn't worry about saving themselves for 'the big day'. Monday's Carnival was *their* day and they were going for it! Maybe this points to the error of putting too much emphasis on the climactic 'big one', when potential disruption of state control and capital (and consequently, the functioning of the G8) can come at unexpected times and places.

But even at its best, was the Carnival primarily a defensive struggle against the police for control of the streets? It made a good showing and had its excellent moments, but did it break any new ground? For some, a lot of the actual politics got lost in the shuffle. As a writer from Irish Indymedia observed: 'There were a few banners the organisers had which made the themes explicit, but these were lost among the corrals.'²

The fact is that we didn't get around to 'visiting' most of our political 'targets'!



The big windows of the office where the Benefits Agency ‘fraud’ squad is based did get flyposted with the name and number of Scotland’s chief dole snooper,³ but the damage was very quickly repaired. We’ve heard that two sheriff’s officers buildings had been hit, but if this is true then the glaziers were too quick for it to be confirmed. If this aspect of the Carnival had been successful, dole snoopers, New Deal apparatchiks and sheriff’s officers in Edinburgh and beyond would have got a strong taste of public disgust and resistance. Most important, the message would have spread that we don’t need to fear these people if we act together.

In the future, we could think about better networking with affinity groups to prevent cordoning – or to see that important places are visited if larger groups get trapped. In fact, such a back-up plan had been discussed, but it was too late in the day to make the necessary contacts for it to be very effective. It could have also ensured wider distribution of publicity. I suspect that balance and coordination between public and affinity group actions had also been a crucial issue for other actions.

A lot of this discussion could and should have taken place around the anti-authoritarian assembly held in Edinburgh on July 3. The assembly had originally been set up to coordinate anarchist/anti-authoritarian actions over the week. But when the Sunday rolled round there wasn’t time left to discuss anything other than the Wednesday blockades. This points to some organisational issues looked at later.



LONG, PAINFUL AND KNACKERING

In the short term, the above problems can be put down to a last-minute rush to get too many things done. But why did we find ourselves in that situation, when we started to meet and talk about the action in late October 2004? On reflection, it goes back to an early mistake: we relied too much on Dissent! and Dissent! gatherings as a point of contact and organising, as well as the Beyond the ESF event (October 2004) and the Anarchist Bookfair (November). At the time, it made sense to meet at events when people from various cities would be in one place. However, the Dissent! gatherings were often long, painful and knackerings. Many later gatherings were devoted to infrastructure and didn't leave much time or energy for sorting out actions. Perhaps these gatherings put the cart before the horse – could we have talked first about actions, then decided what support structures we needed to make those actions possible?

The fact that Dissent! was a network that didn't plan actions itself seemed to be an excuse not to deal with them at all. Many of us had supported the initial decision on the role of Dissent! in the interests of diversity, security and avoiding yawn-provoking discussions about violence. But Dissent! meetings were also meant to provide space for facilitating and coordinating actions, and where did that go? At the Newcastle gathering (early December 2004), we did spend a productive afternoon setting out a provisional timetable of actions. But much more typical was a Glasgow gathering in February 2005 that left about 15 minutes at

the end for action groups to meet and then report back to the gathering. It was only when we had our own meetings in Edinburgh to organise the Carnival that we got on with some concrete and creative plans. The first public Edinburgh meeting had been in May. Imagine how much we could have achieved if we had started this process in February or even March. Furthermore, people came to our meetings in May and June who had never been to a Dissent! gathering. So rather than focusing so much on Dissent! as our point of contact, we could have held regular meetings in Edinburgh and involved a lot more people locally from the outset.

We need to keep this in mind when participating in future networks. At the same time, you could also ask if a network is serving its purpose when groups must hold a lot of additional meetings. Given limitations in most people's finances and time for travelling, many would have to choose between action planning meetings and taking part in general network gatherings.

It's been suggested that a lot of internationals hadn't been aware of what the Carnival was really about. Our international outreach could have been better. We tried to engage networks organising around precarity such as EuroMayDay – and here there was a strong sentiment that mobilisations at summits were *passé*. Presentations had also been made at international G8 mobilising conferences in Tübingen and Thessaloniki but clearly we need to think about other, less obvious international networks in the future. However, an internationally diverse bunch of comrades eventually showed up for a discussion on precarity on July 3 and we made contacts that could be built on there.

PULLING TEETH

In the bad old days of the 1990s, class-struggle anarchists and eco-direct-actionists in the UK seemed to live on completely separate planets. But later in the decade we saw events and actions (e.g. J18 and the collaboration between Reclaim the Streets and the Liverpool dockers) that challenged the assumptions of both sides, and brought them together in the networks often described as 'anti-capitalist'. During some Dissent! meetings it felt like none of this had ever happened (despite the publication of *Days of Dissent*).⁴ Had I been caught in some kind of weird 1990s timewarp? I could almost hear whining strains of 'Wonderwall' as a background to what was passing for 'political' discussion.

It was like pulling teeth to get many (but not all) people in Dissent! to contemplate the possibility that class struggle might have anything to do with mobilising against the G8. Struggling over our own living and working conditions is pure selfishness, seemed to be the attitude. No, no, we're for lofty, altruistic things like Saving the Planet and helping those poor souls Over There! Again, there seemed to be confusion over the stark difference between patronising charity – and solidarity. This was symptomatic of an approach that took anti-capitalism as a matter of abstract morality, rather than desire, rebellion and fighting those

who keep us down. In fact, some propaganda seemed downright offensive when it appeared to blame climate change on those thick working-class people flying to their holidays in Spain and eating out-of-season satsumas with their Christmas dinners. At times the satirical slogan 'Abolish Capitalism and Replace it with Something Nicer' didn't seem too far from reality.

As the commentary on Irish Indymedia put it, we were aiming to 'push the style of reclaim the streets politics beyond spectacle towards clear class politics.' Not everyone liked that. But when we talked about our project at gatherings, no one really argued against it either. Often, it was just met with sniffy silence, constraining any real political debate and halting the development of ideas for action.

A GREAT BIG DOLLOP OF CHILLI

This inability to discuss politics and action was not limited to Dissent! gatherings, unfortunately. It was present in other groups (Wombles, South East Assembly, etc) though possibly for different reasons – an urge to get to the pub ASAP? When we brought stuff up people nodded or said nothing. There also wasn't much consideration of a proposal put forward by University of London anti-authoritarians for an action in Edinburgh on July 7. This lack of space for dealing with actions may have also led to poor showings at the pre-G8 finance, employment and environment ministerial meetings in London. If comrades thought certain ideas or proposals sucked, fair enough! But let's hear why, let's talk and find something better.

We only heard, well into June, that some people thought the Carnival plans weren't important and we must all save ourselves for our proverbial wedding night on Wednesday. In retrospect, this showed a narrow view of what a 'blockade' could be – couldn't it also be about 'blocking' how capitalism functions and runs? And as we later saw, Monday's action did have a positive knock-on effect for Wednesday.

Despite the odds, the Wednesday blockades around Stirling and Gleneagles turned out to be successful and inspiring. Those of us who'd been emitting grumbles about 'hippies sitting in the middle of a field' had to eat our words – with a huge dollop of chilli. But I'd still say that actions need to hold city centres to achieve a lasting impact beyond symbolic delays. There seemed to be an ambivalence about urban blockades and urban actions like the Carnival. It has even been suggested that the urban convergences should have been shut down at a certain point to concentrate resources in Stirling.

However, stronger actions in the cities could have compounded the disruptive effect of the other blockades. Forward planning and publicity could have mobilised more people to come to urban blockades – those who might not camp out in the rain but would get active on their own city streets. Why did the press and the police have their knickers in such a big twist over the Carnival? While



we don't want to fall into the trap of taking on our enemies' hype, it would be useful to look at the fire behind the smoke. They were worried because the Carnival took place in a city centre, where the major workings of capital and the state are based – and where thousands of people can come together. 'In the streets power is made and dissolved', as the old Reclaim the Streets slogan goes.

The fate of the urban blockades made many of us very glad we didn't shove all our eggs into one basket. In effect, the Carnival turned out to be one of the few big city centre actions, though Glasgow's Boogie on the Bridge on July 7 also had potential. This action sought to link struggle against the imposition of a motorway in a poor area with the root causes of global climate change. It marked a positive shift from finger-wagging moralism to solidarity with community resistance in a truly anti-capitalist approach to climate change, and showed similarities with the Carnival in the connections it made.

ALRIGHT ON THE NIGHT

At the root of some problems was a 'come to an assembly and it'll all be alright on the night' way of thinking. But most successful mass actions (such as J18) had a good year's preparation. That didn't rule out input and self-organisation by people who turned up. The planning worked on providing the groundwork and a framework that encouraged autonomy and flexibility and new initiative as well.

A lot of hard work and planning went into organising the infrastructure, but overall development of actions was very last-minute – almost deliberately so. While some affinity groups did put a lot of preparation into their own plans, what about the larger picture? Shouldn't a network provide an overview and a means to spread resources around? For example, we could have made sure there were more people in Edinburgh and groundwork could have been laid for a Glasgow blockade. When you don't plan ahead, everything gets crammed into a few agonising, dreadful meetings where we've got to re-invent the wheel the night before. That also determined the limits of the anti-authoritarian assemblies.

DRY RUN

While neither the Carnival or the Boogie on the Bridge achieved all their aims, perhaps we should look at them as try-outs for future actions that tie local and workplace struggles to global resistance.

Looking towards 2006, the G8 summit in St Petersburg can be an opportunity for us to forge stronger links in Russia and Eastern Europe. With the current movements of capital and labour around west and east Europe, this will be essential – as shown in recent solidarity actions with Polish casual workers at Tesco's in Ireland. In the past year we've also seen massive street demonstrations in Russia against the restriction of pensions and disabled benefits, which resonate with issues we face in the UK.

Of course, we don't want our horizons to be bound by summits of bosses and politicians. However, these events can still give us openings to highlight and support struggles in a particular area, and additional possibilities for internationalising local resistance. This approach can also extend to the G8 summit in Germany in 2007, and far beyond that.

Meanwhile, a friend who read an earlier draft of this article said: 'You're being too negative and self-critical. It was a *great* day, the best day in the week. Working-class Edinburgh people knew exactly what it was about!'

Who knows? Maybe she's right...

1 See 'Substandard Life' at www.nodeal.org.uk

2 For a good report and discussion see www.indymedia.ie/newswire.php?story__id=70649.

3 Joan Kirk, Castle Terrace office, 0131 222 5089.

4 Available at <http://www.daysofdissent.org.uk>