

# INTRODUCTION

In July 2005, the rulers of the 'Group of Eight' most powerful states – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US – came to Gleneagles in Scotland for their annual set-piece summit. As has come to be expected, they were met with counter-summits, protests and blockades. The focus of this book is those attempts to... Shut Them Down!

This book contains some amazing and exciting stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things but, beyond that, you might wonder why we need to publish anything about the 2005 anti-G8 mobilisation. Was it not just the latest repetition in a series of protests that has already produced many books? This misses the point. Each of these mobilisations is an event within a wider social movement, often called 'the movement of movements,' and the point about social movements is that they *move*. This is how we can best define them: as the shifting or development of social relations. We can see this development by looking at each counter-mobilisation in turn. Each one is different. Each has its specific context. Each presents us with new problems, new lessons to be learnt and prompts particular innovations.

In 1999, the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle marked the emergence of a movement into public consciousness. The problem Seattle brought to the surface was the strange new alliances and the startling mix of protesters (trade unions and environmentalists, anarchists and commu-

nists, queer activists and church groups). The reflecting and theorising that followed tended to focus on the contradictions in these alliances as they played out in protest tactics, in particular the attitudes towards the window-smashing tactics of the 'black bloc'. A year later, the Prague anti-IMF and World Bank protests saw the development of the principle of 'diversity of tactics,' with the physical separation of the protesters according to their preferred levels of confrontation. This move was then disrupted by an horrific escalation of violence on the part of the police, firstly when three people were shot in Gothenburg, in June 2001, and then with the indiscriminate violence in Genoa five weeks later, which saw beatings, torture and the murder of Carlo Giuliani. The reflections that followed focused on this repression, how to deal with it and whether the movement should split or hold together in the face of it.

At Gleneagles<sup>1</sup> the notion of 'violence' versus 'non-violence' did not seem to be such an issue, and the content of this book reflects that. Instead Gleneagles has thrown up its own themes that relate to its specific context. In 2005 the G8 summit was, like most post-Genoa summits, located in a rural area, although Gleneagles is certainly not as remote as some of the locations our 'leaders' have tried to hide away in. We responded with a strategy that had been developed at the Evian G8 summit two years earlier: our counter-mobilisation was centred on rural camping convergence spaces, enabling multiple blockades of the roads surrounding the summit and the disruption of the delegates and staff that keep the summit running. These tactics proved tremendously effective in facilitating such a deep level of self-organisation that the summit was disrupted, despite a huge security and police operation, which contained the suspension of large swathes of 'civil liberties'.

However, tactics forced on to us also carried their own problems and dangers. We needed, for instance, to maintain a sense of connection across geographically dispersed sites of blockades and protests. And, more fundamentally, there was the danger of isolation from the 'general public,' since the convergence sites had to be located in such sparsely populated areas. As it turned out, this danger was compounded by one of the more novel aspects of the 2005 G8 summit, the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign.

For the first time in the G8's history, there was a major campaign to *welcome* the summit. Already pro-G8, MPH itself became overshadowed by Bob Geldof, Richard Curtis and their Live8 concert. A feature of Geldof and Curtis's involvement was their activism by press conference: ignoring the wider feeling of MPH's constituent parts, they continually imposed their own agenda and interpretation of events. This was a concerted attempt to capture the energy of the alter-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements, using this energy to fuel a celebrity-led pro-summit and, ultimately, pro-government demonstration. It is hard now to recall the level of hype surrounding Live8 and MPH and the sycophancy accorded Geldof by the media. The effect of MPH-Live8 was to create a situation akin to a surreal



Stalinist state, where the government sets the limits on demonstrators' demands and decrees as illegitimate any protests outside that framework (setting forth a huge security operation to enforce this decree).

This book contains the stories of how people both succeeded and failed to escape this trap. Over seven days, a series of protests and events refused the script that had been provided. The highpoint of this was undoubtedly the road blockades on Wednesday July 6. We brought central Scotland to a standstill, scattering delegates and staff to the four winds and disrupting the summit's opening day. That evening, it seemed we might be able to go on with the disruption and cause the summit to collapse. But even without that, the potential seemed huge. MPH had been almost unopposed in the press, but now, our anti-summit event was impossible to ignore: a new narrative could not possibly be kept out of the media. As the reality of the G8 agreements on debt emerged, our account could only be vindicated, while theirs could only be shown up as spin. The MPH-Live8-New Labour axis was ripe for splintering and might have easily shattered.

But just when it looked like we might possibly shut down the entire summit, and turn all that media hype against its very orchestrators, history shifted again. Bombs exploded in central London and sucked all media attention away from Gleneagles. Without mass media attention, MPH, being almost purely media- and celebrity-driven, dissolved away. The movement that had wanted to shut down the G8 was in a different position, however. In the days which immediately

followed the July 7 bombings, we became paralysed by the speed of events – unable to offer much in the way of a collective response to the bombings, or to begin evaluating the meaning or the impact of the mobilisation in light of the events which had just unfolded. It was only in the weeks and months which followed that we have been able to realise the singular nature of the Gleneagles events – of a major success for our movement, deprived of the subsequent media attention which has traditionally followed such events.

Episodes of media attention are always dangerous for social movements, which are, on the whole, ignored. Firstly, the media may cheer-lead state repression. Individuals can be arbitrarily picked out, held up as leaders and hounded. More fundamentally, media hysteria tends to cause social movements to inflate uncontrollably based upon a simplified and flattened representation of the complex dynamics the movement originally consisted of. There is no telling which direction things will go in after such uncontrolled inflation: such flattened representations may form the basis for a whole new burst of movement, for better or ill, or they may not.

Instead of this, our movement now occupies a weird nether-world. Energy has been injected into the movement because we acted successfully, yet it has been neither amplified nor distorted by media attention. There was movement but no inflation. This is not a state of affairs that we planned or hoped for, but it still has tremendous potential. For starters, there is no mass media-written first draft of history we have to escape from before we can learn our own lessons. (After all, if the movement had expanded based on the media representation of the event it would be hard not to attempt to simply repeat it in a simplified fashion.) Instead, we have space and we can harness the energy created to move in productive directions.

That is why we<sup>2</sup> have rushed to get this book out as soon as possible. We see it as part of the movement against the G8. Such mobilisations do not just last a week. For many months before July 2005, people were meeting, discussing, thinking, laughing, emailing, negotiating, learning and inventing new structures. Making the counter-mobilisation possible. And now, stretching out into the months after the G8, people are still meeting, still discussing (and still laughing). This is all part of a simultaneous process of reflection and (re-)invention, which includes *Shut Them Down!* And just as the G8 summit acted as a moment of focus for the week of protests, allowing us to channel our energies and hold together our diverse actions and preparations, so the summit is also the focus that holds the diverse contributions to this book together.

When we were organising to get to Scotland, trying to assemble all the materials and physical infrastructure we needed to create the Hori-Zone, the eco-village on the outskirts of Stirling, we got a profound sense of how deep into wider society our networks reach (in many ways, of course, it is not even possible to define where ‘the movement’ ends and ‘society’ begins). It might take ten phone calls to

track down a marquee to borrow, but each phone call would land on a pair of sympathetic ears. How far levels of sympathy for our actions penetrate determines our ability to beg, borrow, build and create impressive physical structures. This book shows the intellectual resources we can draw on when it comes to reflecting upon and thinking through our activities. The movement's dynamism – its *movement* – draws in all these resources, attracting contributions from people who did not physically participate in the protests, as well as many of those who did, and making the book's reflections relevant way beyond the specific event from which it arose.

Some of *Shut Them Down!*'s chapters are adventure stories that convey some of the energy the events carried. Other pieces reflect strategically on Gleneagles and the issues it threw up. For instance: which factors allowed this event to be so diverse and flexible?; what are the possible limits of openness and horizontality? Some authors consider the problems of isolation from other movements and our failure to critique the G8 on its own terms. Others explore the ways in which this counter-mobilisation is connected to other social movements, or rather is *part* of a wider network of social relations. The book also includes some more general reflections on the meaning of such events and the possibilities of moving beyond them.

Some chapters are more specific and reflect on particular aspects of the mobilisation. Here there is an emphasis on innovations from previous campaigns and struggles. In the UK, for example, a radical perspective on legal support dates back to the work of the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign (TSDC), set up in the face of state repression following the 1990 Trafalgar Square poll tax riot. The TSDC innovators dealt with severe criticism from some other activists, but now it is pretty much accepted that this work is necessary and consequently there is nothing written about it here. Similarly, Indymedia is now fairly well established (since Seattle, in fact), so we have included nothing about the role they played, either. On the other hand, we have included a chapter on the work of communicating with the mainstream media, where there is little consensus. Again, militant protest tactics played a very important role in the Genoa events and much was written about them afterwards, but today they appear to be less controversial. In 2005, other novel groups emerged: the clowns (CIRCA), the 'brat bloc' and the Activist-Trauma Support group are three examples.

It is possible to weave different themes from the contributions in this book. The clowns, for instance, can be seen as a clever attempt to increase the flexibility of the protesters by moving beyond the dichotomous roles of 'violent' and 'legitimate' protester. From another angle they can be understood as part of an attempt, along with the innovative work of Activist-Trauma Support and the creation of the Hori-Zone, to recognise our vulnerability as human beings and to meet the needs which spring from this. The clowns might also be understood as part of a theme that both emphasises the spread of politics throughout the whole of life and attempts to escape the specialist role of the 'activist'.



To take another example, the Hori-Zone can be understood in a number of different – though not necessarily contradictory – ways. First, as a physical base from which to plan the highly effective actions which disrupted the summit’s opening day. Second, as an example of low-impact, ecologically sustainable living. And finally, as an experiment in and demonstration of new ways of living and new types of social relations – non-hierarchical, consensus-based decision-making and so on.

But the narratives we have woven from the contributions in the book are just one way of reading it. We hope that you will recognise different themes and narratives leaping out at you. Indeed the story we have told in this introduction is just one story among many that could be told about the Gleneagles counter-mobilisation. Similarly, the contributions here should not be taken as an ‘official’ representation of the movements and networks protesting against the summit, not even of the Dissent! network. It is not possible to *represent* a network: a network can only be *sampled*, and the place from which we sample will of course influence our results. We are writing from within the hurly-burly of these movements and we, along with the authors of individual chapters, make no claim to objectivity. Each contribution reflects merely the opinions of its respective author(s).

As the book’s subtitle suggests we (appear to) start with the G8, but the G8 is just our moment of focus. The themes in the book, like our thinking, move

through the specifics of Gleneagles to reach the real subject: us, the movement of movements and society at large! The effect of our protests on the G8's policies is secondary really. The G8 is not where the real power lies. Real power lies with us: they merely respond, trying to capture, limit and harness the ferment, sheer unrest and movement of society. When we say *Shut Them Down!* we also mean *Let Us Be!* Reflection on the protests is just a point around which we think we can see an emergent politics cohere, a politics which will allow us to move on and tackle the last and perhaps most important theme of the book: how do we take those new worlds that felt so possible during the week of protests and generalise them so that they make sense in the rest of our lives?

### **The Editors**

Brighton & Leeds, December 2005

- 1 *'Gleneagles' is shorthand, of course. We do not just mean just mean the actions which took place in the immediate vicinity of the Gleneagles Hotel in the few days surrounding the summit. Protests took place across central Scotland and the period of counter-mobilisation spanned many months (and is ongoing).*
- 2 *This book was conceived in the fields of the Hori-Zone on July 7. Since then, the editorial collective coalesced into a group of four individuals.*