



Black Bloc in Rostock, Germany, anti-G8 2007

**CAN'T STOP KAOS**

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A Brief History of the Black Bloc



Autonomous  Resistance

# Can't Stop Kaos!

## A Brief History of the Black Bloc

“Black Bloc is not an organization. It has no leaders. Like a spectre, it simply appears out of nowhere, wreaks havoc, then vanishes.”

(“The violent protesters who never were,” *Toronto Star*, June 27, 2010)

### Introduction

“Can't Stop Kaos” was the slogan of a banner carried in the Black Bloc in Rostock, Germany, during the June 2007 anti-G8 mobilization. Despite thousands of police, a Black Bloc of some 5,000 gathered and engaged in street fighting, burning barricades and destroying corporate property. When I saw footage and photographs of this banner, I immediately appreciated its simple yet powerful truth.

In describing the Black Bloc tactic and its history, such a slogan is often appropriate considering the large security operations carried out in efforts to stop such actions. Yet, the tactic itself is some 30 years old. While the German police are by now 'experts' in riot control, the events in Rostock show the difficulty in controlling a Black Bloc, even for 'professionals.'

Another recent example was the anti-G20 protests in Toronto, June 2010. Amidst one of the largest security operations in Canadian history, pre-emptive arrests of protest organizers, and with several thousand riot cops in the streets, a Black Bloc was still able to carry out extensive property destruction, including the arson of four police cars (with two in the financial district, just over a block from the security fence). In the midst of this, I thought again of that banner: “Can't Stop Kaos.”

Yet, within this 'chaotic' method, there is thought and analysis. The Black Bloc arises from a radical perspective that sees no hope in reforming the system—only in destroying it.

### What is the Black Bloc?

The Black Bloc is not an organization. It is a tactic used primarily in street protests during which militants wear uniform black clothing to counter surveillance and identification by police. An essential part of the

“We came to realize that the rulers do not fear our militancy because it results in material damages but that they are in fear of us and everyone who picks up a stone because they know that we are determined to fight and that no dialogue will ever be possible with us again.”

(Statement by Autonomist and Anti-Imperialist Groups in W. Germany, *Resistance No. 5*, Winter 1983)

### Think You're Hot Cuz You March in a Black Bloc?

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In the aftermath of the attack, the police went on a rampage of repression, attacking 'peaceful' protesters and citizens alike, 'kettling' hundreds for hours in the pouring rain, violently assaulting scores of people, and arresting over 1,100 in total (the largest mass arrests in Canadian history).

Many reformists, ideologically opposed to revolutionary struggle and militant resistance, immediately condemned the Black Bloc action, with some prominent movement 'celebrities' asserting that police allowed the attacks to occur as a way of justifying the massive budget (already a subject of public criticism and debate prior to the protests).

The reformists joined with conspiracy theorists, who alleged the Black Bloc was full of police provocateurs sent in to cause mayhem as a means of justifying the police state of the 'new world order.'

Neither of these groups offered any proof, aside from speculation and an attempt to 'document' certain types of shoes worn by protesters as proof they were cops. As the history of the Black Bloc itself shows, militants have been able to overcome massive policing operations and inflict material damage on many occasions. \*



Toronto G20, June 26, 2010, burning cop car

*RAF: A Documentary History, Vol. 1: Projectiles for the People*, by J. Smith and Andre Moncourt, Kersplebedeb/PM Press, Montreal/Oakland 2009

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire, Continuum, New York 2007

*The Black Bloc Papers: An Anthology of Primary Texts From The North American Anarchist Black Bloc 1988-2005*, Edited by David Van Deusen & Xavier Massot, Breaking Glass Press/Alternative Media Project/Infoshop.org., Shawnee Mission, KS, USA, First Online Printing, January 2010

*The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*, by Georgy Katsiaficas, AK Press, Oakland/Edinburgh, 2006



Black Bloc is the use of disguise to conceal one's identity (including gloves and masks). The most distinguishing feature of the tactic is the wearing of black.

The Black Bloc has its origins in W. Germany's squatter's and *Autonomen* (Autonomist) movement, arising from a necessity to defend squats and demonstrations from police attacks. This is most commonly believed to have been in 1980-81 in W. Berlin.

From W. Germany, the tactic spread to nearby Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, and Sweden, throughout the 1980s. Following the integration of the European Union (EU) in 1993, Black Bloc techniques became more common in Italy, France, Britain, and Greece. By 1989-90, Black Bloc tactics also began to be used in North America.

The Black Bloc is most commonly used in advanced industrialized nations where widespread surveillance technologies greatly increases the risk of identification and arrest during protests or direct actions (including occupations, blockades, etc.).

This surveillance includes documentation of the identities of most of the population, automatic tracking of electronic banking and purchases, mandatory vehicle registration, biometrics (including facial recognition,

iris scanning, voice analysis, etc.), widespread use of internet and cell phone communications (the most easily intercepted and tracked), as well as CCTV cameras in nearly every store and building (as well as many street intersections).

Other factors that contribute to the use of Black Blocs in N. America and Europe are similarities in social conditions, cultural forms, and levels of conflict engaged in by social movements. Communication and interaction between the two continents is also stronger than with other regions, due to the history of colonialism and imperialism.

## Defining Autonomy

The tactic of the Black Bloc cannot be separated from the social movement from which it arises, since tactics are themselves an expression of the organization and methods of the fighting force that develops them (along with terrain, etc.). In this case it is the Autonomist movement of W. Europe.

Although the Autonomist movement is often described as anarchist, it also includes in its analyses Marxist and feminist critiques of society. Autonomy does not advocate a single ideology and in many ways avoids classification except as a radical Left or social revolutionary movement.

Part of the lack of a clear ideological line is the diversity of groups that participate in the movement (i.e., squatters, anti-nuclear groups, anti-fascist, prisoner solidarity groups, etc.), making such definition difficult. Another is a tendency to avoid ideological struggles and doctrine within the movement (such as Anarchism, Leninism, or Maoism, etc.).

The main characteristic of the Autonomists are decentralized and anti-authoritarian methods of organizing. While these were part of the earlier student and counter-cultural movements (in 1960s Italy and W. Germany), they became more influenced by the experience of the women's movement in the 1970s (including the politics of the first person, concepts of autonomy, etc.).

The Autonomist movement is revolutionary in that it seeks the destruction of the state and capitalism through decentralized social revolution. It differs from traditional Left forms of revolution in that it does not seek to seize power, but rather to diffuse and decentralize it to the local community base. The struggle for territorial space is seen as essential since it builds infrastructure from which to fight collectively and

On June 15, 2007, a Black Bloc of 70 persons was formed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during a local mobilization against the 'Atlantica' regional economic summit between the US and Canada. Marching behind a banner reading "G8 to Atlantica: Resistance is Global", the bloc wore helmets and carried shields. Bank windows were smashed and police vehicles hit with paint bombs. During skirmishes with police, 21 people were arrested. This was the first use of a Black Bloc in Halifax.

In September 2007, Black Bloc militants were able to carry out property damage despite pre-emptive arrests and thousands of police during the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

More recently, the September 2009 anti-G20 protests in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, saw a Black Bloc that attacked numerous corporations, banks, and police vehicles. This was despite the deployment of some 5,000 cops and National Guard troops (and with a smaller overall mobilization of some 10,000 protesters). Over \$50,000 in damages was inflicted

## Black Bloc 2010

During the February 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, a Black Bloc of 100-150, with 300 or so other militants, caused over \$25,000 in damages by smashing the windows of the Hudson's Bay Company (a major sponsor of the 2010 Games and a vital part of the colonization of Canada), a bank, and vandalizing police cars.

This action was titled '2010 Heart Attack' and its aim was to "clog the arteries of capitalism" by disrupting traffic and commerce on the first day of Olympic events (Feb 13). Due to the protest, police shut down the Lion's Gate bridge, delaying some 700 Olympic buses en route to the Whistler ski resort (site of skiing events).

The anti-Olympic action was followed by the June 26, 2010, anti-G20 protests in Toronto, where some 150 militants in Black Bloc with several hundred other militants, carried out over \$1 million in property damage. Scores of corporate and bank windows were smashed, and four cop cars were arsoned in downtown streets during the action.

The significance of the Toronto G20 Black Bloc, along with the scale of destruction, was that it occurred during the 'largest security operation in Canadian history.' With a budget of some \$1 billion, over 10,000 cops, 4,000 military, and 3,000 security guards were brought in to secure both the G8 and G20 summits (which happened consecutively, the G8 in Huntsville just prior to the G20).



behind a banner reading 'Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Offensive') of approx. 500-600 repeatedly tore down sections of the security fencing, fought police (including the use of Molotovs), and attacked banks and corporate property over a two day period. Police fired thousands of tear gas rounds and nearly 1,000 rubber bullets.



Quebec City anti-FTAA Black Bloc, April 2001

The next significant Black Bloc was carried out in York, Pennsylvania on January 12, 2002. Organized by ARA groups in the region, the mobilization was to counter a fascist event held in the city's library. Some 200 fascists attended the event, protected by several hundred police.

Approx. 100 ARA members in Black Bloc counter-demonstrated, along with 300 local citizens (mostly Blacks and Hispanics). Prior to the event, a fascist vehicle was attacked by bloc militants and its occupants assaulted.

On January 20, 2005, George W. Bush's second Presidential Inauguration Day was again the site of large, disruptive protests. Over 10,000 gathered in Washington, and a Black Bloc of some 700 also participated. Some 6,000 cops and 4,000 military were deployed, the first time since the early 1970s the military was involved in security operations in the capital.

While the protests and Black Bloc were largely countered by police and ten-foot high security fencing around the parade route, another action later that night (a torch march intended to disrupt a gala dinner) resulted in over \$15,000 in damages to corporate property.



Black Bloc for defense of Hafenstrasse squats in Hamburg, 1987

to live autonomously (building revolutionary dual power).

In accordance with these concepts, the movement refuses reformism and all forms of representation (as in unions or political parties). It also rejects the state's monopoly on the use of violence, and promotes direct action as an important method of struggle. Revolutionary violence is accepted as necessary, in accordance with levels of conflict appropriate to the conditions.

The movement rejects the centrality of the factory worker to revolutionary change, and advocates social revolution involving diverse movements (and not just workers). This can be seen most clearly in the Italian origins of *Autonomia* with the *social operaia* (social or mass worker, marginalized youth, women, squatters, unemployed, etc.).

A key part of the autonomous struggle is for free space and self-determining lives, outside of the worker-consumer system of capitalism. This is based largely in a counter-cultural/alternative movement that includes collectives, coops, social centres, and squats.

Some of the main themes of Autonomist activity have been: anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, patriarchy, prisons/prisoner solidarity, state repression/control, immigration, anti-racist/anti-fascist, anti-war/militarism, ecology, and autonomous territory/social spaces (i.e., squats, info shops, etc.).

## Rationale for Militant Actions



“Direct Action is representative of the combined battle against exploitation and oppression. It announces, with inherent clarity, the direction and orientation of the working class’s endeavors in its relentless attack upon capitalism. It means that the working class, in constant rebellion against the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its means of action” —Emile Pouget

What is the purpose of carrying out militant actions in the context of street protests? From my observations and experiences I would suggest the primary ones are:

### *To transform protest to resistance*

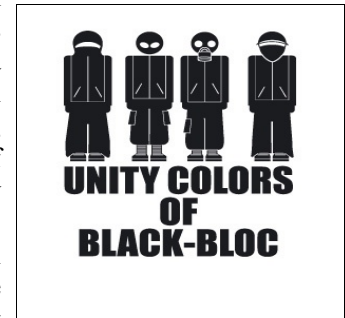
Militant actions can transform routine protests into acts of resistance. The very undertaking of 'illegal' activity is an attack against the authority of the system. The impact of such attacks can have a radicalizing

In October 1992, a Black Bloc marched as part of protests in San Francisco against the 500 year 'celebration' of the invasion of the Americas. As part of a breakaway march of several hundred, the Black Bloc skirmished with riot police and arsoned one cop car with a Molotov.

Around this time, the Toronto chapter of Anti-Racist Action, one of the best organized and most active in N. America at the time, began adopting the use of Black Blocs at its actions. They were influenced by the German Autonomomen *Antifa* (Anti-Fascist Action groups) and similar Anti-Fascist Action groups in England.

Toronto ARA raised the level of militancy in its campaign against the far right Heritage Front, engaging in numerous street fights with both fascists and police. They would have a considerable influence on other ARA chapters that were established at this time, particularly in the US north-east (many of which are still active today and frequently employ Black Bloc tactics).

On June 18, 1999, anarchists in Eugene, Oregon, organized a Reclaim the Streets (RTS) that ended with street fighting and property destruction by Black Bloc militants (as did one in London, England).



## Seattle 1999 and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

On November, 30, 1999, some 150 in a Black Bloc attacked corporate stores and banks in downtown Seattle during mass protests of some 80,000-100,000 against the WTO. The scale and audacity of the attack captured media attention and made the Black Bloc a house-hold name in both N. America and the world (because it happened in the US, the 'belly of the beast').

Following Seattle, numerous Black Blocs were organized in the following years on the East Coast, primarily against IMF/WB meetings in Washington, DC, Presidential Inauguration Day in 2000 and 2005, Democratic or Republican National Conventions, as well as those organized by ARA groups. One of the largest was the April 2000 anti-IMF/WB protests in DC, when some 1,000 marched in a Black Bloc. One of the most combative during this time occurred during the April 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, where a Black Bloc (marching

By 1982, when the Black Bloc tactic was firmly established, the Vancouver-based magazine *Resistance* was publishing translated reports from W. Germany of both Black Blocs as well as communiques of urban guerrilla groups then active in the country (including the Red Army Faction, part of an anti-imperialist movement, and the Revolutionary Cells and Rote Zora, part of the autonomist movement).

Out of the Vancouver anarchist movement, it should be noted, emerged the urban guerrillas Direct Action and Wimmin's Fire Brigade, in 1982. DA carried out two bombings (one of a BC Hydro substation on Vancouver Island, and the other a Litton factory near Toronto), while the WFB firebombed three Red Hot Video porn stores in the Vancouver area. Five members of DA were arrested in January 1983.

By 1988, a resurgence of the N. American anarchist movement had begun. This was facilitated (in part) by a series of annual continental gatherings, beginning in 1986 in Chicago with some 200 people attending.

By 1988, the gathering in Toronto saw some 1,000 participants. The Toronto gathering ended with a militant protest that saw some street fighting and property damage, signalling an escalating militancy in the movement. In an analysis of this action, the Vancouver-based journal *No Picnic* promoted the adoption of Black Bloc techniques in an article entitled "Wild in the Streets."



By this time as well, many young anarchists/anti-authoritarians in N. America were aware of the Autonomist movement in W. Germany and the practise of Black Blocs. Some Autonomist publications even began to appear, including *Endless Struggle* in Vancouver, and *Arm the Spirit* in Toronto. Other aspects of this contagion included squatting (in Vancouver, San Francisco, New York, etc.), infoshops, the increasing use of masks at rallies, and the growing number of clandestine attacks.

The first attempts to use more Black Bloc techniques occurred in 1988, with protests at the Pentagon, and then in Berkeley in 1989, during the (final) N. American anarchist gathering in San Francisco. The Berkeley action largely fizzled after police learnt of an abandoned building that was to be squatted on the final day's Day of Action.

In January 1991, the first US national call-out for a Black Bloc was made by the *Love and Rage* network/newspaper as part of international protests against the Persian Gulf War. This bloc participated in a 'March on Washington.' Approximately 300 militants broke away from the main march and attacked the offices of the World Bank.

effect on protesters as well as the general population.

By breaking with the concept of 'legal' forms of struggle, militant attacks reveal the true nature of the struggle (i.e., it is a conflict between two opposing forces) and the necessity of overcoming state-imposed limits on dissent.

### ***To challenge the state's monopoly on the use of violence***

Militant resistance challenges the state's monopoly on the use of violence, and in itself constitutes an attack on the legitimacy of the state. Even though there is, at times, debate about whether or not property damage constitutes 'violence,' ultimately the resistance accepts that some level of revolutionary violence is necessary.

### ***To show the collective power of the people***

When a group challenges and overcomes police control in the streets they gain a sense of their collective power. It can alter one's sense of the 'balance of forces' to see an otherwise 'all-powerful' opponent run in fear, abandon their vehicles, or stand by impotent to intervene. This experience can be transformative and give confidence to a rebellious population, extending beyond the street to more strategic levels of viewing the struggle.

### ***To reveal the vulnerability of the system***

Paulo Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, explains the psychological necessity of exposing the state not only as an institution of the oppressor, but as one that is vulnerable to attack:

"... the oppressed are reluctant to resist, and totally lack confidence in themselves. They have a diffuse, magical belief in the invulnerability of the oppressor..."

"The oppressed must see examples of the vulnerability of the oppressor... Until this occurs, they will continue to be disheartened, fearful and beaten. As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' the exploitation..."

(*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire, p. 64)

This is an important rationale for militant attacks on the system. If the people do not see a chance of victory or success, they will not participate in a resistance movement. The illusion of the all-powerful state must be broken. Along with the state and corporate propaganda, it is also necessary to overcome the ideology of the reformists who proclaim that it

is impossible to fight the system.

### ***To provide an example (or model) of militant resistance***

People need to see a model or example of militant resistance, especially when it is not a common experience (or even concept). Thus, the carrying out of Black Blocs and militant actions can serve as powerful forms of propaganda.

A recent example is the revolt in Greece, December 2008. Thousands of people, including high school students, engaged in widespread rioting after the police killing of a 15-year old anarchist in Athens. Their method of attack—rioting and arson—had already been practised since the 1980s by militant anarchists. These attacks were generally condemned and appeared to have little popular support. But many anarchists persisted in carrying them out. As social conditions changed, however, and the potential for revolt increased, when the rupture occurred in December, many people adopted those forms of resistance they were familiar with: the anarchist riots and arson attacks.

Without the examples of attack carried out by the anarchists, the December revolt in Greece may never have occurred, and certainly not with the intensity that it did. Thus we can see that militant resistance may have substantial and long-term effects among the population in which it occurs, effects that may only manifest during a period of intense social conflict (conditions which will surely increase in North America over the next few years).



Black Bloc confronts riot cops, W. Berlin 1987

and Black Bloc) and cause panic and division by attacking protesters, damaging small businesses, etc.

In 2006, militants in Copenhagen, Denmark, resisted the eviction of a youth centre (the *Ungdomshuset*) with a Black Bloc of several hundred, building barricades and fighting with police. Six months after the eviction, a street party to mark the anniversary ended with a night of intense fighting and widespread property damage.



Carlo Giuliani, in life and death

One of the largest Black Blocs to occur recently was in Rostock, Germany, during June 2007 protests against a G8 summit. While 80,000 protesters gathered, a Black Bloc of some 5,000 marched, attacking police and corporations, banks, etc.

More recently, in Strasburg, France (bordering Germany), in 2009, the 60-year anniversary summit of NATO was the site of rioting with several hundred in a Black Bloc. A border station was arsoned, and a hotel where police were staying was attacked. Street fighting included burning barricades and Molotovs. Some 10,000 cops were deployed, and over 300 arrests carried out.

## **Black Blocs in North America**

The 1988 protests against the IMF/WB congress foreshadowed the events that would catapult the Black Bloc into the global consciousness: Seattle's anti-WTO (World Trade Organization) protests and riots of 1999. Yet this mobilization and the successful Black Bloc action did not emerge out of thin air.

The emergence of the Seattle Black Bloc was the result of over a decade of practise by anarchists/anti-authoritarians in North America, which itself was preceded by several years of study, observation, and a slow process of adaptation.

The Vancouver-based *Open Road* was reporting on the anti-nuclear and Autonomist movements in W. Germany as early as 1977, and then the W. Berlin squatting movement when it emerged in 1980-81.





Section of Black Bloc, W. Berlin 1988 IMF/WB

After the collapse of the East Bloc in 1989, and the unification of Germany in 1990, a substantial part of the Autonomist's energies were devoted to anti-fascist work to combat the growing extreme right. This was even as many became demoralized from the 'triumphalism' of capitalism, and the decline of many national liberation struggles around the world.

Despite this, the movement continued. As the European Union was established in 1993-94, EU summits throughout W. Europe became targets for mass mobilizations. Because of the EU and the removal of internal borders (which can be temporarily re-imposed, as they are during major protest actions), the Black Bloc technique began to spread throughout countries such as Italy, France, Britain, and Greece.

In June 2001, a Black Bloc in Gothenberg, Sweden, engaged in street fighting and caused widespread property damage during protests against an EU summit. During clashes, police shot three protesters, seriously injuring one. Nearly 1,000 people were arrested, the largest mass arrests in Sweden's history.

In Genoa, Italy, July 2001, Black Bloc militants carried out widespread property destruction, fought thousands of police, and arsoned numerous police vehicles. In one action, a Black Bloc attempted to storm a prison and liberate the prisoners. One masked militant, Carlo Giuliani, was shot in the head and killed by a cop.

Along with the death of Giuliani, hundreds of protesters were badly injured and scores hospitalized by police assaults. Police also recruited some 600 fascists to infiltrate the protests (dressed as militants

### ***To Organize and Act Using Autonomous Methods***

By organizing and conducting Black Blocs in a decentralized and autonomous manner, militants who promote these methods of social organization show them in practise. These also reflect the type of society anarchists/anti-authoritarians seek to create (as do the methods of reformists: bureaucratic and authoritarian pyramids of control). Successful Black Blocs help to promote autonomous and decentralized methods because they demonstrate the effectiveness of such forms in action.

## **Diversity of Tactics**



“The state cannot be wished away. If we are to oppose the corporate domination of the world and the wholesale slaughter of life on earth we must understand the need for a militant and confrontational movement against the power structure. This is not to say that everyone needs to take up militant tactics, but we need to cultivate a respect for a diversity of tactics and a respect for those who engage in more militant tactics, no matter how controversial. We need to regard tactics as tools, and be open to flexibility and to utilizing different tools at different times. We need to develop a sense of urgency-these are urgent times. We need to build a revolutionary movement and a culture of resistance.”

(“What Happened in Adams Morgan on Jan. 20: Report Back,” by The Circle A Brigade, *The Black Bloc Papers*, p. 341)

One of the most common methods used in campaigns to build solidarity and unity between militant and less-confrontational groups has been the use of 'respect for a diversity of tactics' agreements. These agreements ask groups to not publicly denounce others for their actions, whether they support them or not, and to not collaborate with police or state agencies in investigations of others.

Such agreements have helped lessen divisive and demoralizing denunciations and fostered a greater respect among diverse social movements. Some reformist groups refuse to endorse such declarations and frequently denounce militants, even working with police or intelligence agencies.

Another common aspect of such coordination is the separation in time and space of militant confrontations from nonviolent, 'peaceful' activities (i.e., through colour-coded zones of differing levels of confrontation, break-away marches, etc.).

## Organization and Methods



“Therefore the consumption of forming an army is to arrive at formlessness. When you have no form, undercover espionage cannot find out anything, intelligence cannot form a strategy.”

(Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*)

While the Black Bloc is not a formal organization, it is organized. Blocs are mostly comprised of small groups numbering from 3-10 members. Members of a group organize together based on trust and familiarity, as well as agreement on the types of tactics to be used, etc.

For these reasons they are often referred to as 'affinity groups.'

It is the joining together of these autonomous groups in the streets that comprises the bloc. There is no formal leadership, and even those who've organized a bloc for a specific time and place do not have decision-making control over the actual bloc once it is formed. Decisions are made through affinity groups and general consensus among the members participating.

The leaderless, autonomous, and decentralized organization of the Black Bloc makes it highly unpredictable and can be very difficult for security forces to control. At the same time, police forces adopt and on many occasions have been able to counter Black Blocs. This, in turn, compels militants to also adopt and learn from such defeats.

The size of a Black Bloc may vary from 30 to several hundred, up to several thousand. In the first major Black Bloc attack in N. America, during the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle, the bloc was made up of some 150 people.

In some cases, organization may include a call-out (to form a bloc at a certain time and place), spokescouncil meetings in the months/weeks/days leading up to the action, with coordination of scouts, communications, first aid, etc. At other times, a bloc is expected to form or does so spontaneously based on a shared intent by groups that gather together.

Black Bloc techniques have also been used in blockades, occupations (i.e., squats) and small group attacks (clandestine attacks of 5-25 people), during which militants wear black clothing and masks.

council announced the housing issue would be addressed in the *Bundestag* (Parliament), establishing a temporary halt to large-scale repression against the movement.

Influenced in part by the emergence of punk in 1980 (including the widespread use of black clothing), many radical youth in W. Berlin began adopting uniform black clothing, along with helmets and *hasskappes* (balaclavas, commonly used by motorcyclists at this time) as measures against police repression and surveillance of demonstrators. It is during this time of intensified conflict that the first Black Blocs emerged, referred to by the media as *Schwarzen blocs* (black blocs) or *Chaoten* ('chaotic ones').

The practise quickly spread throughout the Autonomist movement, many of whom were involved in the squatter's movement. It was also primarily through the squatter and anarchist movements in Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, etc, that the Autonomist concept and Black Bloc expanded.

## Black Bloc: 1980s to 2009

By the late 1980s, Black Blocs in W. Germany were common sights at demonstrations, often equipped with reinforced banners and ropes at the front and sides. Even after the wearing of masks, helmets and protective gear was banned (by the late 1980s), Black Blocs still emerged. Some of the major Autonomist campaigns of this period included the Startbahn West airport expansion in Frankfurt, anti-nuclear campaigns (Brokdorf and Wackersdorf), anti-fascist and squatter's movements (including the Hafenstrasse squat in Hamburg), etc.

In September 1988, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank held a congress in W. Berlin. This event became a major focus for Autonomists, due to the role of these institutions in the global system of imperialism and capitalism. Over 80,000 people participated in protests, with some 8,000 marching in a revolutionary anti-capitalist Black Bloc. Despite deploying 12,000 cops and several thousand security guards, militants were able to carry out numerous clandestine attacks and extensive property damage in a downtown shopping district. Disruptions of events occurred throughout the days of meetings, and nearly 1,000 people were arrested. Concerned for the safety of the delegates, the congress itself was cut short by a day.



military service. Along with two major universities and a vibrant counter-culture, these factors helped establish a large and rebellious youth movement in the city.

By 1979-80, growing unemployment and a shortage of affordable housing, while hundreds of apartments and houses stood empty, prompted many students, workers, immigrants and unemployed people to begin occupying them. While a large number were simply seeking shelter, thousands were also intent on establishing collective/communal living spaces and social centres as part of an anti-capitalist analysis. Many squats were integral parts of the autonomist movement. These groups set up a Squatter's Council and were more prepared to militantly defend their buildings against evictions.



In December 1980, the W. Berlin government began an aggressive campaign to evict the squats, beginning with violent police raids and attacks. On December 12, two hundred were injured and 100 arrested during heavy street fighting.

The conflict in W. Berlin initiated more occupations and protests throughout the country. In Nuremberg, the largest mass arrests since the time of the Nazis occurred when 150 youth were arrested. On March 13, 1981, as part of a national day of squatter's action, protesters caused extensive damage in a downtown W. Berlin shopping district. The city government (comprised of Social Democrats) offered to negotiate with the squatters in order to 'legalize' them. While some participated, many squats refused what they saw as their assimilation back into the system.

That May, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) won the city elections. While they continued the process of negotiations with some squats, they adopted a harder line against the militants. By August, some 300 squatters/Autonomists had been arrested. But the movement remained defiant.

On September 13, 1981, a visit to W. Berlin by US Secretary of State Alexander Haig saw 50,000 protesters in the street. Militants engaged in street fighting and property destruction, despite the deployment of 7,000 riot cops.

During a protest on September 22, a squatter was run over and killed by a bus while escaping riot police. The next night, rioting broke out across the city and country. On September 26, the W. Berlin city



Attack on HBC, Vancouver 2010 Heart Attack

The primary actions of a bloc are usually property destruction (vandalism and sabotage, such as smashing windows and damaging vehicles, as well as arson) or street fighting against police. Vandalism and street fighting, sometimes described as rioting, do not occur every time a Black Bloc is mobilized.

The targets of Black Blocs are almost entirely corporate or government property, including police equipment and vehicles (and to a lesser extent police personnel). Banks and high-profile corporations are especially targeted, including McDonalds, Starbucks, Nike, etc. Expensive luxury cars may also be attacked.

Black Bloc militants may have tools and weapons necessary for vandalism or fighting police (such as sticks, hammers, crowbars, projectiles). In addition, they may have protective gear, such as body armour, helmets, goggles, or gas masks, to defend against police assaults and weaponry. At other times, no weapons and minimal protective gear may be worn, depending on the nature of the action and expected levels of resistance/repression. Thus, it cannot be said that simple participation in a Black Bloc or wearing a mask constitutes 'criminal intent.'

Even when no attacks occur, the presence of a Black Bloc within a demonstration can by itself serve as propaganda, an example of militancy and self-organization, and a deterrent to police aggression (although the opposite can also occur). The wearing of uniform clothing is itself a show of strength.

The actions of the bloc are largely determined by the political context under which it is formed (i.e., the cause of the demonstration, objectives that arise from this, the level of emotion attached to the cause,

where and when the demonstration is to occur, etc.). It is also influenced by the activities of the security forces (the size and composition of their deployment, defensive positions, weak points, etc.).

For all these reasons each Black Bloc is unique. While the bloc is more well known for the high-profile attacks carried out (as in Seattle 1999, Quebec City 2001, or Vancouver and Toronto in 2010), Black Blocs are now common practise in many cities in North America and continue to be used throughout Western Europe.

## Origins of the Black Bloc

Although the Black Bloc first emerged in 1980-81, many of its methods were first developed in the early 1970s—when the first generation of militant squatters emerged in cities such as Cologne, Frankfurt, Gottingen, Hamburg, and Munich. These squatters had, in turn, emerged from the radical Left movements established in the late 1960s (including an 'extra-parliamentary Left'). As this first wave of rebellion (referred to as the '68 generation, a global phenomenon) declined, some groups turned to squatting as a means of maintaining a radical movement. Along with gaining housing, an important aspect was the establishing of collective/communal living spaces.

In the Spring of 1973, the Frankfurt squatter's movement became involved in an escalating struggle against the city government and police, resulting in street fighting and property destruction. Faced also with the potential eviction of squats, the Frankfurt squatters began discussing the need to better prepare for these types of conflicts. They established *Putz* groups (roughly translated as 'hell-raisers'):

“As a result of their squatting experiences, the Frankfurt scene in particular had to develop a capacity to defend itself from the police, and had even built up a fighting squad, the Putz Group, whose members practised stone-throwing, one-on-one combat, unarresting comrades, and, according to some accounts, the use of molotov cocktails. As one former member recalled, 'We had the complete gear that the cops had, except for guns.'”

(*RAF: A Documentary History, Vol. 1, p. 436*)

In February 1974, one of the main squatter strongholds in Frankfurt was evicted during a large police operation. Some of the most extensive rioting in the city then occurred. One protest saw some 10,000 participate,

In the Spring of 1977, the *Autonomia* were at the centre of a social rebellion that shook Italian society. Starting with student protests against university reforms in Rome during February, the rebellion quickly escalated to mass demonstrations and rioting following violent attacks by both police and fascists. Autonomists went to protests and occupations prepared to fight, with helmets, masks, batons, and Molotovs. The universities and entire neighborhoods in Rome, Milan, Bologna, and other cities became temporary autonomous zones.

The state responded with lethal repression, authorizing police to open fire on protesters. In response, Autonomists began carrying firearms and shooting back (referred to as the 'P-38 Movement'). Scores of protesters as well as some police were shot and killed, with many more wounded.

The repression and rapid escalation of violence blunted the mobilization and led to the decline of the *Autonomia* as a mass movement. Some former members speculate that this defeat resulted from the fact that, despite their combativity, the *Autonomia* were already marginalized and were unable to draw in greater masses of people.

Forced from the streets, hundreds, perhaps thousands, began carrying out acts of sabotage and armed resistance (so diffuse were these attacks that they were referred to as 'armed autonomy'). Along with these autonomous cells, there also arose groups such as the Red Brigades (a Communist urban guerrilla distant from *Autonomia*) and *Linea Primea* (Front Line, a more decentralized guerrilla associated with the *Autonomia*). By 1980, using new anti-terrorist laws, some 4,000 political prisoners were in jail. Of this, as many as 3,000 were from *Autonomia Operaia*.



## W. Berlin Squatters, 1980-81

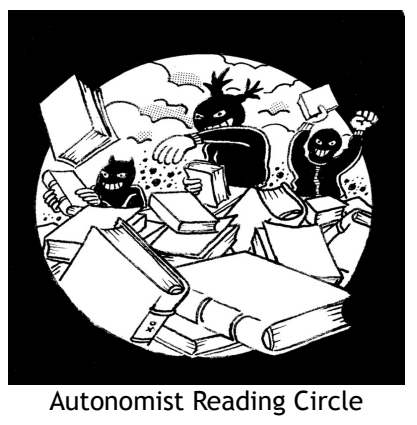
After World War 2, West Berlin had been located inside East Germany, existing as an enclave ruled primarily by US forces (until German unification in 1990). One of the special provisions adopted in the early 1970s by W. Germany (part of the recuperation of the student movement) was that youth in the city were exempt from mandatory



immigrants, women, squatters, unemployed, etc. Within their ranks were various political tendencies, including anarchist, anti-authoritarian, feminist, Marxist, communist (non-party council communists), etc.

The *Autonomia* also had its roots in the '68 generation, when a mass student-worker movement had arisen in Italy. During this time of intense social conflict, with widespread strikes, sabotage, and street fighting, the movement had to fight not only the state and capitalists, but also the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the labour unions that it controlled. It was clear to many radicals that these 'traditional' centres of the worker's struggle were thoroughly corrupted and collaborating with the state.

By 1975, both the student and worker's movements had been recuperated; workers had received massive wage increases since 1970 and were largely re-assimilated to the PCI and unions. While the student movement had also declined, the universities would play a pivotal role for the *Autonomia*.



Autonomist Reading Circle

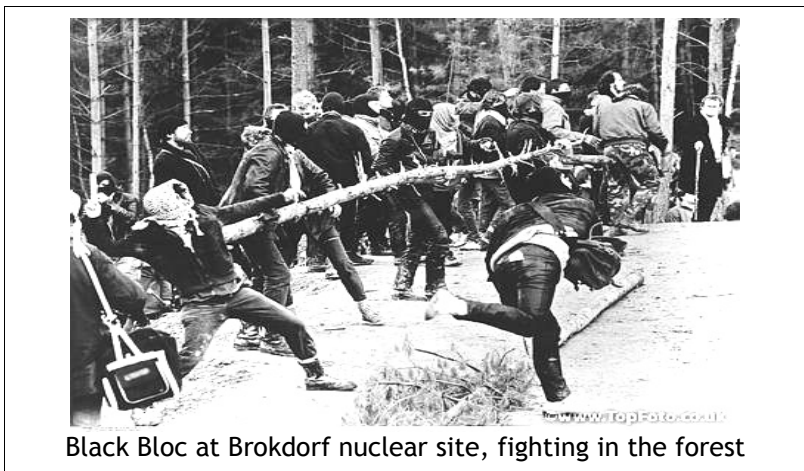
The movement itself had two main tendencies: *Autonomia Operaia* (Worker's Autonomy, WA) and *Autonomia 'Creativa'*

(Creative or Spontaneous Autonomy). WA was more focused on organizing and comprised largely of Marxists (council communists). The WA was linked with autonomous worker and neighborhood collectives throughout the country. The 'Creativa' tendency was more broadly counter-cultural and anarchist/anti-authoritarian. While the two groupings engaged in clashes at times, they shared a common hostility towards the PCI and unions, rejected reformism, and were both committed to revolutionary struggle in their own ways.

An important aspect of the *Creativa Autonomia* was its emphasis on social rebellion and the 'subversion of every day life.' To this end they engaged in 'proletarian shopping' (looting in large groups), storming of cinemas and concerts, and 'self-reduction' campaigns (paying a reduced ticket for events, food, etc., a practise that had begun in the 1960s and early '70s), as well as squatting. Many rejected the very concept of working for wages as slaves of capitalism.

with street fighting and barricades. These battles furthered the development of street militancy, including the use of helmets, batons, and the forming of affinity groups. Although the movement in Frankfurt was defeated, the experiences had an effect on the radical Left throughout W. Germany.

A similar development occurred in Hamburg, where the squatter's suffered a defeat that demoralized the movement for several years. In many cases, what revived the radical Left were the anti-nuclear movement that arose by 1975-76, and in particular the resistance against the proposed Brokdorf reactor. The resistance at Brokdorf saw mass confrontations with thousands fighting police & occupying the site into the 1980s.



Black Bloc at Brokdorf nuclear site, fighting in the forest

## Italy 1977: *Autonomia*

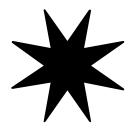
By 1977-78, some groups (radical clusters) within the W. German radical Left and anti-nuclear movement began identifying as *Autonomen* (autonomists):

"[A]utonomy was a notion that overnight gave our revolt a name... Previously we understood ourselves as anarchists, Spontis [advocates of spontaneity], communists or had diffuse, individual concepts of living freely. Then we were all *Autonomen*."

(*Radikal*, No. 123, 1983, quoted in *Subversion of Politics*, p. 88)

The W. German autonomists were inspired by the Italian *Autonomia*, a mass movement in Italy comprised of marginalized workers, students,

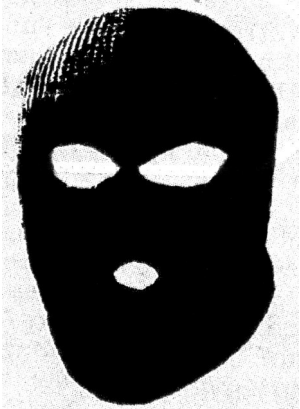
# CAN'T STOP KAOS



Riot cops and burning cop car, Toronto G20, June 26, 2010



Vancouver Black Bloc with ladder, 'Heart Attack' February 13, 2010



FFF

"Those in authority fear the mask for their power partly resides in identifying [and] knowing who you are...**our masks are not to conceal our identity but to reveal it...**Today we shall give this resistance a face; for by putting on our masks we reveal our unity; and by raising our voices in the street together, we speak our anger at the facelessness of power..."

--message printed on the inside of 9000 masks distributed at the June 18th, 1999 Carnival Against Capitalism which destroyed the financial district of central London.



Fashion tips for militants; on left is Black Bloc in Halifax, June 15, 2007; on right, a parade of fools(!?)