

# **FAST FORWARD FESTIVAL**

Mass protest and the future direction  
of anti-authoritarian internationalism

**Ta Paidia tis Galarias (TPTG)**

<http://www.tapaidiatisgalarias.org>

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We would like to thank you for the invitation to your festival, which will give us the opportunity to elaborate a bit on the subject of internationalism and mass protest against capitalist targets.

Our group, TPTG, has been active for years, however, as it is a tiny one, we cannot seriously claim that our own resources and organizing efforts alone could disrupt capital's infrastructure through mass protest. In the over two decades' period of our existence, we have mainly tried to be part of the real movement going on in a critical way, that's why we have been involved in strikes, demonstrations, local assemblies, riots or other kinds of mass protest, in both workplaces and non-workplaces, that is to say, in the production and the circulation sphere.

It is possible that anti-authoritarian internationalism, as you put it, at least in its current form as counter-summits, may provide a very useful network of comrades around the world through which insights, experience, practical proposals and theoretical analysis can be exchanged. However, it has certain limitations. It has been commonly acknowledged that such events usually exhaust their importance by the end of the respective summits, thus their duration is by their nature pretty short. Therefore, they cannot be the basis for any long term struggle, even though they can cause considerable disruption for a certain and rather predictable period of time, like the shut-down of the port in Hamburg, as it is mentioned in the workshop title.

We also share with you the concern on the more and more scientifically elaborated state management of crowd protests and the advanced repressive techniques the cops have been using. We have dealt with such matters in the recent past when class struggles and mass protest in the streets in Greece had reached an unprecedented level and we were confronted with the need to exchange insights with international comrades on our enemies' renewed repression techniques. For this purpose, we had started

an inquiry on the subject which was triggered off and affected by the Aufhebungsgate.

However, our interest in internationalism, as a necessary prerequisite for communism, extends beyond merely political, anti-authoritarian internationalism, to an investigation in the possibility of proletarian internationalist struggles. Although capital is international in its movement by default and capitalist social relationships are also universal (in their differentiated, specific forms from one country to another, though), internationalism, as a characteristic of struggles against capital, is not presupposed or automatically present.

But, one may ask, what is to be internationalised? To answer this we have first to refer to the basic contradictions in this society which lie in the class conflict, in the ruptures that class struggles create in the circuit of capital (either in the production or in the circulation sphere) as they contest exploitation, alienation and the gender-hierarchical division of labour. Class struggles in various forms threaten the two basic processes of capitalist reproduction: accumulation and legitimization of the class relations. However, these relations are not acknowledged as such in everyday life, in political life or even in workplaces: within the capitalist state of things classes do not appear as what they really are but as “social groups” or “social partners”. The capitalist state presents itself as a neutral and autonomous entity that functions in the interest of the “civil society” and the “nation” because the reproduction of the capitalist social relationships has been identified with the reproduction of the society or the “national community” in general. Therefore, social struggles are usually trapped within borders and their class character -the universal reaction against capitalist domination- tends to disintegrate into political and national parliamentary or trade-unionist forms of mediation and representation.

This all may sound too abstract but in fact it summarizes the failure of the possibilities for internationalist struggles in the recent years, at least in Europe. In the EU, the adoption of the

common currency, the financialization of the economy and the increase of profitable investment by the so-called “core” states in sovereign or private credit in the “periphery” states in the previous decade meant that with the outbreak of the recession in 2008 the divergencies within the EU hierarchy became a lot bigger. The adoption of austerity policies in all EU states, which took the form of harsh devalorization in some particular states like Greece, may have had some similar characteristics among the states, however, neither the way they were implemented was the same nor the proletariat responded in the same way. So, while in all those states -at least in the South “periphery”- there was a crisis of legitimacy affecting most political institutions, it was in Greece that it took the most severe form.

At least in Greece and Spain (in the EU) and in other, mostly North African countries, the occupation of open public spaces and the constitution of “popular assemblies” in the cities’ neighbourhoods gave rise to what would be called “movement of the squares”, falsely cramming together very diverse social uprisings with very diverse motives.

In most of the cases, the class elements of these movements against austerity policies were gradually buried under a citizenist ideology and practice, followed by the strengthening of the democratic representation after the initial legitimacy crisis. The content of these struggles was basically oppositional/anti-government and not a class one. From our own experience, in Greece, the “movement of the squares” that started with the occupation of the Syntagma square in downtown Athens, was effective in the sense that it managed to widen the field of opposition to the government’s austerity policy -something that the conventional “general” strikes and the isolated sectional strikes had not managed to do-, however, proletarian practices inside the movement remained limited and weak. Abstract calls for “direct democracy”, “national independence”, “cancellation of the odious part of the debt” and “self-management” were easily recuperable by Syriza and they were then reformulated in order to

promote its political agenda and boost its claim to legitimacy. In a movement which was inter-class from the very start, favoured both by various right wing cliques as well as by left parties and leftists, nationalism (mostly in a populist form) was dominant. In this context, it was Syriza -a party of new type- that mostly gained from the propaganda of an alternative and more patriotic path for the “development of the country”, which was to be turned in 2015 into a left version of the “state of emergency”.

Therefore, the responses to the crisis developed by the popular or neighbourhood assemblies were varying but rarely of a class antagonistic character. There was a growing tendency -mainly within neighbourhood assemblies or “citizens’ networks”- of promoting projects of co-operative businesses, commodity exchange (usually avoiding intermediary sellers), service exchange, soup kitchens, self-sustained farming or even local self-organized social programmes for unemployed and immigrants/refugees in an era when the welfare state is disintegrating and the social wage is under constant attack. As such activities remained fragmented and lacked any strategic class character that would generalize them as part of a movement based both on wage demands and expropriations, they proved to be a fertile ground for Syriza’s tactics. Actually, in the first term of the Syriza cabinet and later during the so-called “refugee crisis” there was an informal cooperation between the government and some of these extensive solidarity networks which functioned as a poor equivalent of the violently restructured welfare state.

The major drawback of the assemblies was their predominant citizenist ideology, as mentioned before regarding the Syntagma square occupation. Their most active leftist and anarchist members were content to be dressed-up as “neighbours”, an identity which was in accordance with the assemblies’ direct democratic form and their vague “popular economy” content. This could conceal the various contending political affiliations and class interests inside them for a certain span of time. The result was that the assemblies fostered an intra-class melting-pot, which

was the prerequisite for the affirmation of “civil society against the state”. As this would help blunt all class differences, it’s no wonder they were embraced by Syriza and its sympathizers and why they have almost disappeared today after having paved the way to the dreadful social pacification organized by Syriza-in-power.

This, in turn, can also explain the lack of any interest on the part of the movement for any internationalist contact and struggles. The international solidarity to “Greeks” was exactly that: solidarity to the poor, suffering citizens of a specific country. The confinement of the struggles within these ideological, political and national limits meant that their internationalist direction became more and more weak, if there was ever any.

### **What to do/proposals**

Revolutionary groups cannot escape the limits of the general conditions in which class struggle is waged. However, they can help struggles circulate transcending borders as long as:

- 1) the struggles themselves maintain certain universal class characteristics and
- 2) revolutionary groups do not abandon relentless criticism of the struggles they are part of.

Therefore, through international networks revolutionaries can facilitate communication between struggling proletarians in different countries exchanging insights and news.

Up till now we have tried two times to conduct a workers’ inquiry. First, in the primary schools sector after the primary school teachers’ strike which lasted for six weeks in 2006. Second and more recently, in the call centers’ sector. Some of us work in these two sectors, so in the beginning we thought that it wouldn’t be difficult to get a good sample of interviews on working conditions, wages, subjective attitudes towards work etc... However, in the process we realized that this was not easy at all.

Workers' inquiry or militant research is a way of theoretical and practical self-organisation in the workplace, so its success depends on the level of already existing workers' autonomy. However, in workplaces most fellow workers tend to organize themselves around a local trade union and its "charismatic" leaders. If there is no union, people tend to organize in small closed groups of friends - whether political groups or not. Workers' inquiry demands openness towards fellow workers who are not close friends, so as a matter of fact the interviews we conducted were not a representative sample as we could not go beyond interviewing our friends or some political contacts.

Another way of organizing we tried in July 2015, was to initiate an open assembly of workers and unemployed. By doing so we tried to establish, on the local level, an assembly that would, in theory at least, bypass professional, sectoral, gender or other divisions and analyze the proletarian everyday experience of exploitation within the social factory, having as a point of departure the struggles against the devaluation politics in Greece. This initiative, though it has so far resulted in the publication of two pamphlets regarding the recent labour and welfare state massive restructuring and a large number of public events/discussions, it has remained relatively isolated, also due to the lack of threatening class struggles in the last couple of years.

**TPTG**