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After the Dust Settles

Lessons from the Summit Protests

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2004

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2004

Quebec

Anarchist groups

- Groupe Anarchist Emile Henry, part of the North Eastern Anarchist Federation (NEFAC)

Umbrella groups organising protests

- Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles (CLAC)
- Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee (CASA)
- OQP-2001

Genoa

Anarchist groups

- Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA)
- Federazione Anarchica Italiana (FAI)

Umbrella groups organising protests:

- Genoa Social Forum
 - Anarchici contro il G8
-

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Where? When? What? — The Protests

Seattle (1999): Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Prague (2000): Meeting of the International Monetary Fund (the IMF) and the World Bank (WB) on September 26th (also known as S26)

Gottenberg (2001): Meeting of EU heads of state and anti-Bush protest in June.

Quebec (2001): Meeting of 34 heads of state at the Summit of the Americas in April.

Genoa (2001): Meeting of the leaders of the G8 countries in July.

Dublin (2004): Meeting of EU heads of state.

Alpahabet Soup — The Protestors

Czech Republic

Anarchist groups

- Czech Slovak Anarchist Federation (CSAF)
- Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists — Solidarity (ORA-S)
- Federation of Social Anarchists (FSA).

Umbrella group organising protests;

- Iniciativa Proti EkonomickÈ Globalizaci (INPEG, Initiative against economic globalization)

are going to tell the media. Now there also appears the idea of media boycott during protests – simply to refuse any contact with them (this is not my personal opinion, but some people like it).

2. Not to work with any socialists/Marxists again (after September they were kicked out of INPEG).
3. To think more about the strategy after the day of action – all our plans and thoughts ended with S26 and we didn't think about how to deal with the consequences.

Quebec

Nicolas: I would not put all my eggs in the same basket (but did we have the choice?) and I would try to defend the integrity of the organisation (NEFAC) so that we have continuity. But then, I am not sure that would have been possible at the time.

Genoa

Fabrizio: As far as we are concerned, very little, if anything. If it were possible, we would have tried to succeed in convincing our comrades of the uselessness of getting involved in what proved to be a trap – the demonstrations where it was known there would be trouble, and which eventually led to the death of Carlo Giuliani. The various police forces and the government were simply waiting for it to happen. What we have to do is forget all that, ignore the provocation and above all, patiently work towards the building of a class-struggle anti-capitalist movement, rather than a free-for-all anti-globalization movement with everything but the kitchen sink.

In recent years anarchism has had a re-emergence in the popular consciousness. For many people what was a piece of social history, a slogan used by cartoon terrorists or a word associated with punk rock is now a form of political struggle no matter how hazily understood. One of the reasons for this has been the role anarchists have played in the anti-globalisation movements and especially in the large anti-globalisation demonstrations in the recent years.

Despite the very real problems associated with the idea of 'summit hopping' and spectacular protest these manifestations have provided a public face of anarchism and at least as importantly have given anarchists an opportunity to work together and with likeminded groups in relatively large numbers. The impact of these demonstrations has been global, showing many that despite the end of the Cold War and the subsequent much heralded 'end of history' that there is resistance to the neo-liberal project and that social struggle has not gone away. The rise in radical activity in Ireland, amongst other places, shows that events in far off lands can also influence and promote resistance at home.

What is often overlooked is the impact these events have in the country they take place in. Each manifestation has been different and each has affected the 'host' grouping differently. This article is not supposed to be a definitive account or survey on what happens to anarchists when the face of global capitalism comes to their town rather it is a sample, a necessarily brief study of some of what certain groups went through during the organisation, participation in and fallout from these events.

The main sources for this article are interviews carried out over email with Alice Dvorska of the Czech Slovak Anarchist Federation (www.csaf.cz), Nicholas Phebus from Groupe Anarchist Emile Henry, a local affiliate of the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC www.nefac.net) and Fabrizio and Stefano of the Genovese Federazione dei Comu-

nisti Anarchici (www.fdca.it).¹ Unfortunately due to space restrictions I have had to edit their responses in places and paraphrase them in others.

Local anarchist movements

I first asked about the anarchist movements in the three cities. While the movement was relatively young and small in Prague and Montreal, in Genoa there was a longer legacy of anarchist struggle.

Prague

Historically there was an active anarchist movement in the Czech part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originally individualistic, it was later connected with anarcho-syndicalism and mining strikes. The movement's foci were anti-militarism and anti-clericalism. It also had an important cultural dimension with several well-known poets and writers claiming to be anarchists.

Anarchist organisations and magazines were prohibited at the beginning of World War I. Some struggled for the establishment of a Czech state independent from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 and many of the anarchists joined the Czech Socialist Party and later the Communist Party. Failed assassinations of government Ministers led to repression of the remainder and signified the end of the traditional anarchist movement. After that it was not possible to speak about the anarchist movement until the end of the Bolshevik totalitarian regime.

The first anarchist organisation, the Czechoslovak Anarchist Association, was founded in October 1989 in Prague, a month

¹ All unreferenced quotes are taken from these interviews. I also used previously published texts, see rest of footnotes for details.

Fabrizio: I think the anarchist movement is seen with new interest today. Anarchist communist positions in particular are viewed with greater sympathy, above all by those who have been disappointed by the neo-social democratic policies of Rifondazione Comunista. There has been a great deal of repression against all sectors of the anarchist movement, particularly against the Pinelli Social Centre which has been the target of several police searches and fascist attacks.

The FdCA's website has witnessed increased traffic in recent years and we are making new contacts all over Italy. In fact, our federation has grown, both in quantity and in quality. There is a great deal of authentic respect for our political positions, positions which we bring with us into whatever area we feel is willing to listen.

Despite our growth the FdCA remains a small organisation in a big city like Genoa and in the Ligurian region and we are still unable to make a big impact in politics in the area. The people who joined our federation after the G8 did so, not only because of what we did during the summit, but also, and mainly, because of our political initiatives after the G8. I honestly don't know if the same can be said for the FAI in Genoa or for the rest of the anarchist movement in the city, because once again, I'm afraid, relations with these groups are few and far between.

Q. Hindsight is 20:20. If you were going to do it all over again what would you do differently?

Prague

Alice: Apart from some details I would change three things and I think that also the other INPEG people would change this:

1. To deal with the violence question before the protests more carefully, this means to be more careful in what we

by the Summit and a lot of comrades literally collapsed after it (there were a few real burnout and some depressions leading to hospitalisation). It was intense. No anarchist institutions in Quebec City survived the Summit; everything was shaken to the foundation. It was a cataclysmic event. It took us close to a year before we started to have a stable and effective NEFAC local again (and it was no stronger then before, just not exactly the same people).

In retrospect, I think we were strengthened by it. There is now a bigger scene than before and I would say the number of anarchists activists has doubled if not more. We are now strong enough as a movement to sustain an infoshop which never happened before.

It did, however, have a catastrophic effect on our relation with the other left groups. Before that, we had cordial relations with them and we used to do a lot of stuff in coalition with all the revolutionary forces. Now we do everything on our own (and both sides have generally better results then we did together). We don't even go to each others' events. The division is there, deep.

Genoa

Stefano: There was a demo shortly after the summit (to mark the death of Carlo Giuliani) — a vigil in Piazza de Ferrari in the heart of the Red Zone, right beside Palazzo Ducale where the summit took place. The square was jammed with people, many from outside the movement. On the first anniversary in July 2002, there was a huge march in Genoa — huge not only in numbers, but also in the strength it expressed — for many, me included, it was a sort of liberating rite. That march was also noticeable for the size of the anarchist sector, though a part of the movement (including the class autonomists) chose to march separately on more radical positions.

before the fall of the Communist regime. The first anarchist squats appeared between 1991–1993. The main issues of the movement were anti-fascism, animal rights, environmental issues and the alternative culture connected with squatting. In the second half of the 90s the movement became more organised and raised new issues — e. g. class war and workers' struggles. It was also in this period that the first attempts at anarchist organising began in Slovakia. In 1995 the Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation (CSAF) was established with a more specific theoretical and organisational structure. Between 1996 and 1997 there were two breakaway anarchist groups, first the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists — Solidarity (ORA-S) and then the Federation of Social Anarchists (FSA). Both of them had a considerable impact on the development of theory and on turning the movement towards social problems and social anarchism.

An important impulse for Czech anarchism was the first street party which took place in Prague in 1998 as part of a worldwide day of protest. Anarchists' reclaiming of the street turned into a radical demonstration of around three thousand people, struggles with the police, and an attack on McDonald's. This massive protest and subsequent police repression shocked the Czech public as this was the biggest protest after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. It also addressed the issue of globalisation in the Czech Republic for the first time and brought anarchists attention to the issues involved.

The public perception of anarchists never was really positive in either of the republics, with the general media image being mostly of violent radicals and extremists.

Quebec

The anarchist movement in Quebec is mostly a new movement emerging from a series of struggles fought around issues of neo-liberalism from the mid-1990's on. No more than a

few hundred largely unorganised individuals were involved, mainly in anti-poverty, anti-police brutality and student activist issues. There were two regular tabloid newspapers with readerships in the hundreds, one a relatively new radical/insurrectionalist paper called Le Trouble and the other an older libertarian socialist paper bordering on reformist called Rebelles.

There was an old anarchist bookshop in Montreal and two groups who distributed literature. There were also a number of anarchist influenced small single issue 'mass' organisations. There were 2 (or maybe 3) specifically anarchist groups, both of which were in NEFAC and had 6 to 10 members each. Anarchism was largely unknown to the general public, even if there was a number of public exposures and even if a book on anarchism became a bestseller around that time. Anarchists, however, were known and generally respected in leftist, youth and community activism circles.

Genoa

The anarchist movement in Genoa and in Liguria in general has always been fairly active. Between the wars anarchists controlled the local Labour Chamber in Sestri Ponente, which had 12,000 members. During the fascist dictatorship they organised strikes in the factories and shipyards and were involved in the Resistance, in the Garibaldi and Matteotti brigades and also in autonomous groups like the SAP² Pisacane and SAP Malatesta.

After the 2nd World War, the Genoese anarchist movement entered a long period of crisis (as did the Italian movement in general) which continued right up to the late '60s. In that period the anarchist centres filled up with young people eager to become activists.

² SAP stands for "Squadre di Azione Partigiana" which could translate as "Partisan Action Squads"

year. We are not interested in appearing to be an opposition; we want to BE the opposition.

Q. What was the effect of the protests on the public perception of anarchism in your country?

Prague

Alice: I think that it (public opinion of anarchists) got worse than it was before. I mean the media would talk about us in a bad way even if there wasn't any violence, but this gave them a brilliant excuse.

On the other hand it is very difficult to say what the public was thinking about anarchists or the protesters in general. If I can speak for my own person — the only real arguments I had afterwards were the ones with my mother. My friends, students and teachers from university or people I met on the streets/in the pubs that recognized me were more curious than hostile and were asking questions about how it was and what I think about the whole thing. So one thing was the media hysteria which was huge and the other thing was the people I met and most of them were OK. But of course I met also some hostile people and heard about problems other INPEG activists had afterwards e.g. in university.

Quebec

Nicolas: Hard to tell. We discovered that we could have a mass appeal and that we were not forced to spread our message in the hundreds but that it could be done in the thousands and tens of thousands. We won a lot of sympathy in the public — we won the battle of ideas against everyone — but we did not have the critical mass to capitalise on this. We were overstretched

Genoa

Stefano: The Genoa demos made it very clear to a wide audience that there was strong opposition to the neo-liberalist programme. In particular, many young people were drawn for the first time to the world of politics as a result of what the movement was saying. On the other hand, the powers-that-be were able to shift media attention onto the problems of public order, thereby hiding the message that the movement was trying to project. In the days and weeks that followed, the only thing being talked about was the Black Bloc, the devastation, the repression, and so on.

Fabrizio: The counter summits have provided publicity for the summits, that much seems clear. If the big guys can't meet in Paris, then they'll meet in Alaska, or they won't bother meeting and just talk to each other by phone. Whatever else they may do, they won't stop the oppression and exploitation just because a bunch of boy scouts and Tibetan monks hang off the railings of the Red Zone, or because the Black Block set fire to a few cars and smash a few shop windows.

It is difficult to say what anarchists in general thought of the Black Block. Obviously anyone who declares themselves to be anarchist is free to do what he or she feels is best regarding action. We simply thought it was better not to get dragged into a military-style confrontation, something which the government was clearly hoping for.

We did not think it was in any way productive to launch an assault on the Red Zone (like the Disobbedienti and friends) or to indulge in petty acts of rebellion, like setting fire to cars and smashing windows. From day one, it was our intention to communicate with the people of Genoa and of the world. The problem is not to be seen, it is to be a real opposition. And we can only be that if we work within the real movements which are developing in society, in the world of labour, 365 days of the

Throughout the years the libertarian communist wing set up groups such as the Libertarian Communist Organisation (OCL), the Revolutionary Anarchist Organisation (ORA), the Ligurian Libertarian Communist Federation (FCLL) and, finally, the Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA).

Before the G8 protests the anarchist movement in Genoa was similar to the rest of the country. There are two organisations, the Federazione Anarchica Italiana (FAI) and the FdCA which represent a minority, both in anarchism and on the local political scene. Fabrizio: In Genoa, the FAI group is made up of a few individuals who come together on specific social campaigns or for certain historical or cultural initiatives, while the FdCA aims to rebuild an anarchist communist presence in Genoa and tries to act as an organised political force. There are also a few informal groups of comrades who usually meet in the Biblioteca Libertaria Francisco Ferrer where they organise debates, book presentations and film evenings. Then there is the Pinelli Social Centre, which is strongly libertarian and which engages in a lot of political activity in its locality.

Q. What type of coalitions were organising the demonstrations in your city?

Prague

Alice reported that in Prague the idea of organising against the meeting of the IMF and WB was first floated at a meeting of the CSAF. She said that the idea was vague at first since no one knew exactly what the IMF was or had any idea of what big international protests looked like or how they should be organised. After gathering information a plan and schedule were developed which took until January 2000, when more structured and concrete meetings started to take place and more people got involved. This was when the idea of a loose group

where people could take part on an individual base without having ideological or other problems between their particular organisations was accepted. This was called the Iniciativa Proti EkonomickÈ Globalizaci (INPEG, Initiative against economic globalization) and involved individuals from CSAF, Solidarity (ORA-S), Socialisticka Solidarita,³ Deti Zeme (environmental NGO), Amnesty International and other groups as well as non-organised individuals.

Alice: The majority of the people were anarchists however. There were some problems between the anarchists and Marxists from Socialisticka Solidarita before, but we decided to work together because the whole thing was so big, that we felt we need to unify our efforts. However we refused to collaborate with other Marxist or Trotskyist organisations, that were more strict and dogmatic.

The Czech movement (even if it got help from Slovak comrades) was, and still is, quite small compared to other countries. After some time we realised that it was simply too much work for the more or less 30 Czechs who directly participated in INPEG so we asked internationals for help. Our first volunteers came in spring and were from Britain and Norway. It was also important to show the Czech public that we are organising ourselves on an international level – there was never a protest joined by internationals before in our country.

Montreal

Nicolas: CLAC started to organise, in Montreal, almost two years before the Summit while CASA started maybe a year and a half before hand. Radical reformists started to organise at the same time but it was way longer to get the mainstream left to start to do something about it. There was a large coalition called OQP-2001, which was made of local mass organisations

³ Czech sister organisation to our own Socialists Workers Party.

from a strategic point of view. Later it was just a good excuse for the police brutality that followed. I also got the feeling that those people who were violent (mostly internationals, but also some Czechs) later just went home and left the Czech INPEG people on their own with the problems that resulted from the violence (bad image, police and Nazi harassment, verbal and sometimes even physical attacks on streets which continued for at least for half a year).

Quebec

Nicolas: It went pretty well as planned but there were two marches from the start. I think there was between 8 and 10,000 people (and that's for a march called for by explicit anti-capitalists and pro-diversity of tactics organisations). As soon as the march hit the wall, the black bloc tore it down. That was cool. I was in the Green zone and it was marvelous with literally thousands of people from the neighborhood out there to 'occupy it' (we – the Comite Populaire- said that the best way to protect the hood was to occupy it with a Street Party and not leave it to the cops).

On the 21st, however, things did not go as planned. First, we had several organisers arrested. Second, most radicals did not answer our call to do an anti-capitalist bloc in the union march; many just went directly to the wall to besiege the summit and police. Third, there was a sea of people (between 40,000 and 50,000) and we were completely lost in it, unable to regroup more than a few hundred people.

Many, many, many unionists (a third of the march, half?) however did come with us to the conflict zone and participate in the fun (the union leadership led the rest to a parking lot miles away for the conflict zone!). On the 22nd, we organised some 'clean up teams' in the community. That too went well.

Q. Now that the dust has settled, what do you think were the successes and failures of your action?

Prague

Alice: I think the biggest success of the actions was that the Summit of IMF and WB was brought to an end one and a half days earlier than it should have and the protests were one of the reasons. We also got a lot of media attention and despite of the negative image we got we were able to transmit one basic information to the Czech public — there is something like the IMF and WB and a lot of people here and in the world don't agree with their activities or the whole present economical system. Unfortunately the majority of mainstream media and journalists weren't interested in the reasons why we are against IMF/WB policies so we tried to transmit this information with the help of our own media. S26 was also the biggest protest action of this type ever in CZ and the number of 12,000 people is really high for our conditions.

We also had some problems of course. I think that the two biggest were:

- A. The fucking socialists from Socialistická Solidarita didn't keep their promise and did not act according to the plan of the four marches and instead of joining the pink one they joined the yellow march which resulted into a very strong yellow (maybe 6,000 people) and weak pink one (maybe some hundreds of people) and this led into an incomplete blockade of the Congress center.
- B. We knew that the most radical people will join the blue march/block, but we didn't expect this level of violence. The other thing is also that the violence in Lumirova street was completely useless and didn't make any sense

and political groups. We started by working with them but we left early as we felt they were not democratic and they were dogmatically non-violent. We did however continue to have people there, delegated by their mass organisation, like me. I don't think OQP-2001 was dominated by anyone but the Trotskyites did indeed have a strong influence in it (but they were red-baited a number of times), at the end of the day, however, it was the bigger and richer mass organisations (unions mainly) that determined what was acceptable and what was not. While we were not that big (never more than 50) we ended up having as many skilled activists as OQP-2001 so they were forced to deal with us on an equal footing. CASA was anarchist initiated. The NEFAC local proposed it to another anarchist group. We met a number of times to write an appeal and a proposed Aims and Principles (modeled on CLAC A&P). We then held a large public meeting and proposed it there. It was not supposed to be an anarchist group, it was 'just' anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and in favour of a 'diversity of tactics'⁴ We got 75 members right away (but many of the reds left early to concentrate on OQP-2001). Unlike CLAC, however, we did not use consensus and we were a little bit more formally organised (Was this due to a platformist influence, or experience gained in mass movements? Probably both).

Although it was not officially like that, the only group we really collaborated with was CLAC. We organised everything together and held numerous joint general assemblies. The rest of the crowd was just following the plan we had set up or finding a way to fit in. We did indeed try to be super-democratic by holding two large 'consulta' conferences. But how are you supposed to organise with hundreds of people from all over the place, some of them there on an individual basis, other than

⁴ Diversity of tactics: respect for and pursuit of a wide variety of actions from marching, through civil disobedience to property destruction and beyond.

with delegates? We ended up basically proposing/imposing a framework and everyone just used it, adding a special touch here and there. It was really chaotic!

Genoa

Fabrizio: For the anti-G8 protests in Genoa, the anarchists here started preparing well in advance. There were initiatives in many parts of Italy. Here, we could mention two: the national demonstration organised by the Anarchici contro il G8⁵ network and the 1st National Festival of Alternativa Libertaria (the FdCA's newspaper). These were two particularly visible events for a movement which was, for once, united and which left inter-group rivalries aside. But they were above all two occasions when the anarchist movement was able to address the people, far from the militaristic situation on the streets of Genoa during the G8. The vast majority of anarchists, those who were not organised and those who were part of the FAI or FdCA, showed great political maturity on those occasions.

Stefano: The Genoa Social Forum was made up of quite a mixed bunch: political parties (Rifondazione Comunista), trade unions (FIOM, COBAS, etc.), various sorts of associations (ATTAC, environmentalists, etc.) and other sections of the movement (such as the Disobbedienti, then known as the Tute Bianche). After the G8, some of the local structures remained active, such as the Genoa, Ponente and Val Polcevera Social Forums. These were mostly led by elements from Rifondazione Comunista or Catholic groups. The Social Forums, however,

⁵ "Anarchici contro il G8" was made up of: 14 FAI groups, FdCA, FAS (Sicilian Anarchist Federation), Circolo Durruti (anarchist group connected to USI syndicalist union) and about 40 other "non-aligned" anarchist groups from all over Italy. Its structure was the typically libertarian horizontal form, with assemblies making decisions. Interestingly enough it had one typically "platformist" feature — collective responsibility. This feature strongly characterized the network throughout its existence".

'offensive direct action' but it was a code word for Black Bloc). There were a number of 'green' protests leading to the Summit. Our day of actions was on April 20. This was for 2 reasons. It was the day where most of the officials were arriving but it was also because the union had planned a huge peaceful march the day after and we wanted to respect that. For the 20th, the idea was to have a march starting on the University campus (in the suburbs) going down town. The march was Yellow because there was no way to guarantee a green march thanks to the cops. At one point it was supposed to split in 3 directions toward green, yellow and red zones.

The way the whole thing was organised was highly influenced by other anti-globalisation protest (mainly Seattle and Prague). We wanted to find a way where everyone could be comfortable, peacenik and black blockers alike.

Genoa

Fabrizio: The feeling that a lot of comrades had was that both the summit and the counter summit were imposed on us. We wanted to protest against the G8 but we also wanted to avoid simply being a part of the no-global cauldron and getting caught up in pointless rebelling in simulated and/or real clashes. We weren't interested in any of that. The anarchists placed themselves on the field of play as a revolutionary force with our own analyses and programme. There were rumours that there would be clashes, it was a sort of open secret. The State was ready to come down on us, but was clearly in a much stronger position, militarily speaking. After Gothenburg, there was also a realisation that someone could die. So, yes, anarchists preferred to join the union demonstration (and not only anarchists) and we announced our intention to do so. Anarchism was born from the workers' struggles in the countryside and in the factories — and that is where its place lies. And three years after Genoa I still stand by that choice.

Q. What did you decide to do on the day and what influenced your decision?

Prague

Alice: We agreed on the basic plan in one of the international meetings before S26⁹ and it was a result of a discussion that took about 11 hours, horrible. We agreed on a carnival-like meeting on Namesti Miru (a square in the center of Prague) that would later spread into 4 marches (yellow with Ya Basta!, pink with socialists, silver-pink with people in pink and silver carnival costumes and blue with anarchists) that would surround the Congress center and block it so that the delegates inside wouldn't be able to leave it – we justified this with the argument that we will keep them inside until they decide to shut down the IMF/WB.

I think we were influenced by earlier events a lot, as this was the first protest of this kind we ever had in CZ and we relied a lot on the help and experience of internationals. On the other side we wanted to keep it understandable for the Czech public, so this was one of the reasons why we refused to do any violent actions in the name of INPEG. We got inspired by some tactics of earlier events (e.g. blocking the delegates in their hotels in the morning), the carnival-like way of doing protest actions and we agreed with Ya Basta! that they would block the Nusle bridge in front of the Congress center.

Quebec

Nicolas: The idea was to have a colour code for the protests and geographical areas so people knew what to expect. Green was absolute pacifism and no resistance.

Yellow was non-violent but with direct actions and resistance. Red was, well, none of the above (I think we called it

⁹ S26 stood for September 26th.

have basically been a failure as they haven't been able to remain independent of institutional politics and in fact are more often than not used as a springboard for aspiring politicians.

Fabrizio: A majority of anarchists viewed the counter summit as a circus which would feature the same old comedy acts we have all too often seen, and not as a real political match. The criticisms which came out of the Anarchici contro il G8 network were of course directed at the summit meeting, but also at the usual itinerant opposition rituals. For months, the debate, with people like Casarini and Caruso⁶ at the heart of it, was centered on how to break into the Red Zone! Not only was that ever likely to happen realistically, it could never have represented a real political objective. The most hardcore elements, such as the so-called Black Bloc or the class autonomists, found themselves more or less in agreement with the Disobbedienti⁷ on this point, whereas anarchists, on the other hand, believed that the counter summit should have become a political opportunity to focus on the big questions of the day, such as social injustice, exploitation and war. To challenge the State on the streets in military fashion was pointless, especially since the battle had already been lost, given the amount of repression which was unleashed in those days. It should have been a chance to come together to develop a class-struggle, social opposition to neo-liberalism. This is why Anarchici contro il G8 decided to take part officially in the demonstration organised by the grassroots unions which took place in Sampierdarena, quite some way from the infamous Red Zone. I believe that the anarchists' position on that occasion was serious, responsible and represented an authentic revolutionary force.

⁶ Casarini and Caruso: leading figures in the Disobbedienti.

⁷ The Disobbedienti are a group with ideological roots in 1970's Italian autonomist politics and Zapatista solidarity. Heavily involved in social centres and squatting they have also become a large part of the Italian anti-capitalist movement and are into defensive and symbolic acts of resistance.

Q. In Ireland we experienced a certain level of police harassment when organising protests on May Day. What was your experience?

Prague

Alice: There were different levels of police harassment/repression:

- Harassment of internationals at the borders – a few people were denied entry into CZ (Italians, US Americans and others)
- Policemen appearing at meetings (in uniform or secretly)
- Using the media to create an atmosphere of fear, the police did this together with the Interior Ministry and minister.

Montreal

Nicolas: The harassment was on many levels. Many people were followed and harassed. Some were fined, others arrested on bogus charges. That was the municipal police. The Canadian secret services tried to scare activists by visiting radicals at home (they went to several CASA people's places, including mine). The federal police tried to foment division within the broad movement, meeting with mass organisations and warning them against us and inviting them to spy on us for them. The provincial police went even further and infiltrated everyone, including NEFAC (yeah, a police officer even attended our congress). This led to more serious repression as a whole affinity group from Montreal was arrested en route to Quebec City. They got heavy convictions and spent months in prison. Several NEFAC members were arrested just prior

to the action or in the middle of it and there was evidence of long-term police surveillance (one Boston comrade was told his whole travel route from Boston to Quebec City). One of our members in Quebec City did some prison time and was on house arrest and then probation for a long time after his conviction.

Genoa

In Italy, after the disruption caused by protesters in Seattle, Prague and Gothenburg the state embarked upon a series of previously unforeseen security measures. The centre of town (the Red Zone) was completely sealed off and a further 'yellow zone' was established where people were subject to random searches. Warships were stationed in the bay and missile arrays were erected. As if in response to these measures the Italian media began to report various bomb and letter bomb scares as well as arms and explosives finds.

Stefano: Italy has a long history of State terrorism (what is known here as the strategy of tension⁸) and anarchists have always been at the centre of this repression. Most people are aware of this, and certainly all those who remember the events of the '70s. In my own experience, I have to say that most of these stories are not taken too seriously.

Fabrizio: But I suppose we shouldn't be too surprised, after all, at the start of the last century a Japanese anarchist was accused by the government there of causing an earthquake! I don't think people really believe these stories any more.

⁸ The name "strategy of tension" usually indicates the period roughly from 1969 to 1974, when Italy was hit by a series of terrorist bombings, some of which caused large numbers of civilian deaths. The authors were right-wing extremists maneuvered by intelligence and military structures aiming at providing a pretext for reactionary elements to strengthen themselves against an increasingly strong and effective working class movement.