

Smoke Signals

A conversation in the aftermath of the G20 in Hamburg

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At the end of the summer of 2016, several communiqués propose an informal coordination of radical groups in the run-up to the G20 summit in Hamburg. You took part in it. What interventions were you aiming for and which perspectives did it entail for you?

[Chuzpe] On the occasion of several big events like the G8 in Heiligendamm in 2007 or around the Destroika prior to the inauguration of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt in 2015, there have been similar proposals and radical campaigns. It is not a very new idea. Starting from an anarchist analysis, I see the necessity of a permanent conflictuality and I'm sceptical towards this staging of a political play where everyone has its role. Focusing on such an event leads often to the side-lining of everyday struggles. But at the same time, I see the possibility of a tension opening up in such moments, in which the scope of our interventions can amplify. Towards this end, I think that a focus on the practice of radical actions rooted in local struggles while referring to each other, can be a good way to resolve this contradiction and to work towards sustained action. Meanwhile, the practice of direct actions inside the mobilisation gives the possibility of showing this means of struggle, which can motivate and inspire other people.

[Peter Pan] I think that a lot of the actions that happened during the year are part of specific struggles. Each specific struggle is valid on its own and is important, but the articulation of shared points gets lost. To create a certain ambience, but more so, to find shared points in the different strategies and analyses, points of reference are important. Which are created rather well with this kind of coordination. Individuals, groups, but also movements, that don't know each other, can in this way communicate and get in touch.

[HoodLum] The aim was to go beyond a political campaign and to set out lines on a European level, on which to work together. Events like the G20 mean that texts are more translated and diffused than normal. Through these, it becomes possible to affirm affinities towards other struggles or structures and to build upon them. For example, currently the actions against the construction of new prisons in Switzerland are inspired by the struggle on a similar topic that took place in Belgium. We have to express our utopian dreams. Or at least can we develop our dreams more if we know we're not the only ones working to bring them about. I think a lot of groups reconsider their offensive when they don't see immediate results, and that the feeling of isolation and futility of radical actions proliferates. Coordination like the one of the G20, the

Greek call for a Black December, or from before, the campaign against the Olympics, can find a resonance beyond the event. If it is formulated well.

Can you give some examples of what resonated in the run-up to the G20 or of shared points between different struggles?

[Peter Pan] Good question. The G20 was probably itself the biggest shared point, that also explains why there's always a certain calm after such an event. But I think the context of the "campaign" against the G20 has created the possibility of different tendencies to focus on the same topic. Before, each tendency put forward different positions. Now, through the coordination, a shared position was developed by different tendencies. One of the most evident shared points was the choice of method, expressing the incompatibility with the rules of the state and the values of society which have been indoctrinated. It's from there that we consciously encountered each other.

[Chuzpe] I have the impression that there was a stark need for an international dimension, which is also rather evident with a topic like the G20. A point of reference – one that was soon to emerge after the first attacks and that became clear through the choice of targets, as well as in the texts through the analyses and research – was the attacks against big companies that are known to be profiteers of crises through the rule of the Troika and the managing of German imperialism. This can also be considered as a continuation of the discourse expressed prior to the inauguration of the ECB in Frankfurt. Besides companies like Cosco, Telekom, Hochtief, Deutsche Bank, Allianz and others that profit from the privatisations in Greece, also multinationals like ThyssenKrupp, Thales, Actemium, Sodexo and much more have been targeted. What I find interesting, is the international scope that has been developed. This creates the possibility of correspondence with other struggles elsewhere and most of all, in resonance with it, the expansion of terrains of struggle. For example, there was the burning of a car of a French diplomat in solidarity with the ZAD, or a police station that had its walls blackened by flames in solidarity with Greek prisoners.

[HoodLum] Those who follow texts from other regions, will notice that, for example, the security industry is, worldwide, more and more attacked, and that sabotage of cable connections and antennas increases. In texts, there are often comments that imply that people are aware of what is going on in Germany and vice versa. That is the precondition that will allow people to really meet, that discussion will take place and that something like a strategic orientation can be found. Furthermore, the people who participated in the direct actions in the run-up of the summit, and who were partly also in Hamburg, are evidently a target of political pressure in their regions and cities. Pressure from the side of our political enemies from the Left. In Italy or in France, there have been many times fights in demonstrations with labour unions or their security stewards. In Greece, there is a dispute over the right moment and objectives for radical actions. The dissociations and, hopefully also, ruptures after Hamburg make it more easy to find conditions that entail shared points. For us this means that we also wanted to strengthen the tendency that some might call insurrectionary or nihilist, which are not adequate terms. Through the communique from the attack on the police station in Zografou (Athens), it becomes clear that some have taken up the call to do something in their own city if they're not coming to Hamburg. I think that is great!

It seems that the international dimension has played a significant role to you. At the same time, there was also a lot embedded in struggles on local levels. In which way does it make sense to combine such projects with a mobilisation like the one against the G20?

[Chuzpe] I think we should never only concentrate on the dates set by our adversary, like the G20, because we get often stuck in an abstract relation. In this sense I think it is important that we try to connect our struggles – in which we are engaged and which are directly related to our lives – with such moments. In the run-up to the summit, there were mostly struggles against displacement of people and redevelopment of cities that are in lots of places a terrain of permanent conflict. But in the end it is about the question of the development of a revolutionary perspective. With only an event, how good it might be, these questions don't find their solution. Therefore this means that without a daily practice, we will never be able to experiment with our theoretical reflections and to question them. The mobilisation against the G20 cannot be seen as more than a fragment. One that allowed us to create situations to encounter each other and to have shared experiences in the streets. I don't think we can consider this as different projects that take place detached from each other.

[Peter Pan] The G20 meeting is a meeting of the self-proclaimed elites of the world to discuss different topics of world politics. Decisions that concern different themes all over the world are prepared or finalized there. So this happens also on the side of resistance. Different spheres fight on different levels for totally different areas. A shared reference point is what is lacking at times without a polarizing moment. To make this coordination permanent, it could be useful to focus it in something concrete.

[HoodLum] Between us, the discussions of the last year have been concentrated on not having a typical campaign with an occasion, a beginning and an end. We rather wanted to try to provoke a permanent state of attack, that maybe already exists if we look attentively at the daily messages of resistance worldwide. Lots of things are only visible on a local level, either because the participants don't diffuse them, or because they get lost in the information stream. The G20 was for us only the vehicle to use to propagate that what we practice every day. And that also got more attention and resonance due to the behaviour of the cops during July in Hamburg. There are regularly calls to radically act about something, but most of the time such calls are last-minute and very specific, which makes it difficult to respond to them. The anarchist call against the G20 summit in Hamburg was diffused from August 2016 onwards and was quickly translated into several languages. And it was rather open, which invited a lot of persons to participate. The radical campaign against the G8 in Heiligendamm from July 2007 started even sooner, namely with the first attack during the summer of 2005 against the CEO of Norddeutsche Affinerie, Werner Marnette. But these were very specific attacks, that raise the bar high on the level of research and explanation. Without having in mind the texts of that time, I think there were other main emphases made. For Hamburg it was more important to us to make the practices of resistance that are already present more palpable.

Do you see a possibility that the calm – that has set in after the summit – dissipates, and that the dynamics from the run-up to the G20 can be taken up again? Also, to respond to the desire that the coordination doesn't vanish into thin air after the end of the event?

[Peter Pan] I think that for a lot of people the summit, but also the period of the run-up, was very impressive. It is very probable that for a lot, especially youths, it was the first time to see whole units of riot police fleeing in panic. Even for the older, lots were impressed by the ability from all these people to coordinate and organize and to not keep quiet in the face of, on one side, an apathetic and disinterested society, and on the other, a highly militarised and repressive state. These are the kind of experiences one doesn't forget easily. Personally, but also collectively, this summit will be remembered and in some years we will be still able to build upon

it. The period after the G8 in Rostock was not characterized by a blaze of activity, but it lay the first building blocks for the following mobilisations, for example the one of 2009. Also, some persons who weren't pleased by the clashes in the Schanze quarter or who took it personally when the connection of their mobile phone was interrupted due to attacks on antennas, have asked themselves why this happened and have looked into texts for explanations. That this entails a potential danger, seems to have become clear to the state. This will also have been a reason for the taking down of linksunten.indymedia.org.

[HoodLum] This perception of calm is also relative and surely subjective. It is clear that for some months there have been less things going on in Hamburg or Berlin, but that doesn't matter so much. Neither sabotage, nor riots recognize borders. Since the G20 there has been worldwide a big part of the capitalist structure fucked up, and in numerous riots cops have been attacked. We have to stop measuring our effect or potential on a local level. The statement of Panagiotis Argyrou from a Greek prison, is for me more meaningful than the rhythm of attacks in Germany. Through this we see the proof of an emergence of affinities based on the combination of words and deeds that are spreading to more hearts in fortress Europe. The rulers can shut down internet sites, diffuse false information, or bring out their servants dressed in magistrate robes to enforce their law; there will certainly be other attacks. The formulations of coordination will not disappear when we get into the habit of putting as much importance into the follow-up as the preparation, when we make the effort of translating the texts from us and our international friends, when we are able to put into practice the necessary solidarity with prisoners and, finally, when we practice what has for a long time been deformed by some; riot tourism. All the talk about international coordination is useless when we don't find ourselves together with our people from other regions in the streets or the forests. We have to broaden our horizon and experiences.

[Chuzpe] I think we have to be careful to not fall into the illusion that only the amount of direct actions says something about the condition of our struggles. We would be making the same error as lots of others, who tire themselves with counting heads and for whom the motto "More is Better" becomes a paradigm. This way of thinking comes from a capitalist logic and is not suitable for us. We should rather examine things based on our principles and convictions, and take care that the way we fight and the perspective it holds, indicate a bit towards our utopian dreams. That does say something about the quality of our actions. If there is now a bit less things going on, it could be because people are in a process of reflection and are questioning themselves about how to go on. I think that also for this, you have to take time. And it would be wrong to fall into a blind activism, only to maintain the illusion that everything seamlessly continues.

The G20 is over now, and the experiences have surpassed our expectations. Would you say that they are also the outcome of the actions in the run-up?

[Chuzpe] It would be too flattering to locate the origin of the collective rage during those days in the mobilisation through radical attacks. Of course, these have contributed to an ambience and motivated some milieus to travel to Hamburg. But I think that the events just before the week itself; like the generalized state of emergency in Hamburg, the rude expulsions of the camp, the brutal repression of the "Welcome to Hell" demonstration and other episodes – that were supervised by the police boss Dudde & co – were surely more important factors. We know from other mobilisations that the idea of actions by small groups are not the ultimate thing and that we have to be able to question its limits. With a sober look, we also have to admit that the desired proliferation of certain types of intervention doesn't last in the long term. At the same time, we can see that this practice can provide us the necessary skills to face the police apparatus. Certainly

in Germany, where the power relation in demonstrations is seldom in our favour and where a riot can only be provoked with considerable risks and efforts. Several times it would have been useful to have the know-how to realize decentralized actions. I think that during the G20 there was a good mix of different forms of action that interacted with each other, which led to the loss of control on the side of the state. On one hand, the spontaneity of the masses, on the other, pin-pricks well-prepared by small autonomous groups or wild, swarm-like demonstrations like on Friday morning in the Altona district. Ultimately, we could say it's because of this mixture that a police force of 30,000 was pushed to its limits. But also thanks to the fact that there are groups who have a practice of attack during the whole year and that bring with them a certain experience in these situations.

[HoodLum] Absolutely, as always for such type of mobilisation, it's about creating a certain ambiance. It seems that we were able to transmit to a lot of people in Germany and Europe, the feeling that in Hamburg – despite the high level of risk – there was something possible. The conditions were present. On one side, the determination for confrontation. On the other, the capacity to attack highly secured places and to put out statements that speak to the hearts of many. There have been also mobilisations that produce negative resonances. For example, the yearly Munich Security Conference (SIKO). Prior to the event, there is the eternal communist babble that ends with a march, that is eventually hemmed in. In such circumstances, there's nothing that could have happened and that would be appropriate to the topic. But in Hamburg, there are also youths and other dissatisfied who haven't been perfectly assimilated by the system and who – traditionally – are close to the radical left or chaotic resistance. They always came to the block parties in Schanze and look for any occasion to get back at the state for their daily humiliations. The fact that a lot of people were up for it, is partly thanks to our agitation but also to the media scare prior to the summit. When the media write that on this day and at that place, there will be a lot of stones hurled at the cops, then lots of people will turn up to do exactly that. That the media reinforce this message through their propaganda, contributes to the mobilisation; we don't demand anything, we only want to attack the state and the society that legitimises it.

To conclude, a look towards the future. A lot of persons are still in prison and will be sentenced to quite harsh punishments. We can also expect more investigations. On that level, there will be for a long time a shadow cast on the G20. How to go on? How to deal with repression and which perspectives can we envision from these days in Hamburg and the preceding days?

How we see it, there are already some groups that are busy with gathering funds. Our task is in showing to prisoners and other accused that we not only support them through words and materially. We have to continue to push forward the struggle of the prisoners. There are already letters from those who assert their positions. Ideally, our message is that their repression will not stop people from acting. It will increase tension and people who otherwise wouldn't have met, will come together. But in general, we're not very well organised on a level of repression. In Germany there's more of an individual approach than elsewhere. I doubt that it's clear for everyone that more resistance will entail more prisoners. For me, the perspectives are connected to knowing each other better, knowing our ways of acting, and the cities and situations from where they arise. We should confront our – frequently too abstract – theories with their workings. For example, what our affinity really means. After a long period of moving around to riot, the coordination of the struggles also has to advance. We should be able to talk concretely about things and not only through public texts. It could be the next phase if, throughout Europe, we can coordinate on a topic or companies against which to act. Or to find each other next time in

the streets without public call. We have to destroy this feeling of a “Heimat” [a specific German word that could be translated as “home”, “homeland” or “nation”, but always with connotations of tradition, identity and territory] and be ready to be everywhere to take part in struggles. For example, I was surprised that in March there was a riot in Copenhagen for the 10 year anniversary of Ungdomshuset’s eviction, and that almost no one knew about this in advance. It could be a development to share more plans and discussion prior to this kind of actions, so as to have more people participating.

[Peter Pan] I share this feeling of not being well prepared to face repression now and also in the coming times. But I think some letters and statements of prisoners have been encouraging. From certain statements, we can understand that the struggle doesn’t stop with incarceration, but on the contrary, is part of it. Also, a lot of solidarity actions with those afflicted by the repression show that connections made prior are continuing to take shape. The actions in Hamburg, but also the actions from before, as well as the media frenzy, show that the ambiance we invoked earlier, cannot be stopped from a certain moment on. Then the state can try to do whatever it wants... I think the campaign in the run-up has created a nice perspective to continue connecting different intentions and forms of actions in everyday struggles. Maybe this will continue?

[Chuzpe] The terrain of repression provides us, in general, with a good target. Especially now, when the digitalisation of surveillance and security technologies is developing fast and when big events are used as testing grounds for counter-insurgency methods. This could be taken as a challenge to expose the shit that is going on and attack the companies that profit from it. Law enforcement is being outsourced already for a long time. And the cops are dependant on the technology of private security firms who provide the useful software. That can be seen very well for example in Hamburg. Never in the history of criminality in Germany has there been such an abundance of images and video material obtained by the authorities. On a snitching portal specifically set up for this occasion by the cops, there have been 7,000 files uploaded apart from the ones of the cops. Before, because of the overload of data, it would have been impossible to find a needle in a haystack. While now, with the help of facial recognition software – like the one from Cognitec, a company from Dresden – the data can be analysed in a small amount of time. That is a new level of repression, which we cannot ignore. We have to have discussions and share information to be able to develop counter-measures, but also to integrate in the struggle against repression on a practical level. Something that already happened during the yearly police congress in Berlin, but was also focused on in actions in the run-up to the G20. I see perspectives there of how to oppose the repression with an offensive response in a concrete struggle. Furthermore, I share what has been said before about continuing to be mobile. After Athens, Frankfurt, Milan, Paris, Hamburg, there will be other places where to meet and conspire. Outside the metropolitan areas, there are lots of interesting struggles that also contain this possibility. Like the Hambach Forest, Bure or Notre-Dame-des-Landes, and still more places where there is an autonomous zone to defend. These moments of coming together are very important and make it possible to together accentuate and develop projects which can continue on a local level.

Thanks a lot for this conversation. I hope to see you soon in the streets, on the barricades, or at Rewe.

[There has been a significant intervention during the process of translation. When in the German version, the interviewees use the term “militant” (and its variations), here this has been translated as “radical”. These two terms have both a similar generic and ambiguous character while “radical” avoids the immediate negative overtones the English “militant” would garner. In

a German context this term is still widely used, although also – notably – consciously rejected (as a positive thing) by some. Specifically here, the insistence on speaking of “militants” can be seen as a symptom of the vagueness about what constitutes the bases of the desired informal coordination. - TLK]

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