

My Belgrade experience

**3rd European conference of Peoples' Global Action in Belgrade 24th-28th of July
2004**

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To cut long story short, PGA is a network founded 1998 in Geneva, which is united according to the following 5 hallmarks:

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalization.
2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.
3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organizations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker.
4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism.
5. An organizational philosophy based on decentralization and autonomy.

Currently PGA networks mostly in continental and inter-continental levels, conference in Belgrade last July was that of European continental network. PGA has several webpages. AGP is for the inter-continental network, PGA Conference has some documents and links related to the continental European organizing.

Best of the discussions and workshops I attended in conference last July have already had their minutes published. More than report of "work done", attempt of this text is to give some general picture, reflect on off-program business (such as corridor intrigue), and continue the discussion I began two years ago (this far with myself only) about purposefulness of such events in general, in article I wrote about 2nd European conference of PGA in Leiden.

My main interests relating to conference were

- To see whether such a multitude of most diverge activists could find a convergence of interests which goes beyond superficial "one struggle" rhetoric.
- To meet with people who could help our group in case shit hits the fan some day.
- To see whether good intentions, which influenced bringing the event to Eastern Europe in the first place, could give any concrete benefits to Eastern European movements I am networked with or participate to.
- To see if there is a demand for a bit more narrow, but more coherent than PGA model of international organizing in Eastern Europe.
- To analyze dynamics of decisionmaking of an organization, which attempts to be as little organization as possible.

Nobody ever commented my article about Leiden, but indirectly I understood that some people interpreted me putting down the whole thing. This would be a rude simplification. But definitely there were moments I was sort of lost there, and I have learned some lessons since then.

Conference is useful if you know how to use it

First lesson is to make ones own program. Framework of the event may be organized normally or disastrously, but it may never make a success alone — it is the content which matters in the end. And since people have so diverge interests these days, you should ever count someone else to organize according to your interests. Good ideas for workshops are the best way to contribute, since organizers will be so much burdened with logistical questions that you should not count on them. More cooks, better the soup will be. So together with a couple of friends we announced a number of discussions and workshops on the spot, which had us busy about half of the time we were there. Some of them gained wide interest from others as well, few themes flopped since they were of interest for us alone.

Some other groups which have applied this approach in the past have been accused for an attempt to hijack the whole event — one example people from European Social Consulta in Leiden. Although I was not too much into ESC project which apparently got a flat landing soon after Leiden (now they seem to only exist in Spain), I think it is PGA which should serve movements, not movements that should serve PGA. In Belgrade, this approach was taken to its extreme by Venezuelan Chavists, who had their recruiting events every day from morning to evening, all the area plastered with their placates and announcements. I have a lot to learn from them what comes to promotion. They gave about zero contribution to the process, except a resolution project to support “Global Day of Action in defence of the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela and the Pachamerican struggles” 12th of October for the final spokescouncil.

After bitter disappointments with all 3rd world “national liberation” and “anti-imperialist” movements during last four decades, it is little surprise than in the final spokescouncil this Chavist resolution raised some uneasiness. At first, initiator was unwilling to amend the call since it was already distributed independently from the PGA, but having an instinct of a skilled politician, he soon realized that there was no any other way around. Eventually they rewrote the text with one person from Wombles who originally demanded to make it completely anti-state, against US intervention without any support for Chavez. In the end I did not saw any big difference between the original text and the new one, but I decided not to block it. For sure there was not anything that an anarchist would oppose in principle, just the ambiguity which cleverly hid how much the initiative was just typical leftist cheerleading of authoritarian regimes.

This is one of the reasons I am pretty critical about consensus — if it was vote, I would have had a fair opportunity to make my point and lost a vote. But now I had to shut down, since it was about principal disagreements which could not be mitigated. Since much time was spent for the issue, and there was nothing directly contradicting PGA hallmarks, it was clear that accepting some lame statement by consensus was much lesser evil than major disappointments caused by a block.

With all the setbacks of the anti-imperialist movement in the North, in its heyday it was a true mass movement, something which cannot be said about anarchist movement during the last 60 years. I suppose much of the PGA has been founded on networks which date back to those years, so if one decides to participate, one should not complain about a couple of fruits with old best before — dates in the basket.

Perhaps more than half of the people hanging around in events like PGA conference do not have any coherent political ideology, so little surprise that I met typical “you have not been there...” arguments in discussions. For sure, as happens with any shifts to “left” in the power

structures everywhere, Chavism in Venezuela has also given impetus to tendencies which want to push processes further from the old school latino populism, but this does not change the fact that weakest link of the “Bolivarian revolution” is Chavez himself. I am sure that the party will be over the day when CIA finally gets the guy — this is why all real change must come from below. For sure I have not been there, but I do not have to spend all my time and money for travelling to places like North Korea, Cuba, USA or Venezuela to have an opinion about their regimes. Anarchists are few, but strength of the movement is that we are almost everywhere, and Venezuelan anarchists around El Libertario — journal are particularly sympathetic and well-argued, so I will buy anything they state unless serious reasons to do otherwise appear.

Some bad excuses for a parasitic behavior

Talking about ethics of participation, I do agree than one should try to give something for the logistical side (security, food, cleaning, technology...) as well. This time I ended up giving nothing, and for my only defense I may say that I really tried to contribute to the content side and in the end I ended up sleeping in average 6 hours every night anyway, getting totally exhausted in the end even without doing any shitwork.

When I understood that Belgrade organizers were attempting to repeat Leiden spectacle, I was very critical at the beginning. And not only because I would probably find more effective ways to spend thousands of euros in Eastern Europe, but also because I supposed that lack of the local activist infrastructure, and infrastructure in general would lead to a total logistical disaster. But this disaster did not happened. I bet many people from Western Europe found everything totally chaotic, but really there was much less chaos than I expected, and even this chaos was partially due to reasons extraordinary, such as a very bad weather during 4 days of the 6 day conference.

I really liked the food in the conference. Food supply was outsourced to a local collective kitchen suffering from serious financial problems, and they fulfilled the order better than one could have expected, given that traditional Balkan kitchen is not too vegan. But since participants were in advanced level what comes to conference kitchen philosophy, they were also aware of possible shortcomings of the outsourcing — so there was also autonomous kitchen for those who wanted their food more according to _____ (add your favourite -ist here), self-organized ideals. I am all for that, but there was too little time anyway, so I just paid for the food and ate what was served. Most of the people did the same, so autonomous kitchen faced frustration and co-existence of collectivism (autonomous kitchen) and mutuellism (monetary exchange between collectives) was not so smooth all the time. I hope this was not a final argument for mutuellism in longstanding debate between these two, but an important and interesting experiment at least.

What comes to payment for food, there was an ugly incident, where guests from probably most impoverished country of Europe (Bosnia) were accused of being parasites for not paying for the food. Or more exactly, their company, a dedicated parasite, was accused and they took complaints as being directed for them as well. Originally they came to perform in an event closed down by coppers in Resnik, and after this food incident they got such a bad taste from PGA that they did not showed up in conference site another time.

For sure, they could have gone to register, given a fair price according to ecorates, and paid for the food a price they could have afforded. But since they had little experience about such events, there was no clear call to do that anywhere (even more experienced people got confused) and

they were not that much for the PGA conference anyway, that just did not happen. But I do not think that is necessary a reason to insult anybody. This incident inspired Parasites Global Action webpage, which I think is meant to be more a satire than an attack against PGA.

I think organizers of such events should just take into account, that some people (a minority of participators) just do not register in principle. It is not for rational, but for emotional reasons. Or even more likely, they are just chaotic. To count amount of food needed, one may add a certain percentage of chaotic people to number of registered, or just estimate the need according to portions served in the previous meal. It was nice that there was enough trust and no control tickets were gathered in meals, but there could have been a pot for those who would like to pay for the meals without being registered.

As for myself, I like registration and I always do it. I got a nice yellow card to stick to my chest, where I may write my name and organization. Nobody besides me was going around with such a card after the first day of the conference. Such a card makes me feel important, and people come and say “oh, you are the guy who writes those too long reports we have read in the internet”. Small yellow card is my pledge of allegiance to PGA, so it is an excellent way to annoy Rata as well!

No beef but activist beef

First program I participated was supposed to be a training for facilitation of consensus decision-making in Saturday morning, but it ended up being mostly yelling and accusations. This was a pretty confusing situation, since I had missed the scenario day before where PGA hallmarks (or exactly speaking it was the conference reader) were used to wipe ones ass — this had pissed some people off quite a bit. Conflict dates back to the preparation process of the conference, which had plenty of frictions. One debate which escalated in a needless manner in e-mail was about men only spaces — a group called West Essex Zapatista was suggesting these were intended to exclude women from important decisions. Another major disagreement had been should the conference be organized in Belgrade suburb of Resnik, or suburb of Jajinci. Arguments for Resnik were that it is an impoverished working class area where many local activists were living and had contact with local community, in another hand school and kindergarten in Jajinci, where conference was eventually organized, had superior capacities.

None of the sides (Resnik vs. Jajinci) were willing to give up, so given the consensus paradigm of the PGA, I think the resolution to split the conference to two parts was the only possible solution. Workshops were to be held in Jajinci, and evening parties in Resnik. For sure this was pretty inconvenient, although both suburbs were in South side of Belgrade it was pretty big distances and bad traffic between them. Personally I did not visited Resnik at once during the conference.

I may not comment whether this split decision was made with a good process, since I did not participated to preparation meetings. Resnik people and West Essex Zapatista supporting them claim it was not. Originally, evening program was planned to be organized in Resnik every day — however after second evening party local activists got harassed by the cops, and they had to cancel rest of the program. A pretty serious complaint raised — Resnik activists claimed that they were not given funds to organize program and support against repression by the conference organization. As far as I know, this claim was not handled proper manner at any moment in the

conference, and obviously the issue must be taken up in any possible coming up evaluation meeting, if European PGA seriously claims it is living up to its hallmarks.

Although I may not comment the preceding process, sorry show I saw Saturday morning inspired me to raise some new concerns about the so-called “consensus processes”. I have a feeling, that always so volatile consensus process gives extraordinarily strong demands on which kind of behavior could be considered as correct, and which not. People, who do not fit the narrow “well-argumenting, polite peace hippie” model of behavior may quickly get ignored, excluded or even attacked. Actually, West Essex Zapatista people were labeled as crazies already before beginning of the conference. I do know, that after Leiden conference all European PGA shitwork has fallen to very few shoulders, and when pretty aggressive comments are flying around in e-mail one may easily get pissed. Making whole PGA responsible for shortcomings of the process by such a provocative manner as wiping ones ass with the hallmarks may as well be the last drop.

But although I like PGA hallmarks, I am fine with wiping ones ass with them – that is a pretty cool punk thing to do in case you want to underline your message that something is wrong with the process. In another hand, I may forgive lack of humor for people totally dedicated for the PGA process, since I respect people who take their shit seriously. In Saturday morning, things did not got too violent, actually attempts to move someone out from a workshop physically in a non-violent manner, when this person is resisting non-violently, may look pretty funny. In the end, people who were most pissed with the West Essex Zapatista questioning consensus processes inside PGA left the room to have workshop in another place. At this point I was confused and did not followed the workshop any further – my only connection to West Essex Zapatista was from a number of angry e-mails, and I could not really figure out what these conflicts were about. In another hand what I had just sawn was indeed pretty far from the hippie consensus ideal. Later on, I learned that off-line West Essex Zapatista are much nicer people than I had judged from their e-mails, and some of their criticism are indeed well-founded. However I must admit that in this conflict I am partial, since anyone giving me Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker anthology for free gets my loyalty!

I suppose most of the humanity will not fit the scheme how consensus is currently expected to work in the PGA/related scene. Many people may react too emotionally, or without enough emotions, or aggressive manner – in the end, wiping ones ass with PGA hallmarks is no way the most radical way to express ones emotions. It makes me wonder if consensus culture of West-European activists is like the Culture of science fiction books of Iain Banks – something which destroys everything except itself with its all-encompassing love. I know all too well that there is no way to replace consensus in the PGA process, and often it is best of the worst alternatives in other frameworks as well. And main input the whole consensus school has given to radical theory is anyway putting emphasis on the process instead of the result – so my critics should be seen more as guidelines for the future.

Besides ignoring people who do not really fit into the hippie consensus culture, labeling them as “crazies”, “aggressive” or “paranoids”, another problem is labeling all conflicts as personal ones. Actually, I think real political differences are more often put down as personal problems, than personal rows are claimed to be political. Also, problems which are concern of everybody were claimed to be minor local skirmishes. For example Andrej Grubacic, a key figure of Drugaciji Svet je Moguc! (DSM!, Another World is Possible! – current European PGA conveyors who put the 3rd conference together) put West Essex Zapatista criticisms as internal London Action Resource Centre (LARC) rows, and conflict between Resnik and Jajinci as an internal DSM! issue.

I do not accept this — although some of the distrust I originally found difficult to justify in West Essex Zapatista e-mails may have its roots in frictions inside LARC, most of the concerns they raised were about the process in general, and thus an issue of everybody.

Where I found concerns raised by West Essex Zapatista dealing with the Resnik vs. Jajinci issue relevant, it is not necessarily the same with the gender reader and questionnaire issue. Concerns raised by Fabian from WEZ in April in regards to gender questionnaire seemed to me minor issues relating to language of the document. Personally I try my best to use politically correct wordings in my texts, although sometimes it is very difficult due to all inconsistent sex-distinctions which Indo-European invaders have imposed in Europe. For example, I do not really understand what is racist in the use of word “ghetto” when referring to close-knit activist communities. I think often stress to language issues is just a way to escape problems more difficult to deal with. It is also not a big deal for me if European map in PGA page or in the conference poster has a big part of Eastern Europe missing, I do not think that is a real issue. Plus I do not think there was a burning necessity to translate all materials to Russian — that would have been good, but availability of materials requires lots of work and is not a guarantee of getting some PGA presence in Russia.

I also find West Essex Zapatista argument that all these issues are rooted to institutional racism inside PGA very problematic. Call me behaviorist, but if someone is ignorant how may I know is she/he ignorant because she/he is a racist, or just ignorant? Accusation of racism is a demonizing accusation, which leaves little room for mediation. How may one negotiate with a racist?

In other hand, even if I perhaps do not find these concerns relevant, it is not reason to dismiss them without discussion. I do not know what was happening inside LARC, but it must be said that West Essex Zapatista was presenting their concerns in e-mail list in an open manner, and they were ready for discussion. I have no reason to oppose them having their way in issues of gender questionnaire, reader or whatever. If people just had not time to discuss these issues a proper manner when there was so much work to do for the conference as they claimed, logical solution would have been to remove that fraction of the gender working group which could deal with each other from the “inspired by PGA” framework altogether, to a completely autonomous entity. It seems to me that eventually no questionnaire, nor reader was published — apparently because of this conflict, at least I did not saw one. Maybe people should have had their thing published without the “inspired by PGA” label. Maybe people should not be too much sticked to their “inspired by PGA” label, since this seem to a source of much of the controversy, and problematic issue in general as one could conclude during the final spokescouncil. To be honest, I do not really have ideas how conflict around gender reader could have been resolved, the whole discourse is just way too alien for me.

There was men’s meeting in the conference, I only attended unsuccessful attempt to have a second part in lunchtime of Wednesday. No women tried to join us, but I suppose there would not have been any attempts to exclude them if some wanted to join.

Another WEZ concern worth of mentioning is that of transparency of finances. Up till now, I still have not seen a report about spending and financial sources of the PGA conference in the process list — “thousands of euros” mentioned above is just my estimation. Among long list of WEZ concerns, Asim from WEZ also claims to be excluded from Asian PGA convergence just because he is from Pakistani Diaspora in England and thus not living in Asia — personally I find centralizing inter-continental communications inside PGA unacceptable.

I did not recognize any attempt to clear these concerns during the conference. Originally I understood that one purpose of the Emma team would have been to mediate these issues, but it seems they were dealing with “external” threats instead.

There are many reasons why authoritarian forms of organization have defeated anti-authoritarian ones during last 3000 years, but one small aspect might be that in authoritarian organization someone usually bears a final responsibility for failures. Authoritarian organization may always escape revolving its organizational paradigm by discarding this person. But when anti-authoritarian organization fails, as European PGA conference failed to mediate these conflicts, responsible is just the abstract “whole”. Everyone was either busy with other issues, wanted to keep the caravan going or just did not bother to figure out what was all that fuss about. This is something what anti-authoritarian organizations should definitely deal with to justify their superiority in the first place – PGA Wintermeeting would be a good place to start, and I think discussions about Resnik issue and all other West Essex Zapatista criticisms should be in the program.

Although my attempts to understand these processes may seem to be clumsy at least and waste of words, for my self-respect it is important to make a better try than for example that of Richard from Oxford Indymedia – ignorance of his account about Belgrade is absolutely stunning! He even claims that West Essex Zapatista wiped their asses with hallmarks because they were disagreeing with them in the first place. Some people seem to be positive and upbeat so hard, that reality must be ignored altogether! In general text of Richard is interesting also because he seems to represent not only totally antagonist to me tendency inside PGA in regards to general mood (in axis of positive vs. negative), but in regards to his interests and activities in general. I do not see much point in travelling 3000 kilometers to see some videos, I do not even have a fucking television at my home! I get my news from A-infos, Indymedia and Infoshop.org only, that is why I hear about all the important events in the world only one week afterwards, or not at all.

Unpredictability makes it more interesting

Next program I participated was presentation of the Tusovka-newsletter, however nobody came to make a presentation. So we were a group of most various people, some of whom knew little about this project and rest knew nothing. I seemed to know the most (although not too much) of this idea of Olga S. and Alain to publish about globalization-related themes in Eastern European in English and Russian, but as far as I knew, this project hibernated 4 years ago already.

Program projection was one of the more chaotic sides of the conference, obviously hand program given the first day had to be taken with a grain of salt. It was based on forms people filled about workshops they could make when booking for the conference, but it was not adjusted according to time preferences of presentators, and database was outdated anyway. So if an event happened to be in the program, it was most likely announced in wrong time and place. Fortunately, cartoon and markers have been invented. Although some people did not figure this out during the whole conference period, all program could be found in form of hanged announcements in one wall (except the day when all of it was spoiled due to rain). This system could have worked out an excellent way. Since it is obvious that there will be plenty of cancellations and ad-hoc chances anyway, I hope that in the future hand programs are banned as waste of forests.

Still I am pissed that someone took my program and did not give it back, since until this day I have not seen any attempt in internet to list all workshops which took place during those days in Belgrade — this person is to be blamed for me writing only about part of the program I personally participated. Shame on you! (Perhaps he stole it in order to make this report a bit more brief).

Rest of the Saturday we had meeting of correspondents of the Abolishing the Borders from Below with editorial collective. I wrote minutes about parts of these discussions, so I will not refer it there. In prior conference organizers were really delighted for us having our embedded meeting, with condition of it being open to everybody. In the end, it was not open and attempt to organize open presentation Tuesday evening did not really worked out, but nobody criticized us for this.

Saturday evening our loose affinity group set up our program schedule, which included second part of the Abolishing the Borders from Below — meeting, a couple of discussions to be organized in Athenaeum of Belgrade anarcho-syndicalists, planning meeting of an anarchist bus tour around Eastern Europe, and foundation of a new anarchist international. Most of these ideas popped up in Alternative Eastern-Europe mailinglist in prior to conference. In course of the conference, many other people also decided to add something, so in last days there were much many workshops organized than during Saturday, when it was at most two parallel workshops. Good lesson for next such event is to have ones own stuff in the very beginning, in order to attract more people and to have a chance to participate to most interesting stuff which is concentrated towards the last days.

Sunny Sunday

Sunday morning I visited presentation of students from Sumy of Ukraine, in hand program this was marked for another day, so presentation lacked participators. I was surprised to learn, that same people actually put up a quite decent anarchist samizdat (Anarh Akbar) I was familiar with before, and actually we had accepted their group to our federation (Autonomous Action) year before, although since then contact had withered — seemingly their interests had developed to another direction. Students of Sumy struggle against unification of three local universities to one for various reasons, for example it is expected to boost already flourishing corruption. Struggle has a mass character, and has faced pretty harsh repression (a tent camp was attacked with an unknown chemical poison, march to Kiev was stopped with heavy-handed arrests). 3 months later, it seems that this conflict may be seen with intensification of oppositional currents in Ukraine in general — something which seems to be happening in Belarussia as well, although to a lesser extent. Especially in Ukraine repeat of Serbian and Georgian scenario is possible, not that it would necessary change things to much better direction from anarchist perspective, but any unrest gives some opportunities. In Belgrade I had much good intentions to organize some support for Sumy efforts, but now it seems there just will not be any time — sorry!

Sunday was my distro day. I attempt to bring to such events as much Russian underground press and literature as I may carry, since it is seldom accessible to interested people outside of Russia. This is actually quite a pain, since after carrying that 10 kg one way your main concern will be avoiding carrying it back — not to talk about groupies who insist on having free copies since they contributed years ago. And since nobody may read it anyway, I ended up distributing most to Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian and Bulgarian speakers for free since they maybe could

learn one day. And of course, almost all Western materials had very Western prices and no trade with Avtonom — with notable exception of Anti-systemic Library posse (the notorious West Essex Zapatista), who gave all their shit for free. Big respect! Organizers of such events should always remember us poor distroers, and to give one program slot for book fair only.

Sunday afternoon we discussed anarchy bus tour project. Idea is to have a couple of tours in different Eastern European countries with a bus during 2005, mainly visiting countries and cities with “emerging anarchist scenes”, small groups which would benefit from such a visit which could encompass street actions, video screenings, discussions and lectures. Of course, everything should be preferably connected to some local struggles. Idea is pretty clear and ready as it stands — thus this workshop was mainly presentation of the idea. Perhaps there was a small collision of concepts as well, when a more ngoist point of view met with the anarchist one (in questions of grants, public image and so on). No doubt that certain common, coherent political concept should be worked out, but I hope nobody felt excluded in the starting line. Also, some people we perhaps would like to cooperate with maybe do not align to “Anarchy” label, but what can you do — for example “Councilist bus” or “Horizontal bus” sounds way less cool.

Sectarian Monday

Monday was to be our day in Athenaeum of anarcho-syndicalists. It was unfortunate that it was to be Monday — gender day had some of the most interesting discussions coming up. I got brief taste of the “dealing with violence inside the movement” workshop by Sydney people, until I had to leave for the city, and I really liked what I heard.

We wanted to organize something in Athenaeum anyway, in order to have contact with local anarcho-syndicalists from Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative (ASI) as well. (Note that their website asks a password if you are a lifestylist. Try names of pioneers of Serbian anarchism!) Moreover, in Tuesday it was to be strike of electrical workers and in Monday they came to anarcho-syndicalist place to present their cause to “anti-globalists” as we were presented to them by anarcho-syndicalists from ASI, and to ask for our support. Since I had some business in the city, I missed this presentation and did not really got what was their cause. However, I suspect that workers were right and bosses were wrong.

Besides activists, a number of inter-activist conflicts were also converging to Belgrade — I already referred conflict between West Essex Zapatista and rest of LARC/PGA conference organizers and inside-DSM! conflict between Resnik activists and those who preferred Jajinci for the conference location. Third, and most longstanding conflict is between Anarcho-syndicalists (ASI) and the section of DSM! who eventually ended up organizing the conference in Jajinci. To this third conflict I give least attention, since there is no place for mitigation. I do not even find it necessary to go into details to political differences between these groups (although I indeed find them political, not personal as some claim). Long time before the conference, anarcho-syndicalists had made their conclusion that PGA is a hopeless structure not to be debated with. I may understand people who get annoyed for some bullshit getting hanged to their Wiki, but when you get to know Rata off-line, you learn that he is the most funniest sectarian there is — so I will forgive him a lot. But thinking back now, I am sorry that I did not took effort in the spot to sit down with certain DSM! figures, asking detailed answers to certain accusations of anarcho-syndicalists — it

might take several years until I have the next opportunity, since e-mail is simply too worksome means of communications.

No matter their small size, both ASI and DSM! had contacts to trade unions organizing protests and direct actions around Serbia, and there seemed to be a sort of rivalry which of them has more such class struggle credentials. I doubt political differences between ASI and DSM! are reflected to these contacts, actually I think it is more or less haphazard whether some group gets hooked up with ASI or DSM!. One meeting of workers' collectives linked to DSM! was organized during PGA conference, but for non Serbo-Croatian speakers it was not really possible to follow its dynamics, and I heard that short time reserved for questions of internationals did not helped a lot to clarify the real situation in the country.

In some sense such a rivalry is understandable, I am not friend of false unity and I want to respect peoples' right to organize according to their own principles. At some point this rivalry however got a big ridiculous, when some people were clearly disappointed when we were inviting people inside PGA conference to support action of striking workers linked to anti-PGA ASI.

I was a bit worried that people in general would be annoyed us announcing inside PGA conference events to be organized in premises of the ASI. It is still a mystery, who added to our announcement that these discussions were to be "anti-PGA" – for sure none of us did that, West Essex Zapatista were suspected by someone from, but they denied the charge. We erased this line from the announcement.

In the end, people were interested about our event, and especially many indymedia activists wanted to join our sectarian hit discussion topic "Indy- or anti-media? Against ANY journalism..." which was first in program. I wrote a summary of this discussion as well as about less witty "Terror"&"human rights' as bourgoise concepts", so I will not refer them here.

Monday evening after dinner in the PGA conference area, there was a spontaneous discussion in the tent outside about strike which was coming up next day. None of the people discussing were local, so there was a big confusion in front of the coming up action and all these local conflicts. In course of this discussion I got to a rather stupid argument with a long-time PGA activist from London. I hope that he has changed his mind since, but then he was arguing that by inviting people to demonstration of the strikers next day, I was breaking PGA hallmarks, because action was organized by authoritarian trade unionists where according to hallmarks, PGA is for horizontal organizing. I hope shortcomings of this argument are obvious to everybody, but perhaps at the next conference some discussion on what hallmarks really mean would be at place.

Another, more legitimate concern was about respect to organizers of the conference. Since they registered us as temporarily residing in Serbia and Montenegro with their own names, they could get some personal problems in case we got arrested. In another hand, people were not told about this setback when they were asked to be registered, and probably many would have preferred not to register if that would require refraining from a solidarity action. Sure, demonstration came without a warning in prior and organizers could not warn people about it, especially when it had not connection with the PGA conference. Many people did not registered and they did not had any problems when leaving Serbia – in another hand, one participator from Ukraine had spent 10 days in Yugoslavian jail 5 years ago when attempting to leave country without a registration.

This was a more complicated matter, but in the end I think support to strikers was more important than concern about uneasiness for individual people organizing the conference. Although local organizers did not endorsed the action, at no point they asked us not to participate. It must

be noted that this was not just some marginal lefty cheerleading, but strikers had personally come to ask for our support. And I doubt that they saw a big difference between ASI and PGA — for them it was all just a bunch of anti-globalist freaks, so does not really make difference if they did asked help from ASI or PGA. And in the end, the very person who had registered people in her own name was in Tuesday's demonstration and liked it, so I hope nobody had hard feelings in the end.

Shtrajk!

No matter bad weather prospects and all these arguments and confusion, I counted 60 of us leaving for the strike from the conference site 7 AM in Tuesday. And on our way, a cold rain started pouring down, and almost nobody had a decent gear. But when we connected with the strikers 8 AM, mood made a total turnaround — TOTALLY AWESOME! Sound system was boasting only best possible revolutionary Serbian pop music straight from the charts, including pro-syndicalist hip-hop, even occasional “commandante Che Guevara” could not spoil the mood. Whistleblowers and dancing people gave a drive one could never imagine to see in a trade union demonstration in Northern part of the Europe. We got a great welcome, and strikers cheered at our huge banner with text “International workers' solidarity”, written in Bulgarian, English, Serbian, Greek and Spanish languages. It was really unfortunate that Rhythms of Resistance samba band ever made it to the demo, since that was a place to be for them.

We were partying for a long time in front of the building apparently most guilty for pissing on the workers, after which we went on blockading main road of the city center, surrounded by buildings bombed by NATO back in 1999, for hours. Coppers were did not made any provocations. Perhaps they all had joined SAC29. Groups of strikers kept arriving from other parts of the country, and around midday there were some 800 electricians in the street party, joined by maybe 150 supporting miners. After four hours in cold pouring rain and my shoes soaking wet, I had to shamefully retreat — only most hard-line sectarian anarcho-syndicalists could support strikers until evening, when it was announced that bosses had fulfilled all demands.

Some of us paid attention that a number of strikers greeted each other with chetnik (Serbian nationalist) three-finger greets, also one of the hit songs played was told to have a homophobic line “..these days faggots have rights, but workers have none..”. There is no excuses, but in the big picture it all makes sense — unlike liberals claim, there is no continuum other end of which is “civilized humanist western values”, and other “barbarians”, which include Arabs, Balkans and whatever. In reality, when legitimization of the system collapses, there always happens a polarization where both anti-authoritarian and extreme reactionary alternatives attract people. You always see the same dynamics — in Germany of the 20's, in Spain of the 30's, even in Italy of today. What matters is who finally wins — us or them. My visit to Croatia after Serbia and talks with local anarchists there proved to me once again that national revolution is a graveyard of any revolutionary workers' resistance.

We all had been skeptical of Rata's boasting that Serbia is in the verge of a social revolution until we saw it in our own eyes. And even if Rata failed to deliver us the revolution he has promised, it may well be that Serbia could become another Italy, where radical workers' resistance is light years ahead rest of the Europe. It is something very special, that trade unions in Serbia, with all their inefficiencies, are open to groups such as ASI and DSM!, and actively seeking cooperation

with them. And no matter the one homophobic line, even kinkiest of us were well received in the demonstration (although this might have been because they confused us with members of Prodigy).

It took about 3 days for my shoes to dry, and I do not know why I did not get sick. After one hour or so at the camp, I went to fight with hostile Linux operating system in order to print materials for the workshop about repression in Eastern Europe we had called two days before. Free software community defeated me this time, and workshop had to start without these papers. Workshop was not too popular, it attracted 3 persons and one family. But it is not always about the quantity, and this way we had more chances for interaction. I told mostly about harrasing of our editorial collective of Avtonom in Krasnodar, and people had some ideas about NGO's to contact for appeals. I should have told also about Tomek Wilkoszewski jailed in Poland for 15 years for self-defense, but maybe I forgot.

Around 5 PM, we had our second Abolishing the Borders from Below session. We were late from the schedule, so few people who came to presentation we had planned to start after meeting dropped in one by one during the discussion. I thought presentation would have been interesting for more people, but this was the rainy day when all the workshop calls in the wall got destroyed, perhaps people had also problems in finding classroom number 5. It was well hidden in the basement, and I guess no-one else called workshops to be organized there besides me.

Contaminating from the basement

Party we had planned was about to begin. Evil Rata dared to come to conference drinking Coca-cola with no remorse, and he was rightfully assaulted for this — there was some loud yelling and coke was splashing all around. This was the revenge he deserved for all the spam e-mails he sent against the PGA. There is a speculation however, that really he was assaulted by a Pepsi salesperson, who had infiltrated the conference. This salesperson was singled out by watchful conference security, and she was forced to scrub floors.

Eventually party evolved to anti-PGA conference with header “What is wrong with the PGA — class struggle anarchist perspective”. There was a strict face-control, only stalinists (with moustaches), trotskists (with eye-glasses) and sexists from Resnik were allowed. They know how to shake it in Gdansk, but headspin on the table has to be practiced some more.

This all made establishment anxious, and entrance to our conference was barricaded. Or perhaps it was because groundfloor was pacified for sleeping. So there was a conflict, fortunately we could agree to investigate the noise concern, and really most of the noise in the gym where people were sleeping came from groundfloor through windows, and not from our autonomous anti-PGA space. So we could have continued the party, but some of the key people had to leave for the city already. Much of the rest of the party people were in a lengthy Balkans meeting, which was commented afterwards to have been excellent, with exception of the decision to have Balkans PGA meeting to be organized by some neo-Bolsheviks in Thessaloniki, which is very hardly reachable for all non-EU people anyway.

Since people remaining in the counter-summit were Resnik drunks listening Turbonegro, I made a tactical switch to side of the PGA establishment, I dissolved anti-PGA conference and locked up the classroom number 5. Room had to be cleaned up a lot early in the next morning, so I wanted to have some sleep after toughest day of the conference. But wild rumors about

the anti-PGA conference had been circulating in the camp already, and I heard that some Danish people came half past midnight, about one hour after end of the counter-summit to search “where that good party is?”

Wednesday 10 AM it was time for the “Anarchist Mystery Organization”, again in Classroom number 5, scrubbed clean from beer, chips and other icky things. We had decided to found a new anarchist international with Laure, since we are not content with any of the existing ones. We had drafted a program in train from Warsaw to Belgrade. But it was not only about sucking best PGA blood to our coming up international, but also to discuss difficulties which appear in international cooperation in general and in Eastern-European coordination in particular – we hoped also to have a discussion with people who do not like founding new formal organizations as much as I do, and people who do not see demand for such organizations in the first place. Call for the working group we had drafted 3 days before was the following:

“Anarchist Mystery Organization”

”-How should anarchist cooperation be organized in Eastern Europe?

-Is there a middle way between creating organizational fetishism/micro bureaucracies, and informal networks lacking solidarity and ridden with untransparent informal hierarchies?

-International activist meetings – practical help or identity building?

-Come and have your own international!”

Already 2 years ago in Leiden I had made an analysis, that such organization as PGA which just networks vastly different projects without setting any common priorities and with minimal political coherence lack solidarity, since foundation of the solidarity is in sharing – sharing of common ideas and projects. For sure, PGA conferences also serve a certain purpose as they are now. There are few possibilities to meet so many different and interesting people involved in grassroots movements. Since change of the millenium, social forums and the like have practically taken over the so called “anti-globalist” movement, and PGA is a sort of relic from the times when things were better. Probably it would be impossible to found something as wide as PGA right now in case it collapsed – so it is worth of support. Of course it is important to visit any events like European Social Forums where one may meet thousands of critical people, but personally I hate even the idea of going there and hope I never have to. I do not want to put down efforts of comrades who have worked hard to get alternatives visible inside Social Forums, I am sure that they have had good intentions, but there is no way our movement may develop in being just a small tumor in the disgusting social democrat whole, all talk about “contaminating” the event is just way off the ground. It is just very harmful to have any illusions about such a possibility. Our movement lives and dies depending on its existence as something on its own. I remember the enthusiasm when PGA was founded in Geneva 1998, it inspired movements all around the world. Just lately I heard that for example Indymedia charter is founded on PGA hallmarks, and I am sure there are many other examples. Nothing alike has been left from all those alternative events inside social forums.

In practice, necessity of PGA got proven pretty concretely, since I was the only person in the Anarchist Mystery Organization workshop. 50% of our projected international got lost with the transport. If there were other people with concerns in regards to PGA within the conference,

they had other concerns than we had. Right now, it there is no way to have more coherent common denominator than PGA concept is.

On Eastern Europeans and “lack” of them

Next workshop I participated was “Breaking the activist ghetto”. This was one of the few which were properly prepared in prior, and discussion paper had been released already one month before the conference. A person from Glocal group of Hanau which had called the workshop also made excellent notes, so there is no need to go to detail with the discussion.

I only attended the first part of the working group. I had wrote a reply to paper of the organizers, but it got lost to the cyberspace. So I made my point orally — I think the whole “activist ghetto” — discussion is a West-European one, since at least in Russia we do not have such a ghetto. Any activity immediately collides with the mainstream society, which makes things difficult but is an interesting challenge in the same time.

“Activist ghettoes” make sense, just as any ethnical and cultural ghettoes (for example Roma, gays) which different communities have founded around them for the sake of protection. Existence of such ghettoes is to big extent the reason that anarchism still exists in the first place, and has not withered away as countless once widespread libertarian movements before it (such as narodniks and council communists). In practice, projects which attract most people in Russia seem to be those which aim to building of such ghettoes. It seems like ghetto must be built first in order to be destroyed later on.

Small support for my thesis was the fact that there were almost no East-Europeans in this discussion, so it seems like being in a ghetto is definitely not a concern for East-Europeans. A couple of times during the conference I heard concerns about small number of East Europeans, after conference I heard that somebody from UK had even asked “but do you really think that people from Eastern Europe are actually here?” — this had provoked some Polish to propose all East-Europeans to paint their faces green during one conference day in order to gain “visibility”. Really this concern was unfounded, since actually there were quite a lot of East-Europeans around, perhaps one fifth of the participators, maybe even more. Compared to size of the movements, East-Europeans were just as well represented as West-Europeans. Of course there were also failures, such as neighboring Romania — Yugoslavia had lately issued very costly visas for Romanians, and an extra effort should have been made to have any Romanians in the conference. I also did not meet any Czech people, scene seems to have a crisis there. Or perhaps they just save all their pennies in order to obtain nukes. But most of the other countries of East-Europe with any “horizontal” activism were present.

Of course, in ideal situation, PGA should not network only small activist groups but also mass movements. But we should be realists, in past there have been some Eastern-European NGO-like structures hooked with PGA, but they did not gave anything for the process. It is better to have small, horizontal groups than big ones for whom hallmarks mean nothing.

However, East-Europeans were often attracted to very different program than West-Europeans — this is one of the reasons why some West-European complained about lack of them. There was a sort of division, where West-Europeans were for example media-activists or “pink & silver”, and East Europeans came from small revolutionary anarchist groups (with many exceptions for sure). This difference is also reflected to activist culture in general, Laure wrote a good rant about

difficulties of East-Europeans to access Western European jargon and discourse, which I do not feel necessary to repeat here — I try to make this text available online with this one. In some discussions, lack of East-Europeans was about total, whereas in others they were a majority.

After lunch in Wednesday I joined PGA process discussion for a while and I just could not resist temptation of counting share of East-Europeans present. From more than twenty people in the room, only three raised hands — among them, one person living in the West with East-European origins, one person from West living in the East (myself), and only one “genuinely East-European”. Obviously, bringing the PGA conference to Eastern Europe had not made a big change what comes to involvement of East-Europeans in the process. Even local organizers from DSM! were so busy with all the shitwork that it seems like none of them actually participated to the process. One has to do even much more to have East-Europeans involved to PGA — to form personal contacts, support East-European initiatives.

One of the many criticisms by West Essex Zapatista towards Belgrade organization was for lack of the East-Europeans in the process of preparing the conference. Of course, more of \$\$\$ and scarce time could have been invested for this, but I think this concern was not really just, all the information was there all the time for any East-European to hook with it. For sure call got translated to Russian a way too late, but that was because some Minsk people halted the translation without bothering to tell anybody, and eventually Sumy people translated the text on their own initiative.

Even if one day we had an unlimited amount of cash, many people do not like begging for it — actually, those who like begging are often least useful types from point of view of the international activist networking. And visa procedures are humiliating. When I told about these problems to a person from Eurodusnie, he was immediately ready to pass me a pile of cash to get Russians to the next European PGA event with the least required begging — that was nice, but I do not necessarily want to be the money man. These are really complicated questions, in the end totally transparent and egalitarian application procedure might be an oxymoron.

Some credit for lack of Eastern European involvement is also due to some (former ?) Rainbow Keeper activists, who machinated an intrigue in Geneva 1998 against some trotskists from Voronezh in order to gain “Eastern European conveyer” — label, but eventually did very little to justify such a title.

West Essex Zapatista have also attacked the whole global PGA process for lack of African involvement. But in general I think network should not be judged according to its “might” and “width” only. Actually I think it is pretty much authoritarian leftie idea to have branches everywhere, no matter what the local priorities really are. Such a thinking plagues even libertarian circles, for example a while ago I was approached by a member of a legendary revolutionary syndicalist organization from USA about perspectives to have their branch in Russia. When I told my honest opinion about applicability of their concept of organization in Russia, correspondence was finished. No further interest for exchange of ideas. When someone else from the same organization will contact me another time after a couple of years, the same history will probably repeat itself (to be honest, I am personally also not very interest about bilateral exchanges which some groups propose since it takes lots of time... I rather have such exchanges in multilateral way, for example in Alter-EE e-mail list).

I think Africans are able enough decide on their own if PGA concept is necessary for them or not. Of course if the problem is lack of information there, there is something we should do. In East Europe, one of the reasons of lack of the networking is that groups and organizations are

just not yet ripe of being able to really benefit from international exchanges. Local shit must hold together first. When Andrej Grubacic from DSM! asked me if I knew any groups in Eastern Europe which could be the next conveyors, only one Polish one came to my mind — but even they have little awareness about PGA and actually are pretty notorious for monopolizing such international communications, so perhaps I would not even like to see them as conveyors. I could have founded PGA infopoint in Russia right after Leiden, but I did not want because I would have been the only person doing the work. Fortunately, Epicenter infoshop from Sankt-Petersburg announced their willingness to become a PGA infopoint in the final spokescouncil, thus saving us from embarrassment of still not having a single infopoint in the whole Russia (in whole Eastern Europe, only other infopoints are in Sumy of Ukraine and Lyublyana of Slovenia).

I think one should be just as concerned about discrepancies of Western-European involvement than about lack of East-Europeans or Africans. For example during whole conference, I met only one person from Italy. There were 4 from Ukraine, so

Italian radical left was perhaps 1000 times less represented than Ukrainian, since Italy has the biggest movement in the world (both relatively and absolutely). Perhaps involvement of authoritarians from Leoncavallo in PGA for a while discredited network in eyes of rest of the Italian scene, and when Leoncavallo for some reason made conclusion that they may not use PGA in their search for hegemonies and lost their interest, nobody else hooked up in their place.

From Western Europe, UK was best represented, probably due to longstanding Reclaim the Streets — involvement in the PGA. Big UK involvement is very good, since although British “anti-globalization” scene has been much smaller than continental one, it has been much more free from all the kinds of authoritarian institutions. Besides former and current RTS activists, there were many people for example from Dissent! and Wombles, latter group is particularly sympathetic to me. There were also many Germans, but few of them were interested about the process. There were even some anti-German morons tearing down exhibition of photographs of Palestinian children. It would be nice if next European conference was in Germany — that would be a good opportunity to settle some scores with those types. Some French groups have been much involved in the process during last years, but besides them few people came from France. It seems like French scene is more fractionalized, and it is pretty hard to form alliances — this is perhaps why some French seemed to be particularly sensitive to criticisms which could discredit PGA as a whole. Spanish were around, but they could have been more, taking into account size of the movement there. Dutch involvement was not unsurprising, taken that as previous conveyor Eurodusnie had spend a lot of effort to help DSM! to put the 3rd conference up. Austria is perhaps not the easiest place to be radical left, but Austrians were around and they were among the coolest people in the conference. Danish and Finnish were relatively well presented, but at least latter without involvement in the process. Besides Italians, Swedish were particularly badly represented — I only met 3 persons although Sweden has a relatively big anti-authoritarian scene. Traditionally Swedish have been pretty autonomous though, without big effort to network internationally.

Busy Wednesday

PGA process discussions continue most of the time during European conferences, and they draft proposals for the final plenary/spokescouncil. In Belgrade, I was only participating to one ses-

sion, this splitted to different groups — I chose one which discussed about relations of PGA to European Social Forum, Socialist Workers' Party and other such vertical organizations. There were not too many people in this group, and they were almost exclusively British — little surprising given where the then next ESF was about to take place. PGA has a pretty strict policy of non-representation — only final plenary/spokesouncil of European conferences may make decisions in the name of European PGA, and there is for example no way for somebody to “negotiate” with ESF or whatever in the name of the PGA. Already in Leiden it was clear that this raises a problem with visibility, “promoting” PGA is pretty difficult and this is why it is often not accessible to people that could be interested. But changing existing policies is not really possible, since they lie very deep in the concept of the organization in general — so in some sense discussions in our working group were a sort of waste of time. Everyone was pretty much aware anyway that ESF and SWP suck, although there were perhaps different levels of optimism how much some sort of involvement in the former may make change.

This was only time in the conference I was in a group mostly crowded with people speaking English as their motherlanguge, and it made a big difference. Person which speaks better English immediately sounds more clever and well-argued, even if she/he was talking about most trivial things. This may have much more deeper influence to power structures than we even imagine. In this conference, I attended no workshop with any translations, they were just not asked — it might be a pretty bad sign if everyone without proper English skills have already now been in practice excluded from PGA events. In Leiden there were still a number of non-English speakers, in Belgrade just a handful.

After process discussions, I joined anti-repression workshop. It was initiated by people doing Aubonne bridge solidarity work for person who got almost killed when police made him drop from a bridge during latest Geneva protests. This was interesting, because initiative is from completely different networks than European Anarchist Black Cross, to which I am connected. I think one of the biggest problems of our movement is lack of anti-repression work with a long-time perspective. There is very much work to do, but it is not very spectacular and of little interest to society in general — this is why “spectacle activism” has been pretty averse towards anti-repression issues beyond setting up temporary legal teams during the summit protests. Incapability of the “spontaneous movement” to organize anti-repression work is one of the main reasons I have argued for a more coherent, formal way of organization. Not that our “less spontaneous” efforts in Russia have been much more successful either.

However, this workshop was a bit of disappointment. Apparently, people who originally wanted to present Aubonne bridge project did not come, so presentation had to be made by another person who seemingly had other concerns and was not too much in the mood. Maybe half of the people had not any previous experience with anti-repression work, they just came to listen. As for people already active, there were a couple of very local German initiatives, Wombles who had worked with cases of British repressed after Gothenburg and Thessaloniki protests, and people from Thessaloniki group of Antiauthoritarian movement of Greece. Little doubt that solidarity work in Greece is at completely another level — solidarity movement for Thessaloniki 7 surpassed anything what could have been imagined in rest of the Europe. Greek people also proposed questions that could be discussed, but facilitator hurried to finish working group according to the schedule. I do not think maintaining the schedule was a good idea — we could have discussed the issues such as who should be concretely supported and how on our own even if she had to do her business elsewhere. After Thessaloniki, there were 3 separate an-

archist supporting campaigns in Greece, totally conflicting around these questions and without any coordination of activities, so Greek people certainly had some insight to relevance of these questions, although British could just shake their heads and say “Greece is Greece”. I still have not had time to join the e-mail list of Aubonne bridge network, so I do not know how much it is currently active. Mostly this network attempts to be a sort of information clearinghouse and to do fundraising, fine tuning of politics is up for each involved group to do on their own.

My 6th working group of Wednesday (counting the men’s network meeting in lunch which ended up just changing e-mails), and last of the whole conference, was the Dungeons and Dragons one. Although board game variant is pretty primitive, it still took about one hour to learn the rules. I found it surprisingly gender-correct, 2 of the four characters are female. Their sexual orientation was not defined though. 8 year old dungeon master preferred a ready scenario to improvising, so we slained all the goblins pretty easily since it was the first level. Non-violent conflict resolution was not an alternative. However we were denied opportunity to loot the treasury in a somewhat unfair manner, perhaps there was an anti-consumerist message dungeon master wanted to deliver us.

Security issues

In the evening, some pretty serious security concerns raised. Some Polish girls were sexually harassed by local kids, locals also recognized Croatian accent of one participator and she was threaten because of her nationality. Stuff was also stolen from the tents. Earlier in the day someone claiming to be from Serbian Blood & Honor section had also promised to bring his crew in the evening and storm the conference.

Things looked bad. Most of the people had left for squat party, and we could not find anybody doing security from the so-called Emma team. For sure it was very good that local kids were let to drink beer in the conference area every day (unfortunately but almost unavoidable consequence of which was that some genderqueer people felt pretty uncomfortable — outreach from the ghetto comes with a price), but about all of the local kids were having gopnik/derzy/jogging suit wear and it would not have been any trouble for any nazis or thieves to infiltrate among them. There was an idea to do some patrolling in the camp area to discourage thieves, but I did not found anything to be used as a weapon, nor a single person organized enough, so I went for another business.

Actually I understood that in previous evenings Emma team had done pretty good job in de-escalating drunken arguments with local kids that were unavoidable. Hippie approach for security for sure works better to a certain limit, even if we managed to have some 10 person black-block macho crew to “defend” the conference site in Wednesday evening, things could have pretty easily escalated and I do not think we would have been much of a physical contest for local kids in case they decided that we are a nuisance altogether. And really I guess the biggest problem of the Emma team was lack of people.

In another hand, there are things to be criticized as well. Good for the PGA, that even fluffiest types were not happy with the moronic punk who called the cops, they fortunately left soon without causing trouble. There is no excuses for ignoring concerns of harassed Polish girls (I did not saw this myself, just heard about it) — Laure pointed out correctly that stiff reaction would have been much more likely if these girls had been from some more “important” scene.

Also, since things were indeed stolen, announcement that “nothing happened — people just are paranoid” cannot be seen as anything else as primitive, manipulative and authoritarian crowd control tactics. I found it also outrageous that there was no reaction whatsoever to threat of an all-out nazi attack. That would hardly be just a promise in Russia. Of course a likely result of distributing information would be a useless panic, but at least some minimal precautions should have been made — for example tents from surroundings of the school could have been moved to football field, which could have been easier to defend.

Actually somebody in fact saw cars around site loaded with nazis — perhaps a raid was planned, but plans changed since they realized that it would not be a fair fight. At least in Russia nazis usually prefer to attack white people only if they are offered a proper resistance.

I do not know in detail about the situation in Serbia, but at least in Russia we may not give 100% security guarantee for any activist event — although big attacks are seldom seen. And shame on somebody from abroad who would demand such a guarantee — you either adapt to local realities or stay home. Personal security is one of the many privileges you must compromise in order to maintain revolutionary politics.

But of course things are very much different, if you are responsible for more than your personal security only. I would not recommend taking your children to any such events (big and open, which attract public attention) in Russia, and Serbian PGA conference organizers should have also considered in prior, whether they may really fully guarantee security of children or not. BTW, I wonder what happened to crèche-pool — such a thing was planned and even volunteers were asked in the website, but seemingly it never got realized.

Among local kids, especially Roma seemed to like us. However they came only in the evenings, so I suppose they understood us being a big party only. Talking about accessibility of activist cultures, “consensus hippie” seemed to be specially accessible to Roma, they even had a common jam with Rhythms of Resistance. I was not participating to this Roma outreach part, so I may only comment what was told to me.

Final spokescouncil — PGA campaigns

Thursday morning it was time of the final spokescouncil. This form turned out to work very, very good — a positive surprise compared to hellish final plenary in Leiden. There were perhaps a dozen or so affinity groups, 10–20 persons in each of them. Each of them had a spokesperson, only one accepted to speak in the central ring (a couple of times reasonable exceptions were made to this rule to clarify fine details of opinions inside the group).

Almost all the time when serious concerns raised, they were similar between a number of different groups. This helped to economize time even more, since some groups did not had to voice their concerns at all. Preliminary discussion inside affinity group is pretty much required to formulate concern so that it was understandable and relevant for everybody — this is the main benefit of a spokescouncil.

Our affinity group ended up being a rag-bag of various outcast elements — West Essex Zapatista, East-Europeans and some weird Austrian types. Many of us however went to support miners’ strike to Kostolac 80 kilometers north from Belgrade, and much of the rest could not bear discussion to the end of the spokescouncil, so in the end our affinity group was perhaps two persons. I heard miners’ strike was great, besides bosses, miners were also fighting their own

union. Miners were totally excited for “anti-globalists” coming to support them, and those who went were really sorry that they were only one mini-bus. I however preferred spokescouncil, since for me it was a very interesting laboratory example of direct democracy.

Actually, contents the final spokescouncil were perhaps less interesting than the form. Main proposal for PGA campaigns was “Global Estafette” (relay), born from discussions about going beyond summit protests and global action days. Idea is that instead of one day actions, actions would spread from country and city to another as a relay.

But hold on, what is this? What is the analysis on the global action days it is founded on, in which sense it is going beyond? Is the point just have the next days thing, next cool way to have your face to telly? Is the only problem with global action days that it is “yesterday’s thing”, and people are already “bored” with it? Is our movement some kind of entertainment factory? This is how I sometimes feel like, when trying to have apathetic kids to move their asses to some action, or what seems to be all too much asked, to do something themselves.

Although at times we will have to play with the rules of the system, ultimately PR, advertisement and selling things are in a fundamental controversy with what we are. I like paki.tv more than indymedia especially because it is totally primitive, rough, true and it does not play games. It gives a fuck about rules of the design!

Action days (used to?) show how small groups in many different cities may together sum up to a much bigger than one may ever see in a protest in some particular place. They were our weakness turned to a strength. They were not just a nice trademark some activist copywriter released one day, but a result of objective condition of class (and other) conflict in world of today.

Most of the texts criticizing “summit hopping” scream for their lack of content. Especially for Americans, “community organizing” is buzzword of the day, although it may mean anything up to all-out reformism — usually content does not has to be defined at all in the context. Yes, Black Panther Party members were killed for campaigning for issues like zebra crossings and breakfasts for the children of their communities, but that does not mean that those issues are revolutionary today. Yes, we should work with issues which are relevant to society at large, but often it is not all too clear what is the possible input our movement could give to such issues, how do those issues relate to global change, are our means really those which people involved see relevant, and are means those people would like to use our means. We need more honest attempts of analysis, less concept-dropping. So “community organizing” is in the list of words banned in 2005!

I am afraid media and spectacle value of “Global Estafette” would be much less than that of global action days, but shortcomings (spectacle much for the sake of itself) are more or less the same. And most of the people do not figure out what estafette means anyway (when writing this, name of the action has been changed to Global Chain Refl-Action — not too clear either).

But whatever, we will see which kind of concrete propositions come out from this project, and after that we will consider participation in Moscow. Theme “Taking it back” is still a way too abstract, and may mean almost anything. Let us take Yo Mango for example — a friend of my friend spent a couple of years ago 3 months in a Sankt-Petersburg jail when cops tried to squeeze some money for her after an unsuccessful attempt to steal a packet of coffee. For sure people shoplift in Russia as well, but that has more to do with extreme sports than carnival, youth culture or popular resistance.

I think beautiful words and abstractions are the least scarce resource of our movement. Currently Abolishing the Borders from Below — journal is attempting to launch a special number on

“reappropriation” in Eastern Europe, collecting various phenomena which one could interpret as appearances of this one abstract concept. If it happens to be on the ground, perhaps “taking it back” may work in Russia as well. It is both shortcoming and benefit of the PGA format that there is no moral imperative for all participators to execute common actions.

Only global action days proposed in the draft were around 8th of March (international women’s day), 12th of October (for “Bolivarian revolution”), and around G8 6th-8th of July. First was not too clear — how this would be different from what Women’s day is now already? There was not any answer for this unclarity, but eventually (according to minutes) all propositions got endorsed in a chaotic manner, with exception of the Bolivarian action day, revised version of which got passed in the end of the spokescouncil.

Together with another delegate from Russia, we proposed PGA endorsement for international action day against the war in Chechnya 23rd of February, which is both day of “defender of the fatherland” (sort of macho equivalent of women’s day which is unpolitical in Russia), and anniversary of Chechen deportation to steppes in 1944. There were also some other proposals — 20th of April (beginning of the invasion to Iraq, 1st of May (international day against flexibility), Palestinians asked solidarity in general — but for some reason these four were just noted as proposals in the minutes, and eventually there was no discussion should European PGA endorse these calls as a whole. Understandable given the time restrictions, but really also a mistake of the facilitators.

Final spokescouncil — cooperation, access and all the rest

Second session of the spokescouncil was about “PGA relations with other political/activist organisations and structures such as NGO’s, trade unions, social fora, political parties”. Day before I had shortly visited group which had later on drafted this proposal, which was a total mess of “proposals”, “ideas for discussion” and “announcements of upcoming events”, without a clear distinction between these. There was for example a proposal to call interested groups and individuals to compile a manual or reader on how to deal with these organisations. This was pretty shady, given the “non-representation” policy of the PGA. So it was agreed that this reader will have a subtitle “inspired by the PGA”. Logical next question was if anything may be published as “inspired by the PGA” — answer was YES. You bet that organisations as informal as PGA will hold together only as long as some seriously rotten eggs do not jump to the board.

Eventually, the following a concrete proposal was extracted from all that mess —

“PGA should not allow people to become isolated or excluded in the PGA process because they belong to certain organisations that may be less situated within PGA hallmarks, but put the emphasis on people’s behavior within the network and at conferences. However, people from such organizations can only participate as individuals, will not be allowed to promote their organization through PGA, and must respect the PGA hallmarks when participating in PGA. Leaders and representatives of such organizations are not welcome in PGA, and PGA process meetings are only open to people who agree with the hallmarks.”

(in above resolution “PGA” means “European PGA”).

Another logical question was asked — could any nazi could show up, participating as an individual respecting hallmarks by self-definition? But really this was nitpicking — I would do my best to attack physically any fascist scum showing up in the conference, whether my action was endorsed by some spokescouncil or not — so no point in blocking the proposal. And it is really impossible to draft universal “one size fits all” guidelines for dealing with authoritarians, for example our organization (Autonomous Action) had to make recently such a strict resolution against any cooperation with authoritarians that it might be difficult to follow it in practice in popular local struggles.

In this conference there was a leading figure for German PDS party, she was exposed in the daily newspaper and soon after that she left the conference. I think this was absolutely correct way to deal with the issue, since it was obvious that she was not presenting herself in an open manner, and thus could not have any “honest intentions” in participating to the conference. I do not understand how some people could be disappointed with this. I would also like to note that outright naivete among (Western) European PGA participators the resolution above reflects is due to their local situation — for example in Russia fascists from National Bolshevik Party would show up in any event participation conditions according to this criteria. For West-European PGA participators a scenario of nazis showing up is a fantasy, whereas in Russia it would not only be possible but likely as well.

Next section of the spokescouncil was “Suggested steps to take in cases of physical/psychological violence”. This sounds pretty abstract, but obviously drafters of the document had sexual harassment in their minds. Perhaps they should have been more specific, for example psychological violence may be about everything, up to wiping ones ass with PGA hallmarks.

When I saw this text, originally written by Stockholm Anti-Fascist Action, first time in the process list, it must be said that I did not liked it. This was because of certain ambiguity, which could have been interpreted that it supported presumption of guiltiness of the suspected offender. However in the process it became clear that this was not the case, a number of other affinity groups raised concerns similar to ours and eventually it was agreed that the text would be rewritten for the following event in order to eliminate this ambiguity. Really I think that with voiced amendments, text was pretty good and deserved to be applied outside European PGA as well, and to be translated to different languages.

Fourth section of the spokescouncil was structure proposals for European PGA. Although many points were marked to be concrete proposals about which decision had to be taken, really they were sort of ideas for people to do, without anything what could basically be disagreed about, such as “The next PGA conference in Europe will be organized through a process of open preparation meetings, by the next conveyor and an open international preparation group”. What could one possibly disagree with? In Leiden, there was an ambitious program to reform PGA structure which was left halfway due to time constraints, but this was not continued in Belgrade. It seems to me that European PGA has now a stable structure, and no radical changes are to be expected during next years.

Last section of the spokescouncil was “Global process proposals”. Biggest section was about endorsing 4th Global PGA Conference to be organized in Nepal 2005. There were only few concrete proposals, such as about contacting disappeared South African conveyors, and creating a global list of conveyors which would be easily available in the web, and about making an informal “inspired by PGA” newsletter about European Conference 2004. All of these were pretty common sense, for sure no any controversial issues and conflicts.

So what remained was the clean up and “outreaching event” in the evening. A famous anarchist once said that “If I cannot dance for it, it is not my revolution”, but I think it is too much asked if one has to dance after 5 days of totally exhausting conference program. Maybe I was just dead tired, or maybe the final evening party really was as boring as I found it. Talks were boring, videos were stereotypical, music was crap and I had already got an overdose of hippies during the week. Only nice thing was the inflatable yellow plastic PGA on the stage which we could punch.

Issue of activist subculture is pretty delicate and I will not get too deeply to it here. I have referred loosely to “consensus hippies” in this document, but really West-European activist culture is something which goes beyond “hippie” and has also many other roots than 60’s protest movements. Any community of people always, more or less unconsciously finds norms and discussion paradigms which separate it from all other communities. Paradoxically, it seems like commonness is always founded on exclusion of the others. If one demands that activists should give up their culture, for most of the activists it would not make any sense to be an activist anymore. Such a thing as “normal people” just does not exist, and all groups arguing against “life-stylism” have just as exclusive subcultural habits as the others.

For example, I do not like samba so I feel alienated from all this samba stuff. However if Rhythms of Resistance played breakbeat or bhangra beat, things would be totally different. So in the end, it is too much asked to always have the party your way.

So how about a final judgement, how I managed to satisfy my 5 interests in regards to PGA conference? As for convergence if ideas beyond “one struggle” rhetorics – well, I am not impressed. But to be honest, I did not expected too much. As for finding people to help us in case of some problems with authorities – not too many, but at least something concrete. As for benefits to Eastern European organizing – I suppose all of those East-Europeans who participated should judge themselves. One of the local organizers was at least very upbeat right after the conference. At least we launched one new international project – the Anarchy Bus. To find about general interest to organize with similar but more strict principles than PGA, we at least got a very clear answer – there is no demand. As for the decisionmaking – not bad, although more attention should have been given to rising concerns in prior to final spokescouncil.

As for the European PGA in general, way is clear to forward, and I will stay involved according to my personal possibilities. Next step is to find new European conveyor, and to make evaluation what really went wrong with Resnik issue and other problems. 6 years is a respectable age for a grassroots network in this hectic video age, and although Global PGA has been in stagnation since 2001, European and Asian processes are all but dead. PGA does not attract anymore such attention as it used to, but this may be a benefit as well since it allows going beyond brandmaking – more introspection and better focus on what is actually done.

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Antti Rautiainen
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3rd European conference of Peoples' Global Action in Belgrade 24th-28th of July 2004
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