

Impressions from Evian, G8 Summit by Ruby

Greetings all. This is one woman's impression of the G8 activities in Geneva last week.

Lisa and I are back from the G8 meeting in Evian, France. I want to offer a brief report on what happened during the 10 days we were there. We traveled to Geneva at the request of several groups to do training in preparation for the actions surrounding the meeting of the heads of states of the most 8 powerful nations in the world. (Actually there were more like 15 or 16 big guys attending – US, Germany, France, England, Japan, Italy, Brazil, China, Russia, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria, South Africa, also European Economic Community, WTO and IMF heads – depending on your perspective, the “G8” has doubled in size or shrunk to 1 with attendants!)

One hundred thousand European and North American activists took to the streets to PROTEST the commodifying of the basics of life on earth. We were gathered over 3 main regions – Geneva and Lausanne across the lake in Switzerland where the majority of luxury hotels rooms are located and Annemasse, down the road from Evian, the closest anyone was allowed to the meeting site. These were strategically planned to make our opposition visible to the heads of state and the world as well as to impede the delegates' capacity to attend the meetings. Each site had an encampment of activists who lived, planned, trained, debated, strategized and organized together for the days leading up to the meetings. For more detailed information and pictures from the days of action, see

<http://www.indymedia.org/g8/en> and <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/evian/index>

Lisa and I were there as part of RANT (Root Activists Network of Trainers) offering training in non-violent direct action, including street safety, solidarity, strategic planning, quick decision-making, affinity group and spokescouncil organization. We traveled among Geneva, Lausanne and Annemasse, making connections, providing support, sharing information and ideas and, in general, trying to weave together the energies and efforts of dedicated organizers at all three sites. We offered 3 large trainings, one in each location, and trained about 500 people.

How is the global justice movement faring in these times? There is much that I find encouraging in our struggle to resist the world-wide frontal attack on everything we value. There is amazing courage and spirit in the face of increasingly brutal police treatment not only on the part of activists, but also in the communities that host these meetings. To be sure, the violence of the system is apparent to anyone with eyes to see. This is not a benevolent coup or a gentleman's agreement. It is a war in every sense of the word. The communities of Geneva and Lausanne saw their downtowns transformed into military zones, their rights to circulate restricted, their tax dollars (billions) spent on equipping local police and imported military troops with tear gas, percussion grenades, water cannons and guns. Every delegate who made their way to Evian was escorted in military convoys and had to pass through a small opening in a wall of container cars and rolls of razor wire.

The face of our movement is diverse, ingenious and determined. There was some coordination between the various groups, including the Black Bloc, around our street presence in attempts to make room for a “diversity of tactics.” The Black Bloc threw up almost instant and impenetrable blockades in key intersections while the Pink and Silver Bloc's samba band danced through the streets confronting lines of police in body armor with music, dancing, hoola hoops and flowing banners of color. There were spokes councils in intersections amidst tear gas, making decision after decision in response to each new police tactic. A student affinity group from Geneva spent the weeks prior to the G8 constructing huge paper mâché masks of each of the 8 delegates. Those puppets moved through the streets invoking a larger-than-life parody of those white men and their arrogance. Another group of Geneva community members petitioned the city fathers for the right to set up an information and resource booth in a local

park for the week before the meetings. When they were refused, they brought in a camper bus, removed the wheels and set up tables of information. They remained there throughout the week offering teach-ins and trainings, information and camaraderie to the community and the rapidly swelling numbers of global activists. They provided a forum for discussions in the practice of revolution with folks from Chiapas, writers and strategists discussing economic alternatives to capitalism, training in direct action with RANT and laughter and oddball culture with Monty Python films.

A small group of local pagans found their way to us (then lost us and refound us!). Together, on Saturday night, we created a dark moon ritual on the shores of the lake overlooking Evian. This ritual gave us an opportunity to magically link up with all those here in our communities who were supporting us. We focused our collective energy on a magical working of personal and world transformation. Also that night, there was "Le Feu au Lac" (Fire on the Lake), fires lit and tended by hundreds of people in communities surrounding the lake. These fires became not only a visible presence shining in the darkness, but a place to gather and discuss, just as humans have done for millennia in times of war and peace. Another affinity group built 4 pirate ships (with a strong opposition messages attached) and sailed them out onto the otherwise deserted (by police decree) lake towards Evian. There was a Naked Bloc (baring witness to the truth...) and a bicycle brigade (which provided vital scouting information). We shared water, chocolate, advice, eyewash and sun block. We believed in ourselves, the future, earth and each other. We spoke truth to power. We confronted the violence of the system with our bodies.

And yes, there were problematic aspects. The supermilitarized police presence and their overreaction set up terms that did not allow any human interaction or negotiation. There were some serious injuries resulting from the police violence including Martin Shaw's terrifying fall and a reporter having his leg seriously damaged by a percussion grenade thrown at close range. A campaign of fear and misinformation in the weeks prior to the meetings alienated potential allies and prevented them from witnessing our beautiful, peaceful courage. The three different demonstration sites, even though strategically effective, scattered our energies and focus. There were political tendencies within the movement that didn't always relate to each other, wasting vital creative energy on intergroup strife. Black Bloc, in claiming their space in the streets, tended to set the tone, leaving not enough room for creative non-violent strategies, scaring people off the streets and giving the media an opportunity to present a narrower view of the movement than actually exists.

We are growing and evolving and the challenges ahead will demand our most thoughtful and heartfelt response. Not suprisingly, there are many questions. I do not want to cede the streets to the Black Bloc; we all need to be there. How do we create space in the streets that welcomes everyone to this public and political arena? How do we overcome the campaigns of fear that precede every mass demonstration? How do we put aside our political differences and embrace our universal right (and responsibility) to speak our truth? How do we sustain our activism over the long haul? How do we strengthen our local communities even as we tend the global movement that we share? How do the values that sustain us as individuals – community, caring, a sense of shared power, connection to each other and to the natural world - become the language that connects us?

May we continue to build a world of exquisite beauty and delight.
To love and ecstatic resistance!
Ruby