

ACTION

FREE

PRAGUE EXTRA

THE WEST COUNTRY ACTIVIST NETWORK NEWSLETTER

FUN AT THE FUND'S FRONTLINE

It was meant to be a defining moment of globalised capital - the first time the IMF and World Bank annual meetings were held in a former eastern bloc country. They decided on the Czech capital Prague, a city swiftly colonised once the iron curtain came down by western corporations keen to exploit cheap rents, minimal business tax and a trendy 'new left bank' image. After s26 - when up to 20,000 international activists challenged capital - it's unlikely the bankers will return.

In a climate cooked up by scaremongering headlines and a neoliberal government eager for western approval (the Czech Republic is joining Nato and is angling for EU membership), Prague citizens were warned not to speak to demonstrators and all 1,100 state schools in the capital were shut for the duration of the demonstrations. In addition virtually the entire country's police were drafted in to Prague, bolstered by 5,000 soldiers, tanks, helicopters, troop trucks and other kit loaned by the military, and with 'advice' from western law enforcement agencies.

Ranged against the forces of capital were shitkicking insurrectionists from around the world, joining local groups under the umbrella name of INPEG - Initiative Against Economic Globalisation. Globalisation of capital was met by globalisation of resistance - so British anarchists rubbed shoulders with German autonomists, Italian Ya Basta crews mixed with hardcore Poles, Americans with Spanish, along with French, Belgians, Israelis, Australians and the rest. Many were in town before s26, and in the run up the Convergence Centre on the north-western fringe of the city proved a melting pot of ideas and experience - a fertile training, discussion and work space. In addition a largely American group took charge of an Indy Media Centre, aiming to produce frontline reports of the action and the issues, bypassing mainstream media filters.

To utilise the large numbers of up-for-it political dissidents around, several smaller events led up to s26: an anti-fascist demo on the Saturday to coincide with a Nazi rally was banned, but still went ahead (eclipsing in size and impact the fascists); the Arts Of Resistance cul-

tural festival went ahead on the Sunday despite police pressure and six venue changes; and the happy-clappies of the Jubilee 2000 debt campaign got their own photo-op set-piece on TV.

But the s26 main event made the biggest mark. Thousands thronged to the Namesti Miru (Peace Square) meeting point all Tuesday morning, rocked by United Systems sounds and entertained by a 70 foot tall blue sphere labelled "Balls To The IMF". A party atmosphere ruled, despite the papers having promised tear gas, water cannon, stun grenades and tanks all week. Police took a low profile, and the only downside was the International Socialists, acting like they were at a revivalist meeting, waving placards in unison and practising their chants.

Then came the moment to move off. In a J18-style tactic, there were three colour-coded sections to the march on the Conference Centre: Yellow, Pink and Blue (designed to avoid colour confusion like at London's Mayday). All would march as one until the Blues peeled off to take the western approach to the castle-like Conference Centre, the Yellows taking the bridge leading to the meetings, leaving the Pinks to march on the eastern flank. And that's more or less what happened...

BLUE TUESDAY

After a successful split on Karlovo Square the Blue crew headed south to hack out the bankers on the western flank. "We have split? Now we are just Blue Bloc?" asked the Polish communication bod. "Yes," came the reply, "but now we are the Black Bloc." In the past 48 hours it had become clear - the Pink route was going to be red, the Yellow lot, Ya Basta, and the Blue... well, the Blue was looking increasingly black.

In the event, the three thousand-strong International Socialist contingent [the SWP] buckled on the day - the real global unity was going down on the Blue line. A black and red flag-wielding hooded crew of international anarchists crossed the railway around 1 o'clock. Spain's CNT, Czech's Solidarita, contingents from Germany, Poland, Greece and Israel stood shoulder to shoulder with loose cannon mobs from Russia,

Britain, New Zealand, Colombia and beyond. The police barricade of riot cops and water cannon had been formed at the top of Lumirova - taking the advantage of the slope and narrowing of the road. The anarchist bloc grouped for a moment fifty yards from enemy lines - then surged in. There was a nazi carve-up going down in the fortress on the hill, and no obstacle was going to stand in their way. The determination of the crowd took us all a bit unawares - barricades were swept aside as cobblestones and molotovs rained on the old bill who responded half-heartedly with stun grenades and water. The kids seemed unperturbed. Officers were divested of sticks, shields and helmets and liberally beaten with flag poles and bits of two-by-four. Support teams kept the front lines in ammunition and made sure tear gas canisters got speedily returned to sender. Around four hundred anarchists battled it out for over an hour to the dedicated rhythm of Seattle's Infernal Noise Brigade - standard bearers stalwart in the front ranks throughout. "No Pasaran!" was the cry as a tatty-looking police line was reinforced with a couple of water-firing tanks. Up till now there was a real danger of the Blues joining Wolfensohn for tea in the Prague Conference Centre (had the three- or four thousand-strong Blue march filling the western exit to the conference centre managed to push forward together). Communication between autonomous groups on the ground was seriously difficult. When the tear gas came out, many stalled momentarily to gas mask up. Not the Greeks. "Let us through," they said, "we're used to it." Similarly any beasts lucky enough to grab a stray Blue insurrectionist found themselves buried beneath a flurry of Israelis. The unity was cast iron. As the battle subsided, word came through that the Pink posse could use some help around the southern side of the PCC. Some Blues stayed to skirmish with police in Intifada-style scenes and erect barricades of scaffolding, garage doors and bonfires to secure this route, while others moved southwards. The Blue mole inside the meetings kept the kids on the streets updated on movements of delegates (a few who tried to leave on foot had to return to the centre minus intact nose cartilage) and

when they began taking them out on the commandeered metro line, the Blue/Pink southern contingent of around two thousand headed back through the valley to meet up with the Italians who were besieging the Prague Opera House - where the IMF and World Bank were hoping to get entertained that night. The opera, however, was shelved, but any bankers who had stuck around got plenty of excitement as the ritual flag burning of a well-trashed McDonald's illustrated the bigger intention of a progressive revolutionary force. "Fight Imperialism," the graffiti read. The message was clear. Romans Go Home. The Blue bloc got it, where the reds didn't. This isn't about debt relief or institutional reform. Prague, alongside the resistance rising up from Argentina to Aberfan is about putting the American Empire in check, about reversing a system controlled by corporations, about dismantling the companies and replacing them with communities, about creating a society in place of the system. As night fell the remaining Blues (a few hundred) traded cobblestones with riot cops in Wenceslas Square (Action SW earned a gouged knee from a cop-thrown cobble). The following days would see over 850 people jailed, and another hundred 'disappeared', many to be brutalised away from the glare of the lenses. But on the streets of Prague s26, an international fighting force had come together under a revolutionary anarchist banner, and from here, there will be no retreat. No Pasaran... well, until the petrol runs out anyway.

MELLOW YELLOW

The several thousand strong Yellow contingent, headed by the Ya Basta - "White Overall" Michelin men and women from Bologna, Italy - went for the bridge. Towering 300 feet above the valley floor and the only northern exit from the conference centre. The bridge was already guarded by 200 riot cops (decked out in the latest riot gear on loan from their American buddies), 2 tanks and a load of troops guarding the rear flank.

So was getting through an impossible task? Maybe, but the fun hadn't started. Ya Basta started to organise and form

ACTION SOUTH WEST, BOX 80, GREENLEAF, 82 COLSTON STREET, BRISTOL, BS1 5BB

Tel: 07931 268966

Email: actionsouthwest@yahoo.co.uk

their offensive lines, whilst at the same time others went around taking sticks off some of the protesters; all would become clear soon. Suddenly the numerous car inner tubes were laid on the floor and wrapped up in tarpaulin, making very effective bouncy shields to counter the planned battering from the cops. Lines formed and linked arms, others stood in front of the police line holding up big balloons with "Liquidate the IMF" on them, waving them in the faces of the police, who stood there not knowing what the fuck was going on.

On cue the Italian White Bloc chucked the balloons into the police lines and while the police were busy defending themselves from a vicious attack from air-filled rubber sacs, Ya Basta stormed the lines, taking down police barricades and forcing the lines back. Despite removing sticks off other protesters Ya Basta's front line were tooled up and gave the police a taste of their own medicine.

The police retaliated with tear gas and concussion grenades, yet Ya Basta held their lines, regrouped and returned for more. Forcing the cops further back and disarming them with their own batons and shields, the situation went on with Ya Basta rushing the lines forcing them back and then regrouping to do it again. Other activists - despite the actions of certain Trot groups (see TROT PLOT later) - formed up to join in, and a weird mix of excitement and anxiousness grew as the police issued their third warning that the demonstration was illegal and that they would move in at any minute. Prepped and prepared we waited, but the situation reached a stalemate and after 2 or 3 hours of effort a makeshift forum was held to decide what to do. The police lines would not budge, and getting through the tanks wasn't going to happen; but the Yellows' physical presence tied up hundreds of riot police on the bridge. Reports were starting to come back from the Pink group and the Blues. In fact the sound of concussion grenade and the sight of smoke could be seen rising from the valley floor. Other reports of trouble at Namesti Miru filtered back. While a small group of pacifists decided to hold a sit down demonstration in front of the police lines, the rest of the Yellows moved back to Namesti Miru, or went to join their companeros and companeras on the Blue and Pink lines.

PRETTY IN PINK

The Pink group (led by a huge samba band and dancing carnivalistas) were on the day abandoned by the International Socialists who had originally marched with them. Despite this setback (though to some a preferable state of affairs), the five hundred-odd Pinks took to the eastern side of the Conference Centre to be met by... well, nothing at first. The funkier revolutionaries strutted their stuff to an unguarded flank and two infiltrated the Centre, where they mingled with delegates, letting them know exactly what most people think of capitalism.

Outside the rest of the Pinks finally met the Seattle-surplus equipped Robocops, who teargassed peaceful demonstrators before charging. After extensive brutality the Pinks were forced to withdraw.

THE TROT PLOT

The stagnant and authoritarian left that the people of Czechoslovakia overthrew in 1989 made a significant attempt to capitalise on the anti-globalisation protests. Using the old school tactics of hijacking and subterfuge thousands of International Socialists (aka SWP) placards and banners were given out. Huge red banners were everywhere eager to take their place as revolutionary eyecandy on TV. Remember kids, it's a media war, and

those with the most and biggest banners'll win the revolution. Yeah, right.

Much of this was expected and it wasn't uncommon to overhear Czechs commenting on whether or not any of these people had lived under authoritarian 'socialism'. It seemed doubtful. Still, most of the time it was just annoying. The odd cheeky anarcho-type ran off with an armful of placards to trash, others removed the "Unity Is Strength" or "Trotsky's Not Dead - He's just on ice" and settled with the stick to use later on. However, the divisionist tactics employed by the Lenninists/Stalinists/Trots throughout history reared its ugly head near the bridge on the Yellow march. While Ya Basta had made every effort to inform people in all languages possible what was going on, top UK SWP Julie Waterson took to the walls armed with a loudhailer. While the front liners asked people not to push forwards yet (they were face to face with the police and needed room to manoeuvre) Waterson readied her vanguard. Between shouts of 'unity is strength' she urged the crowd to push forward, contradicting everything the front line asked for. At first it wasn't apparent and it just seemed to be two sets of requests - but it soon became clear. People started to take notice, some following her orders but many shouting her down. Relentlessly Waterson continued. Leading from behind in true SWP fashion she urged the crowd to push on - effectively crushing the front line and putting people's lives in danger.

After much haranguing Waterson started to change her tune and said over the loudhailer that she didn't agree with Ya Basta's tactics and that another group should form up on the other side.

The group split and the left went, err well, to the left. ASW correspondents overheard people behind Ya Basta saying "I feel a lot safer with them next to me than behind me". But it didn't stop there. The left flank - made up mainly of communists and trots - started chucking stuff at the cops. However, the attack-from-the-rear tactics ended up with most of the missiles landing on their own side. When people asked for them to either stop or throw in a less cack handed fashion, fights broke out leaving the police front line bemused, probably asking: "Is this psychological warfare or are they fucking stupid?"

Waterson's tirade continued later outside the Opera House where a few thousand had gathered to stop the Fat Cats' evening of culture. The atmosphere was pretty chilled and people were sitting down, recovering and swapping stories from the days events. Then the crackle of a loudhailer, and Waterson took to the steps, ready to rewrite history. After a truly uninspiring rant about how the Czechs overthrew Stalin in '89 in a revolution, what they really needed was another revolution to put Waterson and the rest of the ice-pick brigade in charge. Swap one authoritarian state for another. State capitalism, or free trade, the ruling class is still just that - whatever its name. She continued, "We've had a really good day, but let's all go home now, and meet here tomorrow at 9am to blockade the delegates in their hotels." Yet again capitalising on the situation, based on the politics of I-can-shout-louder-because-I've-got-a-tannoy, she did it again, and tried to split the arranged demos. The plan a la INPEG had been to carry on all night outside the hotels, making loads of noise to keep the delegates awake. In the morning the arranged meeting point was at Namesti Miru at 9am. What was the point of meeting outside of the Opera House at 9am to blockade the hotels when the delegates would have arrived at the Conference Centre hours earlier? Waterson's attempts to split the demonstration left a bad taste, and brought home history's memory of Kronstadt where Lenin and Trotsky told working class people mak-

ing left-wing demands, "Give up now, or prepare to be slaughtered like rabbits". However, amidst the heckling of Waterson, some revolutionary cheek lightened the situation when some anarchists stood next to her and raised a banner that proclaimed: "The Revolution will not be Bolshevised."

PRISONERS

Amidst reports of the torture and beating of prisoners arrested after September's anti-capitalist demonstrations in Prague, justice-hungry activists demonstrated outside the Czech Embassy in London on Friday 6 October, demanding an end to the torture and the release of all those still being held.

Up to 100 people gathered for over two hours calling on Czech authorities to release the remaining prisoners, still estimated to be in the hundreds, almost all of whom are Czech. "Terrorists" was sprayed over the Embassy's windows (right under the nose of armed British Police - I guess we know which side you're on then boys and girls). Banners were hung from the railings and information given out to passersby.

Over 850 people were arrested during the Prague demonstrations and another 100 were 'disappeared' during demos against the WB/IMF. Around 450 people were arrested on the morning of the 26th and at the demonstrations. Many others were picked up off the streets, often arbitrarily. Many are still being held and many reports of beatings and human rights abuses have been heard.

The legal support group OPH working with INPEG in Prague confirmed that torture and humiliation were commonplace. These include: women strip searched by male officers and forced to perform 'exercises' for their captors' amusement; people taken to isolated areas and beaten severely; prisoners including diabetics denied food and medical attention; 22 prisoners forced into a 4 metre square cell over night. Czech authorities have denied all allegations.

Demonstrations and embassy occupations have taken place in Germany, Spain, Italy and elsewhere, with.. Catalanian anarchists threatening to burn Barcelona to the ground, and ETA threatening a car bomb campaign if prisoners weren't released.

For more information on the torture and conditions in detention in Prague to www.urban75.com for extensive reports on the torture; www.crosswinds.net/~jailsolidarity/overview.html for information on prisoners and support; Prague OPH legal team can be contacted at praguelegalsupport@purpleturtle.com; send your own stories of conditions in detention in Prague to jailsolidarity@yahoo.co.uk

Financial support for prisoners send cheques or postal orders payable to "Prague Prisoner Support Fund" c/o PO Box 9656, London, NJ4 4JY.

"SMELLY"

British activists in Prague were left looking for refunds on their deodorants after an unknown American described UK protesters as "smelly".

The shock announcement - made by a co-ordinator at the Indy Media Centre - compounded earlier assertions that Irish direct actionists were "lazy", Italian Ya Basta members made "great lovers" and German autonomen were "ruthless".

One Bristolian in Prague for s26 responded by calling US IMC workers "a bunch of arrogant, antagonistic, egotistical, CNN-job chasing kids" in a bid to smooth over international differences.

ANTIFA - s23

In a potent show of contempt for the government ban on the demonstration, around 500 anti-fascist activists trotted round Prague on the same day as a legal Nazi rally on September 24.

The antifascists - including a sizeable Black Bloc - looked like a massive tour group checking out the sights as they made their way through the streets of Prague in a good-natured if noisy demonstration of resistance to right-wing demagoguery. The march went past three McDonald's in the Wenceslas Square area, where nervous police, managers and even Group 4 security were all found standing on guard outside the Golden Arches, as bemused tourists snapped away at the balaclava'd-up carnival sweeping past. In the event activists only jeered, holding back the juice for Tuesday.

Dozens of police - all armed - lingered in clots along the route, unsure of what to expect, whilst two helicopters buzzed overhead and plainclothes meatheads tried to look inconspicuous.

By 4pm the demo reached the top of Wenceslas Square - scene of 1989's 'Velvet Revolution' which saw the overthrow of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia - and now gaudy symbol of capitalism's victory in Prague, with its overpriced restaurants, McD's and 5-star hotels for western businessmen.

At the top of the Square - actually a long boulevard - activists massed on the highground in front of the National Museum, enjoying the low-key police presence, with some climbing the Wenceslas Monument and planting red and black flags into the hands of Saint Adalbert in a good-humoured anarchist photo opportunity.

The demo proved too peaceful and visible in this tourist quarter for the police to do a thing - though things would change in under 48 hours.

GLOBAL S26 ROUND-UP

Kiev, Ukraine - Mass gathering around IMF building drawing attention to the Fund's dubious involvement across eastern Europe

Melbourne, Australia - Anti-capitalists marched from a city centre Nike store to the state parliament just two weeks after police tried to violently break up the S11 protests against the city's World Economic Forum meetings

Moscow, Russia - Mass leafletting and a "cut 'n' paste art action" at the local World Bank offices in the city's first Global Day of Action

New Zealand - "What a banker" pickets around various banks

Sydney, Australia - Activists blocked the New South Wales parliament in the Olympic city before taking the S26 message to the streets in a peaceful manner

Washington DC, USA - A16 veterans plus union members rallied in support of local workers trying to unionise

YA BASTA: s24

A spontaneous demonstration was held on Sunday 24 September when news arrived that 75 Ya Basta from Italy had been stopped at the border. The remaining 1000 or so of their activist friends on the same train stayed with them, stating that they would either all be allowed into Czech Republic or they would all stay at the border.

As news reached the Convergence Centre after midday, a demonstration was called for 4pm. After the meeting, a march moved on and by the time it had snaked its way into the city there were at least 2,000 activists. Marching through the town and stopping outside of McDonald's just off the bottom of Wenceslas Square, news arrived that Ya Basta had all been let into the Czech Republic. Cheers aplenty were let off and the march continued up to the Arts of Resistance festival. An impressive turnout, showing what can be achieved with the right people in the right place at the right time.