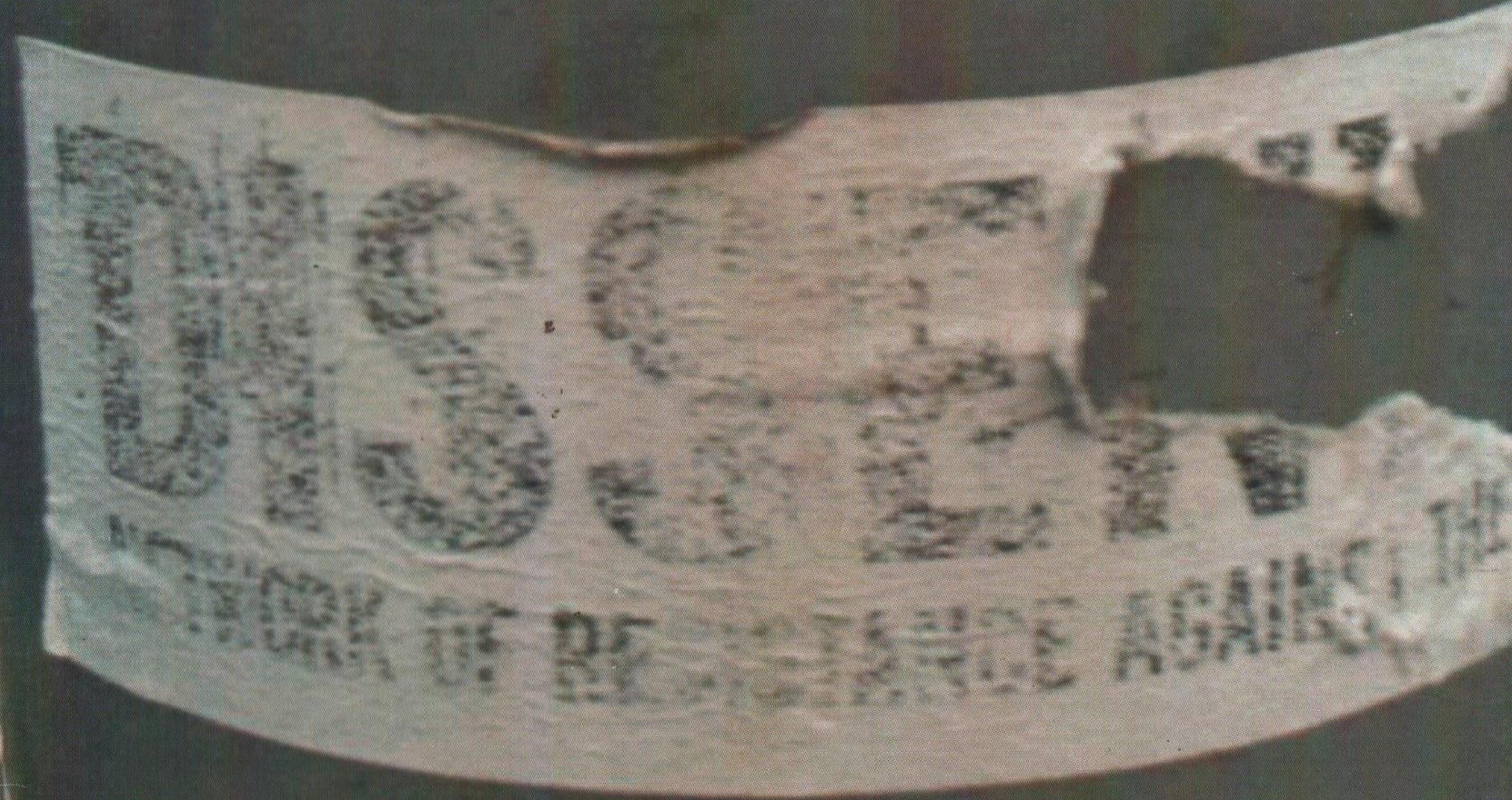


WHEN THE G8 CAME TO MY TOWN

A big event in a small town in the big country

Declan McCormick



NORTHERNSKY

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intro

The pamphlet you hold in your hands is my attempt to give an account of my experience of the movement of opposition to the G8. It is about a time when the world was very briefly focused on the small part of Scotland where I happen to live and work. It was a strange but exciting time for me and that's why I've been driven to write about it.

Being politically active in Stirling, a small town, (it *is* a small town, despite its city status), is different to being involved in the metropolises. I'd moved here from London where every political party, group, sect, campaign, tendency, scene, can sustain an independent life. Most big cities are like that. Everybody involved in oppositional politics can have their own cosy self-sustaining circle, reassuring its members that they are doing something meaningful. Too often the corollary of that is the sense that what others are doing is somehow less meaningful or even plain wrong. When you live in a smaller place this mentality is challenged. Unless splendid isolation is your thing, engaging with people outside your comfort zone is inevitable. It's an eye-opener.

So, when the G8 announced they were coming to Gleneagles, just a few miles from my house, I felt I had to get involved. If the G8 had decided to go to Penzance, I wouldn't have joined the unwelcoming committee. I've never summit-hopped and wouldn't start now.

And so this pamphlet is a local but not *localist* look at the build-up and the G8 week itself. If I wasn't an eyewitness to something, that's clear in the text. Some important things are maybe missing. If you want to read a report, check www.indymedia.org.uk.

But where I was involved, either as full participant, or as an active witness, my accounts are, I hope, authentic.

As for political analysis, this isn't meant as a full-blown critique of the events and actors, you'll have to look elsewhere for that. But my politics should be apparent throughout. For the record, they are libertarian and communist.

Anyway, I hope readers find this an enjoyable and useful account of a Big Event in a small town (and beyond). As with any NorthernSky politics pamphlet, comment and criticism is always welcome from readers.

the g8 was coming to my town

Where did I first hear that the G8 was coming to Scotland? Did somebody slip it casually into a conversation? I can't honestly remember. But I know how I initially felt – pissed off that these people were coming to my part of the world and would be bringing the anti-G8 circus with them. I was also excited at the prospect of something actually happening *here*, in sleepy Scotland. Mixed feelings then. Mixed feelings now.

I remember thinking that the security services really knew what they were doing, bringing the G8 to a place as inaccessible as Gleneagles. Away from the European metropolises with their established social movements, their big street-wise unions and political parties, militant anti-globalisation activists and anarchists. Genoa this was not. Yeah, they knew what they were doing alright.

I've always been fairly dismissive of the summit hopping set, though I guess I respect their energy and occasional innovation. I'd been on Reclaim the Streets events in the mid-90s which had been, well, fun, a rare thing in the world of oppositional politics. But I left London in 1999, not long after the first, inspiring, anti-capitalist carnival in the city of London. I felt that if any opposition beyond a protest march was going to emerge, it would likely be from whatever the organisers had mutated into.

Well, what they had mutated into was something called the 'Dissent Network against the G8' and throughout 2004 they had been meeting to begin planning opposition to the Gleneagles shenanigans.

At some point a statement of intent was issued:

"The Dissent Network will call for convergences in Scotland with the objective of shutting down the G8 in July 2005 whilst building alternatives to capitalism."

The best of intentions at least!

My gut feeling from the start was that trying to shut down the G8 couldn't ever replace political activity on the ground in localities as the real driver for political change. But, I wasn't *going* to the G8. The G8 was *coming to me*, so it was impossible to imagine not winding up getting involved one way or another.

my first dissent meeting – edinburgh september 2004

The ~~Vikings~~ non-hierarchical horizontalists have landed. The first opportunity to discuss the forthcoming visit from the world's leaders came when the Dissent network gathered in Edinburgh. The meeting was a new experience for me, and I suppose quite a few other people, particularly those of us from Scotland.

The initial shock of witnessing, for the first time, the non-oppressive, non-hierarchical hand signals which facilitate non-verbal communication between these 'horizontalists' was initially very alienating. I'd heard about the like but had dismissed it as some sort of urban myth. It was real!

"handy" guide to hand signals



Who are these people? I recognised a number of them, blasts from a not so distant past. People I had known as part of the London 'Milieu'. There are a few W.O.M.B.L.E.S, the non-organisation organisation. People who I hadn't ever expected to see in Scotland! Argh! They're following me!

But the majority are new to me. Mostly young and with a fairer gender balance. The meeting is being directed by a very small number of active participants, whilst the majority seem unwilling/able to do much more than passively spectate. After breaking into small groups, people ease up just a little and we introduce ourselves. Most people merely state where they are from in the country, which is all over the place, basically. I keep

thinking, what are these people's politics? Am I some sort of arch-sectarian or am I just a bit perturbed at being amongst what are mostly strangers? I am also aware that I am not wearing the correct clothes for the occasion and, hey, first impressions count.

I feel like an unexpected guest. Throughout the proceedings I sense a near-complete lack of awareness on the part of the participants from 'down south', of the political landscape in Scotland. This is made obvious with the appearance of Green MSP ^{Mark} Mike Ballard which comes as a bit of a shock to some of our 'comrades' from south of the border. Folks listen politely. I can't imagine a Green councillor or MEP turning up at a similar gig in England, but this is Scotland and we are all one big happy family on the 'left'. Ahem.

During the break some local activists suggest that there's an Earth First! clique running the show. I wouldn't know an Earth Firster! if it came up and bit me on the lip! Well, I never. I also feel like I've been away from active politics in the throbbing epicentres of revolution for a long time. Feels good, actually.

In the tea breaks I speak to participants, mostly locals, but also some people I know from my London days and I inevitably end up in the pub with them. Many of the Dissent network are old hands at this summit game and there are veterans of Genoa, including people who suffered horribly at the hands of the police. In the less formal surroundings of the boozier, visitors are interested in finding out a bit more about the 'forces on the ground'. Whilst not wishing to disillusion them, I try to give a sober(ish) evaluation of the situation.

Following the two days of the gathering I am left anxious. Next July suddenly seemed a very short distance away and the opposition seemed very unprepared. Where were the other usual suspects, the Leninist left?

Less keyed-into the summit timetable, Britain's traditional left was a little later on the scene, but it wasn't long before something called G8 Alternatives reared its head and staked its claim as the leadership of the local opposition to the G8.



alternative realities

G8 Alternatives (G8A) was launched as a coalition of oppositional forces in the traditional broad front mould. It was dominated from the start by members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), who managed to maintain a fairly tight control of the 'alternatives' on offer. Now, seeing as the *Party* doesn't officially exist in Scotland but is merely a *Platform* within the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), this may seem strange. But no one within the SSP seriously challenged them. Most were busy with electoral work, from which SWP candidates are generally excluded, so the SSP were prepared to let their 'enemy within' do the legwork for the G8 mobilisation. The SWP, led by Gill Hubbard, an academic at the University of Stirling, utilised its Globalise Resistance persona to do outreach. The G8A brought together the likes of Scottish CND, The World Development Movement, the Muslim Association of Britain and Friends of the Earth Scotland. The fact that the coalition was dominated by the SSP, never mind the SWP, meant that the Scottish Trade Union Congress did not affiliate and only a handful of union branches came on board. It also gave the unions an excuse to back the non-political option: the Make Poverty History Coalition (MPH) which refused to support any actions outside of the MPH mobilisation in Edinburgh.

G8A and the Dissent Network were to exist in parallel. The former could never hope for the hegemony that the Stop the War campaign, for example, had managed. Certainly, Trotskyist calls for a "united front" between the two were a product of fantasy alone. The best that could be achieved was a situation where the activities of the two currents didn't negate each other. The only group which appeared successfully to straddle the two camps was Trident Ploughshares, a non-violent direct action peace movement group that managed to work with both.

From the very beginning it was apparent that G8A had two 'big' ideas (and one smaller one, a giant anti-capitalist concert, which never went anywhere, despite the time spent discussing current popular recording artists at the

'open' meetings). Big idea number one was to have a counter-summit to which the great and the good of the anti-globalisation and 'anti-capitalist' movement would be invited. The big number two was to have a demonstration as near to the Gleneagles hotel as possible. The former was uncontroversial, it just required a lot of practical organising. The demo, which was to become the great obsession of the coalition, was more problematic given the attitude of the police and Perth and Kinross Council. The attempts by the authorities to put many obstacles in the way of the organisation of a conventional a to b demonstration, gave increasing kudos to the G8A, as they campaigned for the right to demonstrate.

And Dissent? Well they had just one big idea, which was to do their best to *disrupt* the G8. And their hope was that the process of organising and carrying out that disruption would be an example of how non-hierarchical ways of acting and deciding were also the most effective.

the many, many joys of the european social forum

But I'm running ahead of myself. The next 'historic moment' in the building of the anti-G8 movement came during the European Social Forum (ESF). The ESF, is, effectively, a massive gathering of lefties, progressives and well-meaning types which generates frightening amounts of carbon dioxide in the form of hot-air, quite a bit of networking and some intermittent co-ordinated actions. In October 2004 it was held in London at the Alexandra Palace. Swamped by the SWP, aided and abetted by the small but perfectly horrid Socialist Action group, the ESF was used as a platform to launch G8 Alternatives before an unsuspecting European left audience. The meeting on the G8 had a line-up of somebody representing what would become known as the Make Poverty History coalition, Gill Hubbard of G8A and ^{Mike} Mike Ballard, Green MSP of suspected Dissent sympathy. This sympathy was made clear when he demanded that Dissent associated speakers were allowed to speak. Not wishing to lose a member of the Scottish Parliament, nor to appear sectarian, the organisers agreed.

Perhaps one of the funniest moments was yet to come though. An autonomous alternative to the Ally Pally left-fest, called Beyond ESF, was meeting up the road at Middlesex University and bringing together people from the European 'antagonistic' movement. Wanting to confront Labour Lord Mayor of London Ken Livingstone, and the organisers for their

hierarchical and non-inclusive approach, the 'anarchists' amassed outside, stormed the stage and disrupted a meeting. An individual from Babel, the translation team for the ESF read out a statement critical of the organisation of the event and others used the open-mic to attack the bureaucrats. One female Scottish activist, in the heat of the moment, launched into a short tirade against G8A and in favour of Dissent. I looked around and was confronted with the amusing sight of Gill Hubbard's face. I overheard her informing another Scottish activist that this was just what she had expected! Ironically, Gill was to later suggest that the stage-stormers were all male, aggressive and against freedom of speech!

She was right though, those anarchists, they just don't know how to conduct United Front work! The stage-storming led to the organisers making all manner of accusations of racism (Unite against Fascism's Weyman Bennett had been bumped about!). Various left figures protested and a notably nasty and ignorant article appeared in the (sometimes interesting) Marxist journal *What Next?* called 'Wombling Free? Anarchists and the European Social Forum' (www.whatnextjournal.co.uk) which accused the WOMBLES and 'anarchists' in general of being inherently anti-democratic. This did not bode well for the G8 protests, where 'anarchist' scapegoats might be useful to the left.

Still, that's enough gallivanting around the revolutionary epicentres. Let's get back to the real world.

a global protest for local people

Stirling is not widely known as a hotbed of political activity and has few claims to the mythology of Scotland's past working class struggles. It did host a couple of the major battles in the wars of independence against the English, led by William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, but hey, that was 700 years ago. A new university town, Stirling in the 1970s was affected by some of the student radicalism of the time (including an infamous 'drink-in' against the Queen's visit to the University!). It also had an active left-leaning Trades Council involved in refugee solidarity and other social movements. With so many pits in the area, the town had a strong Miners Support Group in the 1984/5 Miners strike. Even up to the early 1990s the Uni had a big anarchist group which had a good relationship with town-based activists.

By 2005, however, the 'left' in Stirling was represented by a small Scottish Socialist Party branch, a well established and fairly large CND branch and the usual mix of unaligned types. In the face of the 'War on Terror', people from these backgrounds formed Stirling Coalition for Justice not War. This very loose group subsequently became the basis of the local focal point for anti-G8 activity, the even looser Stirling G8 Network!

It took a while for things to start moving locally. In December 2004, people from the town and the University's People and Planet group (the national student organisation with a tendency towards direct action) hosted an evening presentation from TRAPESE, the Dissent associated climate change education/outreach group. The evening meeting, held at the University, drew students, academics, local peace activists and ~~a stony-faced Gill Hubbard from G8A~~. The presentation involved a high level of audience participation and the students, at least, seemed happy to oblige. The first 'public' meeting on the G8 had been a Dissent associated event and it perhaps felt like 1-0 to the direct actionists. But in reality, it was just a pre-match warm-up.

In January 2005, G8A decided to hold one of their 'open' meetings in little old Stirling and about eighty people packed out a local community theatre space. The SWP had really pulled out its troops, with the party faithful in attendance from Dundee to London!

Introductions quickly revealed that party comrades had come wearing many hats, representing SSP branches, Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees and Globalise Resistance (SWP front and conveyor belt respectively). The meeting was generally uncontroversial as it mainly concerned itself with G8A's big event of that moment – a giant family friendly concert near Gleneagles, *that never happened*. There would be pop stars galore but no mention was made of political content. Concerning the march, very special guest Chris Nineham of Globalise Resistance/SWP convinced us that the demo would go ahead with or without police permission! But the contradiction of claiming to be able to organise child friendly events in an isolated rural area surrounded by thousands of well equipped police and perhaps army too, was not articulated. This dishonesty was an ongoing feature of G8A 'open' meetings.

This meeting of G8A was notable, not just for its being the only one in Stirling, but for being attended by Dissent people from Edinburgh and England, the latter up to do a reccy of the area. Dissenters outlined the direct action approach and in a conciliatory gesture suggested that the activities of both mobilisations might in fact compliment each other. This was genuinely welcomed by many present, as was the idea of imaginative disruption.

I smiled when, for the first, though not the last time, someone from G8A suggested that people in Scotland had to sort out activities for protesters lest 30,000 "Italian anarchists" were left to wander about the Perthshire countryside. *30,000 Italian anarchists?* If only. The reality is that little of the anarchist movement in Europe was prioritising this event, neither were the alternative and anarcho-syndicalist unions, in whose ranks are many tens of thousands of workers.

our meeting

A few weeks later a town-based 'activist' meeting was called by some members of Stirling Campaign for Justice not War.

I was half expecting an attempt by G8A to take-over in traditional SWP style, but the people who arrived were mainly well-kent faces. There were students from the university People and Planet group and local Scottish Socialists, but no sign of the SWP or the ~~ubiquitous Gill Hubbard, who works at Stirling Uni~~. Perhaps we are too much like small fry to bother with? For us, the meeting *was* important. After all, we were the people with local knowledge who actually lived in one of the towns nearest to Gleneagles. Surely we would have an important role to play?

After introductions, we discuss the implications of the G8 for the town. There is a tangible sense that things aren't looking so very far away and that publicity, outreach, counter-information, whatever, has to be undertaken as soon as possible. A visiting Glasgow Dissenter has brought a map to give people some idea of the geography of the area towards Gleneagles. A guy I don't recognise picks up a Dissent flyer and, possibly animated by a picture of a crash helmeted protester, criticises the text for mentioning a 'confrontational approach' to campaigning. It turns out he is a local Labour Party member and he has managed to sidetrack the discussion

for a while. Most of the Uni students are silent but the vocal members are adamant that they will commit to outreach in the working class areas of Stirling, particularly the Raploch.¹ Hmm. I'm slightly sceptical.

I don't feel overly optimistic but this is where we are, nobody else is going to do it for us, so we'll just have to get on with it. It is agreed that a basic counter-information leaflet be produced for wide local distribution and that the group meet "regularly". A proposal that we become a local group of G8 Alternatives is lost after an inconclusive debate. The 'network' will remain independent of G8A and Dissent and aim to work with both groups. And we will never see any of the students at another meeting, funnily enough.

where are they all going to stay?

The Stirling network was aware of Dissent's intention to find land for a convergence space (mass self organised campsite for protestors) in the vicinity of the town. We were keen to work with the campers with the objective of maintaining good relationships between locals and visitors.

Getting access to land for camping near to Gleneagles during G8 week was fraught with difficulties. G8A had initially been interested in finding such a space, with its professionally organised music festival in mind. However they gave up early into 2005.

But Scottish CND, a G8A affiliate, was to continue to follow the search for land with Dissent as a partner. To this end, SCND took a proposal to the Glasgow Dissent meeting at the Glasgow College of Art in February.

Dissent discussed the SCND proposal with critical eyes and semi-suspicion. Did the proposal match up to the Dissenters' utopian wish list, of trying to achieve a legal camp site, but without actually having to liaise with the authorities and jump through any legal hoops? Eventually, after some arse kicking they agreed to accept SCND's offer of a partnership. At this point one individual suggested that it might be in order to thank SCND for coming along – something nobody had thought to do.

¹ The Raploch, historically the part of Stirling which served the famous castle, has long been a deprived area and synonymous with proletarian badness but is presently being redeveloped and gentrified.

the g8 is looming large

The next Glasgow Dissent gathering was just a few weeks before the G8 itself. It was apparent that there were some people (mainly present) who were doing most of the work and then a load of others, who were waiting for the accommodation for their G8 adventure holiday in Scotland to be arranged so that they could turn up and have a wizard time (sorry, do some very serious political action). At this late point, the deal for the camp site hadn't yet been completed.

A warehouse in Glasgow *had* just been agreed and both hard and creative work lay ahead to transform this into a habitable space with a workable decision making structure.

The main
There was little happening Dissent wise in Edinburgh apart from a deal with the Teviot Students' Union building at the University. Interestingly, by this point there was little concern that the Edinburgh space was organised by Edinburgh University and not self organised, with uni staff as cleaners, kitchen staff, security etc. A big contrast to the previous Glasgow meeting where anything less than Winstanlyesque spaces were viewed with horror.

However, finding autonomous space in Edinburgh would be like trying to set up a travellers' caravan site outside Buckingham Palace. Over time, central Edinburgh has been gentrified and then re-gentrified, with well practiced systems for removing vagrants and other unsavouries from sight during the long festival season. Eventually, the campsite in working class Niddrie, the Jack Kane Centre, was to be used. This site was enclosed by fences and suffered from CCTV. But it was cheap, reasonably well run and it also meant that direct action/autonomous folks had to rub shoulders with people from other perspectives. The G8A backed this site – for them, the rural convergence just wasn't an issue any more.

My overwhelming sense was that the G8 was almost upon us and we haven't got the toilets sorted out yet! Speaking to a number of activists I got the impression that I'm not alone in feeling that we are unprepared. And yet, I had a sort of confidence in the apparent chaos. Human beings can work with a purpose in the most difficult circumstances and get things done. From this point on I began to feel that it is out of my control and that I will just have to go with the flow.

get back, get back, back to where i once belonged

The Stirling G8 Network held weekly meetings in the run up to the beginning of the G8. Apart from exchanging information we were concerned about the practicalities of transport for the various events, who was running mini-buses, who was hoping to organise a coach, who was going to put up the 30,000 Italian anarchists etc. But our main preoccupations were the distribution of the locally produced and focussed '**Will you be protesting at the G8?**' leaflet and the now immanent arrival of the thousands of activists at the long-awaited rural convergence camp site. We wanted to help facilitate good relationships between protestors and locals – a task that we didn't fully get the measure of, though we had, even then, indicators of what was to come.

Distribution of the leaflet took place in Dunblane and Stirling. Leafleters were invariably hassled by the police, with names and addresses being taken repeatedly. Straight-faced local police asked us if we had seen any outside agitators and warned us to be aware of troublemakers "attaching themselves" (to us)! I had visions of black-clad militants locking themselves to the respectable activists with clamp-ons. Remaining as straight faced as the cops was the greatest effort.

Humorous moments aside, the spring and early summer were distinguished locally by increased police surveillance.

The pre-G8 policing in Stirling was different to that found in Glasgow and Edinburgh, where only particular known activists were targeted. In Stirling *anyone* participating in *any kind* of visible political activity on the streets was questioned by the police and in some cases filmed or photographed too.

For mainstream political activists in Edinburgh, the coming of the G8 created feelings of an exciting coming together of a wide range of people for symbolic protest. For activists in Stirling, it precipitated a feeling of isolation and low level anxiety. We didn't fully comprehend at the time that this was part of a co-ordinated plan to drive a wedge between local people and protestors.

In Stirling, our protestors wouldn't be displaying white rubber bands around their wrists to mark the extent of their commitment to oppose poverty and climate change. They would be attempting something much more effective and requiring much greater creativity and confidence. *They were going to do their best to shut the G8 down.* This was going to bring them into immediate conflict with the state. Attempts to scare local activists from getting involved were a first step towards weakening the commitment of the wider community to supporting the anti-G8 actions.

carry on camping

The final site of the Eco-Village wasn't finalised until a fortnight before the start of G8 week. Two site locations had already fallen through, not least because of 'pressure' applied to the land owners. SCND eventually pulled out, due to lack of time. For weeks it felt like nothing was going to be finalised. The Convergence 2005 negotiating team were eventually offered some disused fields, owned by and officially backed by the local council at Forthbank, at the rear of Stirling Albion's football stadium. A local wit suggested that it would be the biggest number ever assembled at Forthbank.

Stirling G8 Network took a reccy straight away. The two designated fields were on either side of an historic wooded lane. It was the lumpiest ground imaginable – a leisurely stroll across it appeared to onlookers like a drunken stagger. It was hard to imagine a comfy night's sleep. But worse than this, the site, in a bend in the river Forth, was surrounded on three sides by fast flowing tidal water and the single exit/entrance was only wide enough for a single vehicle. And don't even mention the toxic methane-emitting landfill on the edge of one of the fields. We speculated that this was the site that the authorities had intended all along. Despite magical and atmospheric views of the Ochil Hills and Wallace Monument, it looked for all the world like the perfect spot...for the authorities to maintain control.

out of sight out of mind

The fact that the location was out of town, next to a retail park and tucked away at the back of the stadium, meant that the Eco-Village was cut off from Stirling, isolated and vulnerable. Having a Morrisons supermarket on the doorstep meant happy campers had no reason to go anywhere near

the residents of Stirling. The council even provided an open-top tourist bus to shuttle people to and from the train station.

With the site settled, a week remained for the site teams to prepare the basic infrastructure for the Eco-Village's inhabitants. This was a mammoth task – but against all the odds – it was done. When Stirling G8 Network people made their first visit, there were only a small handful of people for a big heap of work. A spirited bunch, they got down to their task with little apparent fuss and a lot of innovation. They made the lane useable and the entrance defensible and set up toilet and washing facilities, despite the non-appearance of a 44,000 litre water tank scheduled for delivery. Just as important, they set up systems for decision making – the camp was a true experiment in self organisation for, at maximum, 3000 or so people. But none of this would have happened without the hard work of the smaller numbers who set-up and later shut-down the camp.

The camp and the way the authorities dealt with it was a key part of the anti-G8 activity in 2005. Those who were in the camp perceived this keenly. Those who didn't care for even the concept of a convergence space have not realised this. Those people didn't air brush the camp from history – for G8A the camp did not exist to begin with.

making a splash

The first controversy at the Eco-Village, eagerly jumped on by the local media, involved an incidence of magic-mushroom inspired madness when an early arriving camper took a foolhardy dip in the Forth. Luckily the swimmer emerged unharmed.

The camp had interest from local people who, if only as individuals, came in a steady trickle with gifts of food, drink and supportive words.

It was encouraging to hear about local support for the camp - clearly there were a lot of people who agreed with us, something we also knew from our anti-war campaigning in the town. It was also undeniable that active political support was limited. The anti-G8 mobilisation was focussing me once again on thinking about why activists are so disconnected from people at large – something that those from big cities, with their activist ghettos, are rarely forced to consider.

Outside of Glasgow and Edinburgh, there were few public meetings or other events preparing for the G8. G8A organised a couple of meetings in Auchterarder, but these were outreach to the locals, rather than initiated by local people themselves. At the G8A Stewards and Legal Support meeting² at Glasgow's Caledonian Uni in the week before the G8, Gill Hubbard ^{was described} described the success of the Auchterarder meetings. Seemingly, the locals had been 'lovely' and one G8A activist had used her skills as a social worker to full advantage...

Only two locally organised G8 public meetings took place in the Stirlingshire area and only one in the week before the G8. This was called by Falkirk Trades Union Council. The meeting in the Old Sheriff Court took place around the corner from the new RUC-barracks style police station that would hold so many G8 prisoners a week later. twenty members of 'the public' discussed the likely achievements of the G8 Summit. No one from either panel or audience had any expectations that the leaders would deliver. The Dissent spokesperson set out his view on where the future lay – 'we have to create alternatives wherever we can and when we are opposed, well, then we must resist' to applause from the floor. But how would this translate into action during G8 week?

PART TWO

the g8 express rolls into town

Friday 1st of July and it's official opening day for the Eco-Village. The G8 express train from London organised by South East Dissenters has reached Edinburgh and many have travelled the extra 50 minutes train ride to Stirling. Others, who have stayed in Edinburgh for the Make Poverty History demo tomorrow, will eventually make the Eco-Village their base.

On Friday night a group of sinister hardened anarchists assembles at my house. They are bent on destruction, disruption and having their tea.

² Legal support work was initiated and maintained by Dissent people with minimal input from G8A.

Saturday, is the first day of protest, if it can be called such. The Make Poverty History coalition's march demanding 'More and Better Aid', the dropping of the debt and the vague notion of Trade Justice. The circular march starts at midday from The Meadows but we've decided on an early start.

We head for the early train from Stirling station, having cleverly purchased tickets the previous night so as to avoid the queues! Protestors are distinguishable by their uniform whiteness of clothing as they board the train. This is something I hadn't bargained for. By coincidence my little group are mostly dressed in BLACK! Argh! Okay, a few are wearing other colours too but there's not a sign of white amongst us. I suddenly feel significantly conspicuous! And what a clever ruse by the organisers! The police would just have to look out for the red ones (the socialists) and the black ones (the anarchists). There is a handful of cops hanging around, watching us. I guess we are on average too old to be mistaken for black bloc types and there isn't a hooded top amongst us. Not even our flag poles give us away, excellent!

Alighting at Haymarket, we pass through a phalanx of SSP paper sellers. Nothing odd there. But Edinburgh is still only waking up and the streets are almost deserted, bringing a slightly eerie atmosphere.

Once on the Meadows our unfurled black and red flags are a natural magnet for the police who feel obliged to visit our stall repeatedly, asking for our leaflet and insisting on attempting small talk. Their repeated visits draw the attention of an MPH steward who is friendly and supportive! When not having the attention of the cops, the stall is popular, particularly with the younger marcher, with rapid sales of magazines, badges and even the odd t-shirt. Mums and dads get harangued to front pocket money.

Over four hours we gradually attract a bunch of the kind of people attracted by black and red flags (other than the police): anarchists, Dissenters, Wobblies, AC Milan fans... And then, from out of nowhere, a black bloc appears chanting "no justice, no peace, fuck the police". If they are usually conspicuous, they are *incongruous* here amongst the army of white clad angels! They sweep past us, angry young men. A few try to look at the stall, but they are moving fast, moving against the tide.



It's time to go. We decide to wait until a suitable contingent appears, but it's not that kind of march, so about twenty of us join and form our own! By Princes Street it's time to decamp to the pub. Under the watchful eyes of the police, we head for a suitable boozier past the few straggling Saturday shoppers wandering past shops shut or boarded up in anticipation of something bad happening. The beers are welcome. The TVs in the almost empty bar show the Live 8 debacle. We catch Pete Docherty making an arse of himself. Thankfully the sound is off. What sort of day has this been? A weird sort of day. A hen party crashes noisily into the pub. A bit of reality in an otherwise unreal day. I just want to go home and think.

It has been strange to be a part of a vast mobilisation and come away feeling so alienated and disconnected from the 'movement'. Massive demonstrations usually have the opposite affect – a quiet feeling of confidence, usually illusory, that, whatever the differences, there are thousands of us all prepared to take at least a symbolic stand against...whatever. But MPH *wasn't* organised by *us*, it was one short step away from being a state organised demonstration. Even Orwell hadn't predicted government organised protest – this demo was supported by the prime minister! Professional bouncers policed the entrance to the march and anyone who exhibited indicators of not being totally passive was dealt with rudely.

Participants knew the volume of the crowd was huge. Not because they had witnessed it, but because they had been told by the media. Nobody could stand on the pavement and watch the march pass. The pavement was cordoned off and stewards jollied people along as though they were on a sponsored walk.

This all left me with a bad taste, further confirmed by the return train to Stirling being filmed by the police walking up and down the carriages. A faint taste of the repression that was to come...

sunday july 3rd

Sunday saw the beginning of the meetings, workshops and other events making up the Days of Dissent! in Edinburgh, as well as the G8 Alternatives Summit, also in the capital. A couple of us from Stirling headed down to get the train. More cops than yesterday and a heavier atmosphere. From here on in they know they are dealing with the 'bad' protesters because the 'good' ones left when the last MPH coach departed from Edinburgh. The platform has two small groups of 'anarchists' and the police are asking them questions. I witness my first arrest of the week when a bloke is lifted for giving cheek to the police. On the train we discover the anarchists are from Switzerland and are heading for the Assembly of Anarchists and Anti-authoritarians. By the time we get to the Teviot, the Assembly is in full flow, packing to overflow a large lecture hall. The organising meeting for tomorrow's Carnival for Full Enjoyment clashes with this but we decide to go outside and talk to people and distribute flyers for the Carnival. It strikes me how distinct the 'autonomous' people look. Even though many are wearing bright colours the overall impression is of scruffy grey-black. Some bizarre left sects try to flog their papers with little success. Then who should come tumbling out of the building but famous journalist Andrew Gilligan? He is surrounded by shouty blokes, mostly shouting at *him*. It appears he had been recognised in the crowd at the Anarchist Assembly and it had taken a little while to extirpate him. Weird.

After some light refreshments we head down to the Stop the War demonstration assembling on the Mound. It soon became apparent that this was going to be *small*. Called by the Stop the War Coalition (i.e. the SWP) and billed as a Naming the Dead (of Iraq) event, the march had little local support and clashed with the G8 Alternatives Summit. The march was made up of people who had possibly left the Summit early and token contingents of various left groups.

The demo seems leaderless, where is George Galloway, supposedly leading the masses out of the counter-summit? Where are the people (5,000) who were at the summit? Still there I guess. It might have been re-named the Walking of the Dead. Zombie-like or not, the march of about 2,000 was heavily over policed but mercifully brisk. On the way to the Calton Hill we spoke to people attracted to our red and black flag who asked us why there weren't any anarchists about. Because they had more sense?

The Naming the Dead ceremony itself was slightly peculiar beyond its understandably melancholic nature. Incongruously, the Legalise Cannabis Campaign spoke along side anti-war representatives. The high police presence suggested that a smoke would be seriously out of the question. However, the cool evening air and the panoramic views over the Firth of Forth would be an opportunity for us to catch our breath before the rest of the weeks frenzy of activity began.

monday 4th july

Activists had a choice of actions on Monday. Scottish CND and Trident Ploughshares had organised a blockade of Faslane Naval Base, home to all of the UK's nuclear weapons. It was the biggest blockade ever and the authorities obliged by shutting the base down for the day. This led to a bizarre situation where all the entrances to the base were blockaded by protestors, but no attempts were made to arrest them! Protestors visiting from Europe were left thinking that the UK police were charming chaps. Seasoned peace activists had to explain how the protests usually ended when the last blockader left in the last police van.

The police warned that at 4.30, arrests would commence. Those blockading agreed to stop at 4.30 and save themselves for another day...after all, the week was young.

That morning coaches had left for Faslane from Edinburgh minus 130 Globalise Resistance members. They must have taken a last minute decision to attend the Carnival For Full Enjoyment. According to the organisers this was meant to be a "carnivalsque parade through Edinburgh, visiting places responsible for the increasingly precarious way in which we experience work and life" For me, it was one of the few attempts by the G8 opposition to link global exploitation to the local.

The increased casualisation of work here in Britain, the relentless attacks on living and working conditions are part of a global phenomenon. The idea of having a day of action and contact with people working in the financial and retail sectors in the Scottish capital seemed an important initiative. People such as the Precarity Network, the Edinburgh Claimants (a long standing unemployed organisation) and the IWW were involved so some outreach had been done. However, the management of the companies visited, with the passive connivance of the trade unions, had created an

atmosphere of semi-hysteria in which many office and shop workers were preparing for assaults from protestors and large-scale rioting. Workers were told not to leave their buildings, "for their own safety" even at the end of the working day. This was also advised by the police to local employers in Stirling and even far away Falkirk, later in the week. Protesters were dangerous aliens from outside. Employees who also happened to be protesters found G8 week a very isolating time at work.

'Nine hour running battle on streets of Scots capital' – July 5th headline in The Press and Journal

The enduring media image from the day would be a snarling Metropolitan cop facing down a 'protester'. But violent confrontations between police and would-be carnivalistas were fairly minimal. It was obvious that the police were not going to allow any illegal street party to wind its way around Edinburgh. Riot police and the use of massive portable barriers effectively cordoned off Princes Street and I watched as cops pushed protestors, shoppers and tourists onto the side streets. Attempts by a relatively small number of the demonstrators to break through police lines were generally ineffectual and the frustration was palpable. But the police tactics effectively closed down most of Princes Street for most of the day and antagonised local people with indiscriminate aggression. Towards early evening most of the bins, stones and shopping trolleys aimed at the police were from Edinburgh's youth.

Back at the Teviot buildings, the police had issued an order that nobody was to be admitted and the in-house security generally enforced that for several hours. But I took advantage of the fact that smartly dressed people were allowed into the building – an inconsistency in enforcement that was repeated at police check-points in Stirling throughout the week – to attend a 'public' meeting. We ended the evening with a pint and the drums of the Infernal Noise Brigade providing our soundtrack.

tuesday 5th july

There is truly no escape from wage slavery and on Tuesday I went into work. I chatted to a workmate who had been at the Teviot buildings for film showings on Monday. We were at least able to debunk the myth that there had been mass rioting in Edinburgh as reported in the media. People

were mildly interested but there was a feeling that the spectacle of protest remained just that – spectacle.

During the day, there had been a wonderful Critical Mass bike ride around Stirling. The Stirling G8 Network cheered them along their way and a couple of us joined in, taking advantage of the open-mic. It was the first planned interaction between visiting protesters and local people and gave us some creative ideas for our future actions. Marvellous!



Critical Mass, Stirling, 05/07/05

Tuesday night saw a rapid build up of police around the Eco-Village in Stirling. Stirling G8 activists helped to remove valuables and sensitive materials from the site as the possibility of a police raid became more than simple paranoia. Throughout the evening people were heading off-site, taking to the hills and preparing for the Day of Blockades. The atmosphere in the camp was one of anxious expectation and, I think, optimism.

By 10pm, police check points had been set up on all the roads leading out of the camp. Anyone leaving the Eco-Village was being stopped and searched under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act and all along the

surrounding roads small affinity groups and ones and twos were having their clothing and bags searched. The entire area was swamped by police as we took our car for a tour of the area. At the same time the large numbers arriving by train from Edinburgh and Glasgow were being searched at a roundabout half way up to the village. But again, the police were inconsistent – smart dress paid off as three times we passed through car check points without being questioned. We warned as many pedestrians as we could and conducted a drive-around reccy of police activity before calling it a night.

wednesday 6th

D-day. I awoke to a wet Stirling. It's rained overnight and the sky's still full of it. It's about 4.30 and not having joined an affinity group for the day's blockades I'm planning to meet some of the Stirling G8 Network and head to Gleneagles on the early (the only!) morning train, the 06.24. At about 05.45 we drive around Stirling to pick up friends. There are dribs and drabs of blockaders out and about. I wonder what they are doing and if they are aware of how conspicuous they are.

When we get down to the train station the gates are closed and there's a small police presence. As 6.24 draws near there's a build up of people. They are mostly from the village but at a guess I'd say they were from the People and Planet zone, basically young students. They crowd around the gate, demanding to be let in (many have tickets). The staff claim the train has been cancelled due to a blockade of the track south of here (a lie). Police dogs are brought from the back of a van and a lard-arsed cop with undeveloped social skills uses his alsation to try to disperse the crowd. A friend arrives with a car and those G8 Network people who are supposed to be stewarding at the demo head off in the hope that they can get through the blockades. It's a strange contradiction, most of those who want to get to Gleneagles also want the blockades to be effective. But if they are, then it could mean the demonstrators are blockaded too. Hmmm.

More police arrive and I head back home, I'll find a way to get up there. I crash out for another couple of hours sleep. 08.30, and I wake to police sirens and the radio news that there has been a riot in Stirling town centre. TV shows black-bloc types in what is recognisably Bannockburn (a working class suburb south of Stirling) attacking the police and a private car. It

looks staged. They are saying there was a riot in the town centre and an attack on the train station at four in the morning.

What's going on? Where's the evidence? One of us heads to the station where the media vans are. When asked where she got her information about the city centre and station riot, ITV's breakfast TV reporter replies "the police". And the town centre riot? A brief reccy around the centre shows no evidence of any disturbance – even MacDonalds and the Burger King are intact.

Meanwhile local radio is hosting a phone-in that is whipping up a lynch mob atmosphere. Police vehicles, sirens blaring, are screaming up and down the roads. An atmosphere of fear and hysteria is being intentionally created. I arrange a lift up to Auchterarder, the nearest village to Gleneagles. At about 11am, I walk about a mile up the road to get my lift. I'm on a suburban housing estate, but there are police everywhere. I sit at a bus stop and phone my lift. A minute later they arrive, to my great relief!

We join the A9 at Dunblane, so wouldn't have been affected by any blockading at the Stirling junctions. For most of the journey the A9 is empty except for police vehicles and blockade affinity groups being chased or herded by the cops. Some of the affinity groups good naturedly try to stop our car. I give them the thumbs up but can't help feeling like I'm crossing some sort of picket line. We see no coaches going to the demo, just van after van after van of cops heading for Gleneagles.

from A to B and back again

When I got to the public park assembly point in Auchterarder it was obvious that this demo had all the makings of the kind of lefty a to b march that every activist has been on a hundred times. The hope is always that the possibility of creative and maybe inspiring direct action happening makes it worth attending. I also felt that as I hadn't been with an affinity group being chased around the countryside in the pissing rain, I had a moral duty to come here and stand in the pissing rain.

A small column of the Rebel Clown Army had made its way here as had the Rinky-Dink sound system and contingents of anarchists from Poland and Germany. But this was G8A's big day out. The problem was that many

of G8As coaches had been delayed, been told the demo was cancelled or kept in Edinburgh by the police. So, initially, numbers were down at perhaps a thousand bodies. After about two hours of delay all the buses seemed to arrive at once, bringing the numbers up to maybe four to five thousand.

The rain, which had only *threatened* for ages, now came down with venom as the march started to crawl out of the park. I met up with some people from Edinburgh and we tried to stick together. When we arrived at the wall of steel, where the march was expected to loop back on itself, about twenty or so, mostly masked-up blokes successfully tore down the section immediately facing us. As the riot squad poured out, people dispersed in all directions, some leapt over garden walls only to be chased back by cops. Not wanting to be injured by the waist high roadside crash barriers we had jumped behind, I and several others near the front grabbed onto them and tried to hold them up as the riot cops surged back and forth. I was not as scared as I perhaps should have been, maybe because, given the imbalance of forces, this confrontation could *only* be symbolic.

However, given the precariousness of my position I decided to re-join the frontline of the demo, which had now retreated about 50 yards and had a line of stewards between it and the police, themselves having retreated. At this point I noticed the Chief Steward looking somewhat at sea. This was not part of the script, but surely it was *inevitable* that *someone* would test the fence? After a stand-off of about twenty minutes the march proceeds past a deep cordon of robo-cops.

On the bend back towards the park it was obvious that something was happening. Hundreds of marchers were facing a line of riot police in a field adjacent to the road which was separated by the steel inner fence. Slowly the field was cleared as a Chinook helicopter brought robo-cop reinforcements and the thin black line pushed the stragglers onto the road. And then it was over.

At this stage I had no idea how successful, or otherwise, the Dissent blockades had been. And I had no real idea of events at the Eco-Village that morning. All I knew was that the Stirling I left was not going to be the Stirling I would return to.

And sure enough, the atmosphere in Stirling was hateful and full of fear. The police were everywhere, residents and visitors alike were being stopped and searched, people had been sent home from work "for their own safety", businesses had boarded up. The state had done a fantastic job in driving a wedge between ^{local} people and protestors and for those of us who were both, it was very disorientating. We went down to the Eco-Village and spoke to people at the camp's Media Tent making it clear that we needed to do something to repair the damage that 24 hours of living in a localised police state had inflicted.

Throughout the night police helicopters buzzed overhead and sirens wailed intermittently. It was as if Stirling was under siege. It was, but from the forces of law and order.

It would transpire that the police had been taken by surprise at 3.00 am that morning...

thursday july 7th

Phone calls to the Eco-Village brought news that the camp was surrounded and anyone coming in or out was being searched and having their details taken.

Arriving at the ring road before the camp entrance we could see the multiple lines of cops and riot cop re-enforcements in dozens of vans parked along the road up.

Explaining that we were here on behalf of the local Trades Union movement and being smartly dressed again assisted in our ability to move around, but we were asked to explain our presence, our details were taken and we were frisked.

We walked up to the camp, getting some perhaps understandably suspicious looks (possibly we looked like journos). A couple asked us if we were from the Council. Er, no.

At the front security gate we got some full-on animosity from one camp resident, who said the trade unions were the last thing they needed. I remained calm, as she was probably under a lot of stress. It was obvious

people were feeling trapped and isolated. Without entering we made contact with the on-site Trauma team and offered to take people off-site, but there was nobody they knew who wanted to come off at that stage. We met a friend there who had hoped to do some proper tourist stuff that day. He asked if there was another way out, so I suggested trying where the river was crossed by the nearest bridge. We found out later that this had been a success and that escape was possible, at least in small numbers.

Through the police lines again, we were once again searched but with a bit more respect than the campers. We headed back to town, knowing something had to be done fast to break down the isolation and the Eco-village's separation from the town. Stirling people had heard that 'anarchists' from the G8 camp had trashed cars, smashed windows, attacked people on their doorsteps (a lie), pulled down satellite dishes and, worst of all, had hospitalised a child (another, despicable, lie). The media hysteria had obviously worked on some people. Although town life was going on as normal, many more businesses, large and small, had decided to board up their windows.

the women and men behind the wire

Phone calls to the Eco-Village later that day brought news that the camp remained surrounded by police and for periods nobody was being allowed in or out. But the repression would be compounded by unexpected events.

It is hard to adequately convey the impact of the London bombs on people inside and outwith the camp. People were shocked and sickened. It was a demoralising blow but I am still not sure why it had just *such* a debilitating effect. But it did. Together with the increase in police presence the most oppressive atmosphere descended. Planned events for the day, such as the People's Golfing Tournament, which might have manifested itself somewhere, were abandoned as people's thoughts turned to London. For many people the fight had been knocked out of them and the overwhelming desire was to just go home. For those whose train was on Friday or who were staying behind for the clear-up operation this was not an option. Before the camp entrance we could see the multiple lines of cops and riot cop re-enforcements in dozens of vans parked along the road.

The lack of connections between Stirling and its visitors was making itself felt. But it wasn't just us in the town who realised this.

Our chat with the Media Tent had been followed through. Stirling G8 Network were contacted by a TRAPESE member and we went on to jointly organise a meeting that evening at the Centre for Non-Violence in Dunblane. The Centre spent the afternoon creating a meeting space where the Eco-Villagers would feel welcome, right down to the choice of vegan biscuits and a home baked cake. On the camp, a troop of attendees was recruited from various 'neighbourhoods' in the Eco-Village. We were meeting to discuss events and possible responses from both within the camp and from the Stirling G8 Network.

This was the first 'formal' meeting between local people and campers and there was a general feeling that it should have happened prior to this crisis. After a report on what had been happening in the previous 48 hours we discussed what practical measures could be taken. We wanted to counter the media hysteria and the fearful atmosphere that had been created by the vast police presence in Stirling. We had to reach out to the Stirling people and put our side of the story, but there wasn't much time left. We agreed to attempt to hold a stall in the town centre on Friday and Saturday and to ask a small volunteer special unit of the Clown Army to come down. We also decided that local radio would be asked to announce an open invitation to the people of Stirling to join the campers for a meal at the Eco-Village on Friday teatime.

friday 8th

The Stirling G8 Network town centre stall was set up, the clowns and others from the camp arrived and the cops, for the first time, kept their distance. At last, we were re-asserting our presence on the streets of Stirling. I felt the stress of the last few days dissipate. The Stirling Observer came and took pictures, including a group photo of local folk, campers and clowns (it never got used) and left. I was anxious that the outreach attempt would either be closed down by the cops or would attract some flak from irate Stirling residents reacting to the "shocking scenes of violence" that were reported in Friday's papers.

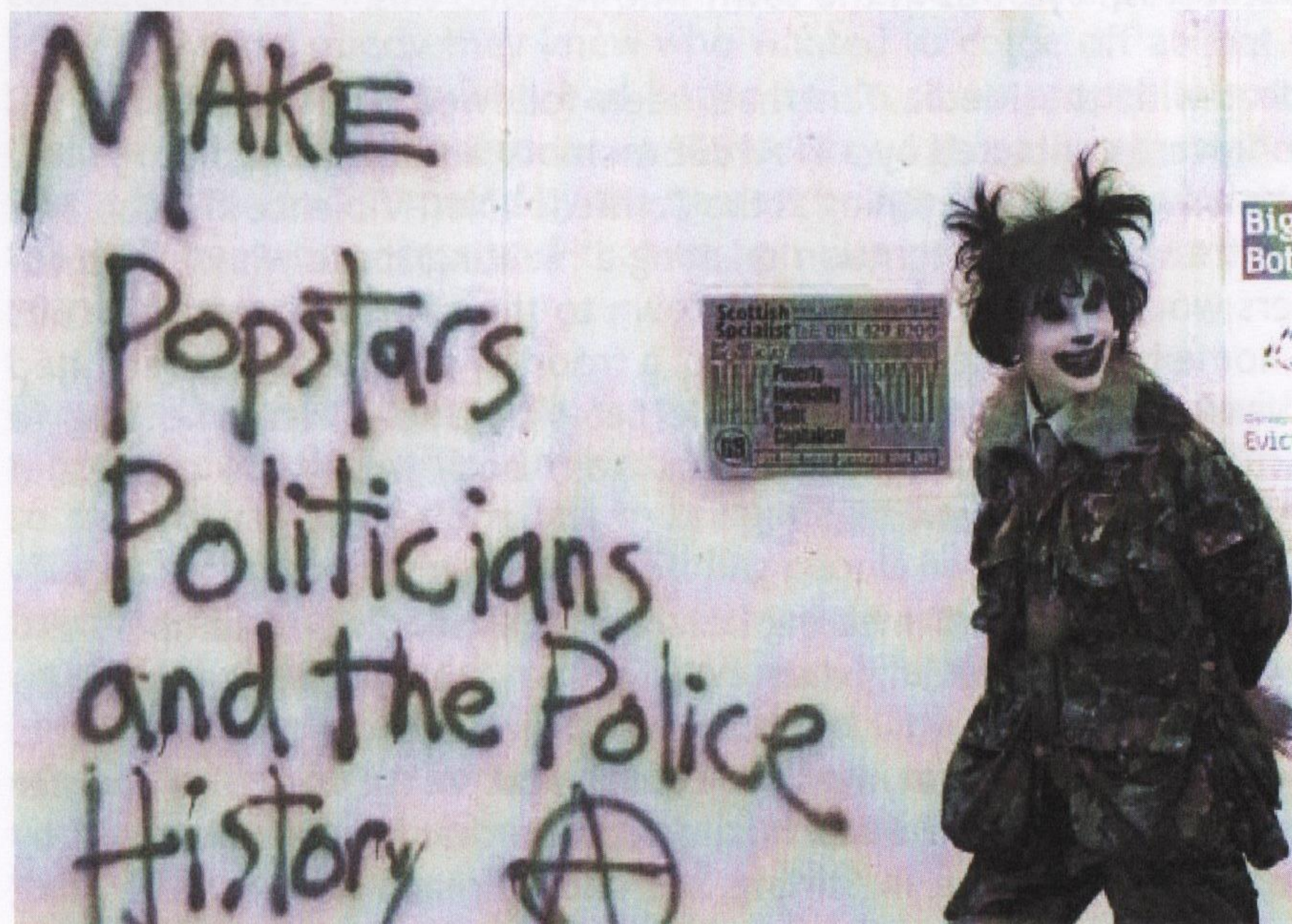


Photo courtesy of www.Indymedia.org.uk

The overwhelming response of my fellow citizens was far from negative. A few, all men of varying ages, snarled when offered a leaflet, but most people seemed unphased that the campers had come into their midst. A number of people took time to come up and talk to people around the stall and the local activists, well-kent faces, were constantly chatting with friends out doing their shopping.

Children were, naturally, fascinated by the Clown Army who enjoined everyone to come on manoeuvres with them. The sun shone and the vibe was good. I felt a lump in my throat as we said goodbye to some of the campers. We knew that Central FM had announced the open invitation. How many would come? How many would turn back confronted by so many cops?

If I can't dance then it's not my revolution. (Emma Goldman)

If there's no revolution, what's there to dance about? (Albert Meltzer)

By the time we got to the camp on Friday evening we had imbibed a small amount of alcoholic beverage, just enough to have an appetite and to enjoy Dutch courage when passing through police lines. The usual pat-downs and search of bags. "Bread to accompany the meal, officer." The police I spoke to were unaware of the radio announcement and I wondered if their behaviour would be modified given the possibility of local people coming to the Eco-Village for the first time.

And despite the G8, despite Beldof and Gono, despite the police, despite the horror in London, people wanted to be together, to say farewell and to party. The Healand (sic) Kitchen plays host to a diversity of unity. Local People are here from Bannockburn Community Council, from the G8 Network and their friends and family, Stirling CND, young lads with a Scottish lion rampant flag, plus people I've never seen before. We eat, drink and share our experiences of the week. I have an interesting discussion on the nature of Imperialism with an SSPer and an anarcho-communist from Dublin! Night falls and a samba band starts up. Like the pied piper it leads us along the walk ways through the camp to the entertainment area. There are hundreds here dancing, sharing a moment of freedom and solidarity. For just a short time I feel we are all glimpsing the world we would like to live in. And, if for that moment alone, the whole slog feels worth it. I'm glad to be amongst these people in this place at this time.

epilogue

Life returned to normal fairly soon after the Eco-Village was gone. The local paper ran a story about how much business had suffered due to the 'trouble' on Wednesday and the letters pages featured pro and contra locals for a couple of weeks. What had been left behind? Physically, two fields left in better condition than they were found in, 'Fuck the G8' and 'No to Borders: for a Free World' stickers disintegrating on lampposts but little else. Politically? Well, local people are talking about creating something which is pro-active, not just reacting to power's agenda. Not waiting for another summit to visit but building a social forum here, in our town.

Now. And, hopefully, across the whole of Britain and beyond, people returned to *their* towns wanting to do likewise. For me, the non-hierarchical, autonomous, horizontal, whatever you want to call it movement must be thinking about what happens in places just like Stirling because it is here that meaningful change must take place, just as much as in the Londons, the Edinburghs and the Glasgows.

For its part, the Dissent network is continuing and is in a process of re-assessing its political focus post Gleneagles (see www.dissent.org.uk). If the slogan '*think globally, act locally*' is to mean anything it must mean acting locally with *local* people on a *day to day basis* not in activist ghettos or 'scenes'.

Though charges have been dropped against many of those arrested over the G8 week, at the time of going to press there are still defendants needing our support. For details:

July 2005 Solidarity Group
c/o 17 West Montgomery Place
Edinburgh EH7 5HA
July2005solidarity@yahoo.co.uk

or leave a message on 0131 557 6242