

In the Wake.....

So what happened at the G20 in Melbourne? On one hand it was business as usual. The G20 met and seemed to function as planned with both agreement and disagreement within the continual entrenchment of the capitalist global order. Predictably, despite the boosterism of groups like Make Poverty History, the G20 did nothing to ameliorate even the most horrific consequences of capitalism. Yet something happened outside: a relatively small group of protesters produced a political event, a moment on rupture that is full of possibilities and dangers. What we do now after that event, how we trace the lines of struggle that it opened up is crucial. There are both opportunities and pitfalls ahead and the telling of the tale, the reflection on our experiences and the sharing of stories is crucial. Because there is not just one version of what happened: indeed part of the power and joy experiencing something like the mobilization is being part of collective moment that has many points of origins and many experiences. In the normally daily life of capitalism we have only two views: that of the machinery of public opinion, and that of the isolated individual. In moments of upsurge something else happens. Let's find a richness and continue to enrich this else.

But there are forces that work to close down the possibilities that have been opened by such an event. In this case, they are police repression, the implementation of a simulation of the events by the media, and division and recrimination amongst those that took part. It is understandable that those that have gone beyond the law want to protect themselves, it is also understandable that the power of the media is so great that even those who took part in the actions can feel disorientated by the way their own participation is reflected back on them, and in a movement that is both small and diverse, that lacks a common language of communication differences can often become divisions – especially when so much is on the line. This does not take away from how important it is to resist these things, to keep the space open, that these struggles opened and try to connect it with others and other struggles.

I want to deal with two points here:

Firstly violence. It is clear that violence happened: that force was used by both “sides”. But it is wrong to reduce all that happened to violence or to see the violence as only an aberration. It needs to be placed in perspective. From media reports the force used by protestors despite “appearing” spectacular was actually very minimal. The most intense use of force was directed at objects: the destruction of a police van, the dismantling of barricades. The physical attacks on police officers, according to media reports, seem to have produced only one real injury – a broken wrist. Obviously this is unpleasant to the officer but it is not more substantial than a serious bar fight. The violence of the police, which has been largely ignored by the corporate media, was the reverse. Armed with batons and sanctioned by the state, the police violence was directed at living bodies. It is obscene to see these things as equivalents.

But in the usual rhetorical defence the use of force by protestors as ‘self-defence’ can not be applied. It is clear that some sections of the carnival did primitively use force on the barriers, the police lines and the now infamous police van. Each of the actions that made up these moments of confrontation can not be reduced to each other. Rather they have to be judged soberly and clearly. Which action was an attempt to generate a creative disturbance, which cemented our co-operation, and which were escalations that were counter-productive? Did sometimes the emotional euphoria of attacking the property of the state detract from action

subverting the kinds of social relations that made up the state? If people chose to take part in these actions how are we going to deal with the consequences?

It is also important that the serious or exciting nature of the use of force does not detract from the other actions, the other manifestations of creativity that people mobilised. If there was value in Saturday's actions ( and I believe there was) it was the combination of people experimenting with co-operation, horizontal and autonomous organising and a militant attitude to the state. Whilst again each moment can not be made equivalent to the other – throwing a garbage bin is not the same as locking on to car is not the same a playing music or dressing as a clown and so on – the points of inter-relationship where rich and important.

Secondly the Arterial Block. It is crucial to refuse either a romanticisation or demonisations of this group. At best they seemed to have been a handful of affinity groups that with a minimum of preparation and internal organising attempted a number of the confrontational initiatives. But so to did many others. Perhaps the only really difference is that the Arterial Block had a public name that the media and police could hang on to. It would be a mistake to see any group as homogenous internally or exercising hegemony over other elements of the mobilisation. If anything the actions taken by this or that section just opened up space for others to fill. The media attempt to portray the Arterial Block as some kind of international paramilitary association is not only totally wrong and an attempt to establish the groups for the repression of those involved, it also works to create hierarchies within the movement : a hard-core that leads others. Refuse this attempt.

So what to do now? I think firstly care for each other. Obviously this means establishing consistent and on going solidarity with those that face charges or police violence. Some very apparent tasks of support will appear over the next few weeks. Don't back down from these. But care in the more general sense. Understand that sometimes after such an event we may feel a range of emotions, some good some part and creating the space to relax and share love for each other is crucial. But more than this in the face of the state and media we should not close inwards. Rather we can make many public spaces to reflect on and debate what happened in a way that is critical but not blaming, nuanced and open minded. Also the energy, the rebellion, the determination and militancy we experienced shouldn't be thrown away. Continue to organise, in whatever forms you choose on what ever scale. The more the that daily projects of creating alternatives and resistances flow into big mobilisations and vice versa the better.

I hope to see , and I hope to see it soon, many different stories being told, many threads of experiences, of criticism, of celebration, of differences that can weave together something great. Possibilities have been opened, forces of repression are being organised, I feel if we base ourselves in the necessity