



# UNITED COLOURS

## RESISTANCE TO THE IMF AND

**T**HE mobilisation for S26 (September 26th) was the first event of this kind that took place in a Central or Eastern European country. About 12,000 people from

all over the world came to Prague to protest against the Summit of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) in September 2000. It was a long and sometimes painful task to organise not only the protest actions, but the whole campaign. But looking back on it, I think it was the best thing that could have happened to the Czech anarchist (or to be more general - anti-authoritarian) movement. We learned a lot. First of all, however, I would like to point out that the views expressed here are my own and don't necessarily reflect the opinions of other organisers or participants.

### THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MOBILISATION

A kind of predecessor to the Prague 2000 mobilisation were the street parties organised in Prague and Brno. The first one took place in Prague in 1998, was a part of the worldwide Global Street Party and was organised by people from Earth First!, the collective of the radical newspaper *Konfrontace* (Confrontation) and others who later became the Czech Reclaim The Streets group. This action was very important for our movement in terms of being the first Czech reaction to a global mobilisation. It introduced the problem of economic globalisation to the activists and the public, it connected protest with a party, some international contacts were established and also the Czech police showed how brutal they can be.

The idea of organising something against the IMF/WB Summit appeared for the first time during an informal meeting in July 1999. It was attended by people who were involved in organising the street parties. At that time most of us hardly knew anything about these two financial institutions, and we had only a vague feeling that there was something wrong with them.



Ya Basta! prepare for confrontation



Pink and Silver in Prague



The Blue Route

# UNITED COLOURS OF GLOBAL RESISTANCE

## WORLD BANK IN PRAGUE

We agreed to collecting information and meeting again in the autumn.

In September 1999 a couple of us went to Slovenia where we met a friend who worked for A-Seed Netherlands at that time and had more experience with international protests than we had. She offered us help, we talked a lot and then decided that we really wanted to organise something. Regular meetings started to be held in Prague but it wasn't until January 2000 that concrete decisions started to be made.

The beginnings of INPEG (Iniciativa Proti Ekonomicke Globalizaci - Initiative Against Economic Globalisation) were very chaotic. Nobody had a clear idea of what to do, most of the people were only talking without starting to do anything concrete and also the system of working groups was 'discovered' by us quite late. But everything got better with time. Also, the idea of what INPEG should look like and what role in the whole mobilisation it should play changed a lot over time from being a very loose platform with nearly no organisational structures to a quite well organised and big body, which had a lot of characteristics of a real organisation. An important point was also the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1999 when we got an idea of what the whole mobilisation should look like.

One question we were discussing from the very beginning was who we should and should not work with. In December 1999 we met with the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) - Czech Jubilee 2000, CEE Bankwatch, Friends of the Earth etc. - and decided not to collaborate officially with each other. Our opinions, goals, methods and strategies were of course totally different. For example, some of them participated in discussions with the IMF and World Bank and participated in the cultural programme at Prague Castle organised by Vaclav Havel, the former Czech President, whereas we refused to sit down and eat sandwiches with the financiers while people in other parts of the world were starving. Furthermore, none of the NGOs besides Jubilee 2000 wanted to organise any kind of

demonstrations. Nevertheless, the NGO people helped us a lot with gaining information about the IMF and WB, which was very difficult, especially when focusing on Eastern and Central European countries, and later a lot of them joined our protests in a personal capacity. So there was some kind of unofficial symbiosis working quite well.

However, it was more difficult to decide which groups should be involved in INPEG itself. There was quite a clear agreement of not involving dogmatic Bolshevik or Trotskyist groups or the youth organisation linked to the Czech Communist Party. We only met a couple of times with them to agree on concrete dates and places for our actions so that they didn't clash with one another. These groups organised their own platform called Stop IMF! On the other hand, however, we agreed to Socialisticka Solidarita joining INPEG. This is a sister organisation of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) which didn't have a good relationship with Czech anarchists at all, but as we knew this mobilisation would be huge we decided to put aside our differences for the moment and to collaborate.

The other groups that joined INPEG were the Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation, the collectives which produce the radical newspaper *Konfrontace* and the anarchist magazine *A-kontra*, Earth First! and individuals from Amnesty International and environmental NGOs (Children of the Earth and NESEHNUTI - Independent Social-Ecological Movement). There were also, of course, individuals involved who weren't organised in any kind of group.

So to summarise, the groups mobilising against the IMF and World Bank Summit were as follows: the informative and lobbying campaign of the NGOs; the informative and direct action mobilisation of the Stop IMF! platform, small actions organised by the Federation of Social Anarchists (a small section of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers Association) who didn't want to join INPEG; small protests organised by other individuals or small groups of various political orientations;

and finally INPEG who organised the biggest mobilisation.

## THE CHARACTER OF INPEG

In spring 2000 we agreed on the character of INPEG. Firstly we decided not to register it at the Interior Ministry which is a thing that every official organisation has to do. The base of the organisation were the working groups which included Technical, Media, Health, Outreach, Street Actions, Financial, Borders, and others. The activities of each group were periodically presented to the other groups during general meetings. The structure was non-hierarchical and we agreed to make decisions by consensus which resulted in some very long discussions. All of the meetings were held in Prague, meaning that people from other places wanting to get involved either ended up travelling a lot or moving to Prague.

A thing that is not often mentioned but was very important, particularly given the local Czech conditions, was the question of money. We decided to apply for funding from some projects and small foundations (Dutch XminY and Alert) and founded a fake NGO called Spolecnost 2000 (Society 2000) for this purpose. For the rest we decided to ask for donations from the international community as we did not want to get money from any big foundation or organisation that could have been supported by multinational companies or financial institutions. And the result was amazing! All in all, we spent around 1.3 million Czech Crowns (CZK) on the mobilisation (a little over 40,000 Euro) and the majority we got from small donations from all over the world!

A very controversial thing from the beginning was the question of violence. On one side there was the fact that we felt a very strong pressure from the mass media and also knew the opinion of the majority of the Czech public which is strongly against any kind of violence. On the other side, not many of us had ethical problems with violence against property but the position on violence against humans or the question

of the level of self-defence was not really clear. So we decided to write down a statement which said that INPEG will not initiate any kind of violence (this was later misunderstood - nobody was criticising active self-defence). We also officially declared our plans for the non-violent blockade of the Congress Centre where the Summit was to be held.

## INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPANTS AND VOLUNTEERS

The Czech movement (despite receiving help from Slovak comrades) was, and remains, comparatively small. After some time we realised that it was simply too much work for the (approximately) 30 Czechs involved with INPEG, so we asked internationals for help. Our first volunteers came in spring 2000 and were from Britain and Norway. There were some initial difficulties with translation from Czech to English, but this problem was dealt with as time went on. The collaboration with internationals was very instructive for us. It was also important to show the Czech public that we were organising ourselves on an international level - there had never been a protest joined by internationals before in our country.

The first very interesting thing was the comparison between Czech and international female activists. I had had the feeling for a couple of years that most of the Czech females weren't very enterprising and independent and a lot of Czech males didn't mind this situation. In INPEG there weren't many Czech women or girls who had been involved for very long - most of them had become active in the last few months or weeks and they were in the Medical group. I think this was a very typical kind of work they were doing at that time (cooking, health care) - whilst very few (or more accurately, none) of them were involved in the Financial, Technical, Street Actions, or Borders groups. The international females were quite the opposite: very energetic, active, self-confident and independent.

The nearer S26 got, the more internationals came, and the communication between them and the Czechs got worse - some of them didn't meet any Czech people in the first days they were here and wondered where we had disappeared to. One problem encountered at the INPEG offices was that the internationals couldn't do any telephone calls and other stuff when Czechs weren't working there. The

problem was that we were overloaded not only with INPEG work but also had to go to school or university, had jobs or had to take care of our families. So the internationals co-ordinated on their own, took care of the newcomers and mostly lived their own lives. The situation got a little bit better at the action camp in the beginning of September when a lot of us got drunk together, fell in love with each other and did a lot of crazy things - but it wasn't the solution.

The question very often asked by internationals was whether the actions they were planning were suitable for the Czech situation. I was very impressed at the international meetings for example by the Italian White Overalls (Tute Bianche), who told us a lot about how they organised actions in their country, and we agreed upon actions in a way that was acceptable for both sides. In general, it was nice to work with these international groups who took part in the international meetings before S26 because they respected the Czech point of view. However, there were a lot of internationals (and some Czechs too) who didn't participate in preparing the actions but took part in rioting on the blue march and the window smashing in the evening. These people didn't take responsibility for anything and hadn't spent over a year working on the mobilisation. Later they just went back home and left the INPEG people on their own with all the problems that resulted from the violence: negative public perception, police harassment (but this wasn't too bad), attacks by media, death threats, verbal and sometimes physical attacks on INPEG spokespeople on the streets etc.

An interesting point was a man called Jan Urban (a former dissident and politician) who somehow appeared in June and said he wanted to help us. A lot of Czech people didn't have a good feeling about him. Nobody knew where he came from or what exactly he wanted. So the Czechs agreed to stop communicating with him but he was very aggressive about being in contact with INPEG or anybody who was involved in the September actions, and started to develop international contacts. The internationals didn't know about him and some of them started to negotiate with him (he offered some office space and things like that) and didn't tell the Czechs. Later we got some indications that he worked for the Interior Ministry and we are sure that one of his aims was to push us into a position where we only organised symbolic protests.

## WHAT DID THE MOBILISATION LOOK LIKE?

The INPEG mobilisation did not only consist of S26, and the whole campaign was much more than just one big mass protest. Our work was divided into two parts: outreach and direct action on the streets. We planned to organise an Art of Resistance Festival too, but this finally failed. Apart from this, INPEG organised a solidarity demonstration with the protests against the IMF in Washington in April 2000. There were also some accompanying actions organised in the spring, not exclusively by INPEG but by some of its members or sympathising groups (e.g. anarchist Mayday and street parties).

The informative part of the campaign started in late spring. We published the newspaper *Kontrast* (sporadically before, and daily during the protests), created a website and printed thousands of fliers, stickers and posters. Every group involved in INPEG could also print its own material about the IMF and World Bank. A very important part of the campaign were the discussions at cultural events (such as alternative music concerts) or at universities and secondary schools. We tried to create a counterbalance to the brainwashing campaign the Czech Interior Ministry started, but of course our activities were limited by money, people and possible places where we were allowed to speak. The finale of all of this was the alternative counter-summit a couple of days before the financial summit. It took place in cinemas and houses of culture in Prague and we invited a lot of speakers from various continents. The counter-summit was attended by hundreds of people.

From the beginning there was a very complicated relationship with the media that was being fed information by the police, the Interior Ministry and politicians. One of the main arguments used against us to convince the public of our aggressiveness and violence was, of course, Seattle. On the other hand some politicians and also the leader of the biggest trade union officially spoke out for the right to protest (but only peacefully). We also won a law suit when one of our demonstrations was banned, but we wanted to show that we didn't only demonstrate and so we organised a series of small creative happenings which were accepted quite well. After some months we found a couple of journalists that wrote in a positive way about the protesters and

sometimes also added information about why we were protesting. In general, the articles became a little bit more positive. But everything changed after S26, as the typical media hysteria started and the reality of S26 got lost.

Two days before S26 we organised one smaller demonstration, and one day previous to this, an anti-fascist demonstration organised by the Anti-Fascist Action also took place. The international day of action was set for September 26th, the opening day of the Summit. I don't want to go into too much detail here about what exactly took place as I think there has already been a lot written about it. However, just to summarise: in the morning of S26 about 12,000 people came to the Namesti Miru square to gather for a colourful carnival and to listen to some speeches. I guess that at least two thirds of the protesters were international. After noon we split into four marches: yellow led by the Italian White Overalls, pink made up of socialists, a pink-silver carnival march and the blue one with the most radical participants. The blue march was more or less anarchist, but I think I don't have to point out that this is not the reason why it became the 'violent march'.

The results of S26 in numbers were as follows: Doctors attended to 123 policemen and 142 protesters, INPEG medical volunteers gave basic help to 350-400 people at the streets, 30 of them were seriously injured and sent to hospital. During the protests there were 859 people arrested, 330 of them were internationals. The violence in the police stations was the most massive and brutal since 1989. Interestingly, it was only internationals who were attacked in custody - they were then kicked out of the country immediately after release so that they couldn't lodge complaints. I don't know of any Czech protesters being injured in police custody during the Summit. Straight after the protests, 20 people were charged with participating in riots, destroying property or attacking policemen, 18 of them internationals and two Czechs. In the days after S26, solidarity demonstrations for the imprisoned people took place in Berlin, Dresden, Stockholm, Paris, Madrid, Vienna, London, Rome, Milan, Barcelona, Oslo, Bratislava and other international cities and, of course, in Prague too. The Czech police had been allocated 89 million CZK (3 million Euro) for the operation around the Summit. The former Interior Minister Stanislav Gross



Police defend all routes to the Conference Centre

later said he believed he had used the money efficiently and dismissed complaints about police brutality as a conspiracy of mostly international "extremists".

### THE THINGS WHICH WORKED, AND THOSE THAT DID NOT...

In general, the mobilisation was a success. One obvious reason for this is the fact that the Summit was ended a day earlier than planned, and the protests were at least one of the reasons why. We also received a lot of media attention, and even though it was mostly negative, we were able to pass on basic information to the Czech public, i.e. that the IMF and World Bank exist, and that there are a lot of people in the world who don't agree with what they are doing. Neither of these institutions were well known in the Czech Republic before S26. The issue of economic globalisation had been brought to peoples' attention - of course, the mass media were more of a problem than a useful tool, but that's another discussion. S26 was the biggest protest action of its type in the Czech Republic, and 12,000 people on a demonstration is, for our conditions, a really big turn out. The mobilisation really helped the progress of the Czech and Slovak movements.

So what worked well? We organised a big and colourful protest action and a very good informative campaign. We were able to invite a lot of interesting people to the counter-summit. A lot of new connections and relations were created both on the local and international level. But a lot of mistakes were made too.

First, the people from Socialisticka Solidarita together with their international comrades broke their promise and did not act according to the plan of the four marches and instead of joining the pink march, they

joined the yellow march, which resulted in a very strong yellow march (maybe 6,000 people) and a weak pink one (maybe some hundreds of people). This led to an incomplete blockade of the Congress Centre. They were also very active in the INPEG outreach working group and used this to send their own propaganda material to people who contacted INPEG.

We knew that the most radical people would join the blue march, but we didn't expect that level of violence. Some of the violence seemed not to make sense from a strategic point of view and later became an excuse for the police brutality which followed. Because of this INPEG distanced itself from this violence which was later criticised by many internationals.

We also weren't able to mobilise a large number of Czech participants for several reasons. Firstly, it was difficult to illustrate the negative impacts of the IMF/WB policies as there are barely any concrete projects led by these two institutions in the Czech Republic. Secondly, the idea that only two alternatives exist, Bolshevism or capitalism, is widespread in the Czech Republic and capitalism is, of course, preferred. We weren't able to address these issues properly. One has also to keep in mind that the culture of protest is quite new in our country and that people simply aren't used to going on to the streets to demonstrate their opinion.

Apart from some details, we learned three main lessons. First, to deal with the violence question before the protests more carefully, and to be more careful about what we tell the media. Some people have begun to argue for a boycott of the media during protests - simply to refuse to have any contact with them. Second, some people showed a quite strong dislike for working with any Marxists/Trotskyists/Bolsheviks again, and third, we should have thought more about a strategy for after

the day of action - all our plans and thoughts ended with S26 and we didn't think about how to deal with the consequences.

We also missed the chance to discuss deeply the issue of Bolshevism, Trotskyism and Marxism. Some Czechs started to do this in the spring but as we had a lot of other things to do and some internationals argued that they didn't want to split the movement, we didn't continue with it. I regret this a lot as we weren't able, for example, (as it hadn't been agreed upon before) to officially ask the Turkish Bolsheviks to take down their banners at the S26 demonstration. They were carrying 'hammer and sickle' flags, which is totally unacceptable, not only for Czech anti-authoritarians but also for the public who still remember 40 years of Bolshevik totalitarianism.

The last few days before S26 were very chaotic - we weren't able to meet regularly and circulate information properly, leading to a lot of mistakes and misunderstandings. I think this is a problem that we have to think about and have to try to be prepared for when mobilising, but it can't be avoided altogether.

## THE CZECH MOVEMENT AFTER PRAGUE 2000

INPEG was originally meant to be a temporary platform serving only for the organisation of the Prague 2000 mobilisation but later some voices appeared that wanted to keep it working for other future activities. Some weeks after S26, representatives of the Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation came with the demand that Socialistická Solidarita should leave INPEG because of the above mentioned reasons. A very long discussion started, without coming to any clear conclusions, and INPEG stopped any kind of activity just a couple of weeks later.

After we did the accountancy of INPEG's expenditures, we realised that about 200,000 CZK (6,700 Euro) were left and decided to give it to the Infocafe Krtkova Kolona which was being founded at that time in Prague and needed money for repairs.

This Infocafe is still working and although it is not attended by the public very much (for various reasons) it has become an important place where meetings can be held and various workshops and preparations for actions can be done. Another thing that is a direct result of the mobilisation is Prague Indymedia which was started in

summer 2000 and still continues its work.

I think the public perception of the anarchist, anti-authoritarian or so-called anti-globalisation movement got worse after S26. Although this was the result of the media hysteria which totally changed the reality of S26, to be honest I think it was just a little bit too much violence for Czech conditions. But one has also to distinguish between Prague citizens and the rest of the Czech people who weren't directly affected and were later much more tolerant. This is one of the reasons why we did the NATO mobilisation in 2002 in quite a different way.

The violence became an excuse for introducing new laws to deal with public meetings and protests. Since September 2000, there haven't been any riots involving the radical left. Some politicians wanted to allow the police to use rubber bullets against protesters, but this was eventually rejected. In November 2000, the Ladronka squat in Prague was evicted. It was the oldest Czech squat and the municipal authorities mentioned the participation of squatters in the violent protests against the IMF/WB as one of the reasons for the eviction.

The Prague 2000 mobilisation had a big influence on the Czech and Slovak anarchist and anti-authoritarian movements. We learned how to organise a big and diverse campaign, practised direct democracy, got a lot of international and local contacts, are travelling much more now and were inspired by the creativity of the internationals (banners, puppets, music etc. at demonstrations). The positive effect was more qualitative than quantitative (the movement did not get significantly bigger).

One of the most important lasting impacts of the Summit mobilisation is, in my opinion, the encouragement of Czech and Slovak girls and women to participate more actively in the movement. The number of active women has risen quite a lot in the last four years, and the issues of anarcho-feminism, sexism and even machismo within the movement itself have started to be discussed. We now have an anarcho-feminist group in Prague doing really good activities. I think it was because of the high number of international female activists we met during the IMF/WB actions who could have served as some kind of role models for us.

In 2002 we had the NATO mobilisation and, as mentioned above, it was quite

different from the IMF/WB one. In the biggest demonstration we had about 2,000 people, but seeing as the majority of them were Czech, it was also a success. Especially considering the huge police and media intimidation campaign that lasted for about half a year. We also did not want to gather as many people as possible (we asked internationals for solidarity actions in their own countries instead of all of them coming to Prague) and rather focused on the informative part of the campaign. We had several reasons for all of this: the intimidation campaign was incredibly intense; we knew that a lot of internationals were simply afraid of the Czech police (which we could totally understand); we did not have the energy and money for a second S26; we were a little bit sceptical about the trend of 'action-hopping' and wanted to decentralise it as much as possible; and finally we didn't want to do the thing that everybody was expecting us to do. We kept everything 100% peaceful and at the main demonstration we gave a present to the Czech police. It was a big paper tank with a broken muzzle and after this we just collectively laughed at the police and left. It was a really good feeling.

Prague 2000 meant a lot for the development of our movement and I think I have presented some examples of that. But I also have to be critical and say that the Czech movement could have learned more lessons. It is mostly the fact that we aren't able to organise any kind of long-term campaign when we are not pushed by a financial or military summit which I find disappointing. This was the case before 2000 and remains the case today. We are doing a lot of things, but there is no continuity.

So what to say at the end? Despite the amount of problems and disappointments, the summer of 2000 was just amazing!

## RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

*Do or Die* Issue 9 pp.1-21. See: [www.eco-action.org/dod/](http://www.eco-action.org/dod/)

Film: *Crowd Bites Wolf* by Guerrilla Vision (December 2000). Available from: [www.cultureshop.org](http://www.cultureshop.org)

Film: *Love, Peace and Petrol Bombs* by AK Kraak (October 2000): <http://akkraak.squat.net>

A collection of reports from the Working Groups involved in the Prague 2000 mobilisation can be found under: [www.travatools.com/takdem/takdem.htm](http://www.travatools.com/takdem/takdem.htm)