



# WE WILL DISRUPT THIS CONFERENCE!

## Resistance to the 1988 IMF and World Bank Conference in West Berlin



**I**n Germany, mass protests against meetings of the international elite date back to 1985, when the G7 was held in Bonn, West Germany's capital. The forms of protest used there were remarkably similar to those used 15 years later: the radical left organised 'action days', there was a counter-conference, and a big demonstration with 30,000 participants, with smaller events in other cities.

For the autonomists, however, the campaign against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Meeting in West Berlin in September 1988 was to have far greater meaning.

The mobilisation lasted three years and attempted to combine mass militancy with clandestine actions, to formulate and express radical analyses, to bring different tendencies within the radical left together, to interact with the broader left and to publicly oppose all that the Conference stood for.

Here's what happened...

### HOW IT ALL BEGAN

+++1985: The IMF and the World Bank decide to hold their 1988 autumn

Meeting in West Berlin. The city government and the media are ecstatic: tens of thousands of Summit visitors and journalists will come to the city. A tourism boom is expected. The city hopes to be put back in the spotlight as an international metropolis.+++

The autonomists' attitude was somewhat different. With more than 10,000 Conference visitors and journalists scattered across the city in hundreds of hotels, driven through countless streets to the Conference Centre and the official events, there were so many targets! We knew that the powerful would not be able to keep the 'security problem' under control. The more effort they made in advance, the more politically embarrassed they would be afterwards. And at the same time, the more they downplayed the threat we represented, the greater the danger that they would lose control of the Conference.

A few days after the Summit was announced, groups in West Berlin began to voice their opposition. The Berlin Alternative List (a part of the then-radical Green Party), peace activists and left wing union branches criticised the

politics of the IMF and planned an official counter-programme. Two small groups from the autonomous scene in Berlin were also quick to respond; one was active against the G7 Meeting in Bonn and wanted to combine theory (including being openly critical of the traditional left) with practice, whilst the other hoped to strengthen the radical left by building a well thought out, long-term campaign.

The majority of autonomists who knew about the mobilisation continued at this stage to focus on the day-to-day projects they were involved in, and found it somewhat strange to begin organising three years in advance of an event.

Eventually, as people from the most diverse tendencies within the radical left sat together at the same table, the autonomous campaign against the Conference began to develop a character. Differences in priorities emerged as soon as the direction and purpose of the campaign began to be discussed. One group wanted to physically prevent the Conference from taking place, by building effective resistance throughout the mobilisation. The second regarded this as 'illusory action-ism' and placed more importance upon the development of theoretical discussions. [Note: three of the authors of this article were part of the 'activist tendency'; as a result this aspect is given far more weight here].

A second point of conflict was the possibility of working with 'reformists'. Whilst the 'activist' tendency prioritised organising effectively amongst the autonomists, they also sought dialogue with the broader opposition to the Summit. The 'theoretical' tendency, however, condemned this as ideologically dubious coalition-building.

The differences were clear at the National Conference of Development-Politics Action Groups (BUKO). It brought together very different groups (fair trade groups, faith-based solidarity groups and more practical campaign groups) and had become more radical over the preceding years. The days of action against the IMF and World Bank were among the items on the agenda. Representatives of the Alternative List/Green Party were heavily involved and pushed their agenda: campaigning



for debt relief for the poorest nations and reform of the IMF through increased involvement of poor countries, and organising a big, peaceful rally and counter-conference to the Summit.

BUKO brought to light a major point of conflict among the Berlin autonomists: should they use the conference to put forth their position - that the IMF and World Bank can't be reformed, and should be attacked, because it's not about peaceful protest, but actively disrupting the capitalist spectacle? Or would attendance at the conference just amount to an attempt at currying favour with the reformists?

In the end a small group of autonomists took on communication with the BUKO people, who confirmed that they were preparing to mobilise in West Berlin and would call for people to take part in the autonomists' actions. The autonomists were also invited to take part in their mobilising conference. The issue of coalition-building with BUKO always remained a point of contention amongst the autonomists.

The shape of the mobilisation eventually emerged from discussions about objectives, content and forms of action. The decision was summarised by the slogan, "We will disrupt this Conference!" and was signed, "Autonomous Groups of West Berlin". The slogan was adopted by all the autonomous groups and used from this point on.

In March 1987, the newsletter, *Unzertrennlich #4* announced, "In September they're all coming here - the financial bosses of the capitalist core from Tokyo to Frankfurt to New York... executives from the headquarters of multinationals such as Toyota, Lockheed-Martin, and Siemens along with ministers, Secretaries of State, 'experts', journalists and their observers. More than 14,000 of them will be here for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Conference. For a few days, Berlin will be recognised in the eyes of the world as a symbol of capitalist imperialism. All hotels will be fully booked; streets and entire sections of the city will be blocked off. Berlin will be rebuilt in the name of 'security'. The message is clear: those responsible for hunger, profit, terror and war throughout the entire world are coming to this 'capital of the free world'. To this, we object. Our suggestion: Disrupt the Conference!"

The spectrum of those involved was becoming broader and broader. Activists from numerous women and lesbian groups - who had until then viewed anti-

capitalist politics as conflicting with campaigns against patriarchy - joined in. [Translator's note: There is a tradition of women's groups within the German radical left describing themselves as 'women and lesbian' in response to the fact that many lesbians felt marginalised and not visible enough within women's organisations]. The anti-IMF group at the Latin America Centre (LAZ) also became very active, and a regular co-ordination meeting was organised. An important objective had been achieved: Despite all the differences, a core of autonomist groups was now actively involved in the campaign.

## PREPARATION

'The other side' offered an important contribution: Hans Klein, the CSU (Conservative) National Development Minister, warned that BUKO were preparing a campaign to disrupt the Summit and were "announcing violence, even if in a restricted way. The recently freed potential from the struggles at the fiercely defended Hafenstrasse squat, Runway West [a camp squatting land to prevent a runway being built at Frankfurt Airport] and the nuclear processing plant Wackersdorf [the target of a series of big, very militant, demonstrations] is being exposed to a new terrain of action."

This was extremely encouraging. From that point on, on top of regular co-ordinating meetings, private discussions were being held around the kitchen tables of communal houses. The campaign slowly began to establish itself, and not just in West Berlin...

Anti-IMF/World Bank groups were formed in cities across Germany, attempting to build links with local projects, groups and structures. This was not a smooth process. When all these groups met for the first time quarrels developed between 'newcomers' and 'old-timers', and between Berlin groups and those from West Germany. These were added to the existing divisions between 'theoretical' and 'activist', and between 'anti-capitalist' and 'anti-patriarchal', tendencies within the movement. Despite this, the campaign continued to develop, with a fair bit of interest being expressed at the Libertarian Days Conference in Frankfurt in April 1987. The IMF/World Bank Conference, however, was still just one issue amongst many.

In West Berlin, in the early summer of 1987, two events demonstrated the movement's strength and made a large

mobilisation against the Summit by the autonomous left seem much more likely - the May Day uprising, and Reagan's June visit.

The May Day uprising created an atmosphere of rebellion, as well as a police response: an 'anti-thug unit' was established and armoured cars were deployed on the streets. When Reagan visited, the police laid siege to Kreuzberg - the heart of West Berlin's squatting district and radical left scene - creating an unprecedented level of solidarity from the rest of Kreuzberg's (mostly working class) residents towards the autonomists. A few weeks earlier the anti-nuclear movement - in which a lot of autonomists were involved - successfully held a large illegal demonstration against Siemens, KWU and the Deutsche Bank on Berlin's Ku'damm - the city's major high-end shopping street.

The attendance of Berlin autonomists at the BUKO conference in Fulda in May 1987 was, by this point, no longer causing conflicts within the radical left. Some still thought it unnecessary, but were no longer worried about false alliances being built - the differences between the autonomists and 'the reformists' had become clear enough.

Within BUKO there were two equally strong factions. One believed that the organisation should adopt a reformist position, so as not to endanger funding from churches and other institutions, and the other thought it necessary to follow up their criticisms of the World Bank with action on the streets. BUKO finally decided to support not only the





big demonstration and counter-conference, but also the autonomist days of action.

## THE CAMPAIGN TAKES SHAPE

The main goals of the mobilisation became clear soon after the BUKO meeting. The heads of the large NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] and church organisations were planning a big, peaceful, demonstration before the Conference started, and organising a counter-conference. The grassroots activists from these organisations were planning their own protests during the Conference, parallel to the autonomists' days of action. The autonomists also were planning a large, militant demonstration to mark the end of the Summit.

The bottom line of the autonomists' position was finally clear: there would be no official linking up with reformist organisations, but co-ordination would be possible with everyone interested in

taking action during the Conference. A framework for the days of action was drafted by a small co-ordination group within which there were no party or organisation leaders, just autonomists and grassroots activists - and a few who refused to be classified as either 'autonomist' or 'reformist'.

One sign of 'unity' within the campaign appeared when the Rote Zora, a women's guerrilla group, carried out arson attacks at the HQ of Adler and eight of its other buildings. Adler were targeted as an act of solidarity with striking workers in their South Korean factories. The communiqué referred directly to the IMF/World Bank campaign. The autonomists saw the action as an example of an action form worth repeating, and, surprisingly, there were none of the usual condemnations by the reformists!

Rifts between the mixed autonomist meeting and the women's group become increasingly obvious. The women's group concentrated on three issues: government policies on population, genetics and the development of patriarchy, as well as issues to do with the daily experiences in social and 'private' relationships of those within the left. Essentially, debate within the women's group was focussed on whether mixed political work and organisation is possible (or desirable), or whether women need instead to organise themselves without (and against) men, even when the political issues involved aren't directly based around conflict between the sexes. In the summer of 1987 the big split came: the women left the IMF meeting.

The division of the IMF campaign really got tongues wagging. Everybody had something to say, and the whole scene became involved. It wasn't just

about boring issues like Bretton Woods anymore. Whilst the 'theory group' and the men's group had had big plans for formulating analyses, they only managed to publish a few 'concepts' by the time the IMF arrived. The women, however, published a pamphlet called, *Attempts to Become Reality: Without Us Women, Nothing Goes*. It read, "Our position on how imperialism and patriarchy are linked has only been outlined in the course of our discussions... There's no less incentive in the metropolis for the class struggle, for ongoing resistance to capital, whose attacks reach to every last corner of society, than in the so-called Third World. This could only mean to us women that we need to organise and build resistance to capitalism's attack on women, on the female labour potential, their submission in their role of reproducing the commodity of labour. The subjugation of women is the material basis for the exploitation of labour. Wage labour is not possible without the unpaid reproductive work of us women, considered an individual matter and hardly recognised by leftist theories. In this sense, the anti-patriarchal struggle is not part of the anti-imperialist struggle, but its starting point. That is to say, class struggle is only anti-imperialist in our definition if it understands itself as anti-patriarchal at its core." They illustrated the significance of the split: "Because of this issue, the West Berlin meeting divided into a women's and men's meeting a year ago. Our group was not only divided over theory, but also in the reality of our discussions. [...] Their [the men's] inability to listen to women, to be interested in their point of view and to follow their thought processes leads to us always being forced to see the men's ideas and theories and help them develop them with our questions and objections, but not to develop our own ideas. This is what we call exploitation. That we haven't withdrawn ourselves as women, but realised a split into a women-only and men's meeting was an important step for us, because this shows that theories developed by men always will only be male theories." The pamphlet continued, "Women are neither as patient or powerless as they are presented in many analyses. We are convinced that the main strategies that are currently being examined within the IMF campaign are shaped significantly by the fact that they will have to react to forms of women's resistance, whether invisible (or perceived to be

## AUTONOMOUS DIVORCE

The last straw was one man's lengthy paper, which strongly emphasised the classical Leninist-Trotskyist position of the central role of the proletariat (always thought of as male) in the revolutionary movement. The women felt their criticisms were being ignored in two ways: In the preceding months there had actually been a consensus that the critique of the patriarchal structure of society would take a central position in the IMF campaign. Also, the behaviour of us men in discussions corresponded exactly with the women's critique of male-dominated culture. The women were fed up with our hypocrisy and established a women's meeting.

At first we men were pretty much at a loss. But time was pressing on. We just had to get on with it. So I found myself in a men's group, although I had never been interested in being in a men's group. It was interesting that men and women met up for chats in the pub after the meetings. This was important, because at the time, there were no other 'official' meetings in which both groups could exchange information on how the preparations were going. What seemed from the outside to be a huge argument between women and men seemed a lot less vehement from within.



invisible) or open.” This is evident throughout the pamphlet. “We have tried to draw up the different areas of society, from genetics and population policies to sex tourism and immigration politics, through to the worldwide restructuring of capital, in which women’s struggles against our submission and exploitation are played out. We ourselves still do this too much, with the view that women are the eternal victims. This is because it’s difficult to liberate female subjectivity from the domination of patriarchal theories, and this is an important part of our struggle.”

An attempt at international networking began in late 1987. There was a meeting in Zurich with representatives of seven liberation movements from South and Central America and the Philippines. Meanwhile, there were also mobilisation tours in Italy, Spain and Greece. People from Holland and Denmark kept up-to-date personally with visits to West Berlin. Groups from across Europe were definitely planning on travelling to West Berlin for the Summit. Movement meetings and newsletters began including discussions and information about the IMF campaign - there were even contacts formed in East Berlin.

Despite a none-too-encouraging political climate created by repression (following a series of Rote Zora bombings), the autonomists’ militant campaign against the IMF kicked off in April 1988 with arson attacks on six banks (and three more having their windows broken) in a single night.

Meanwhile, a more public mobilisation also took place with an anti-imperialist tour of the ‘centres of domination’ in West Berlin. The tour, organised by autonomists, visited factories, corporate stores and institutions seen to ‘organise and profit from exploitation worldwide’. The bus trip was forbidden, and was accompanied and disrupted by the cops. It got a huge amount of publicity. Altogether, 20 anti-imperialist tours were organised in the run-up to the Conference, with over 1,000 people taking part.

The *TAZ*, a liberal newspaper, planned to organise its own conference in spring 1988, inviting both critics and representatives of the IMF and World Bank. After threats from the autonomists, the conference was eventually cancelled.

As the Summit approached, fears began to grow, as did a spirit of defiance! People began warning about the dangers of escalating conflicts, warning that a defeat would divide the

movement and that ‘they’ would close down everything, attack actions and demonstrations, forbid everything and arrest everybody if people stuck to the slogan “Disrupt this Conference!”. The on-going court cases and

persecution of those accused of being involved with Rote Zora and Revolutionary Cells (another guerrilla group) added to the atmosphere of fear. Some people even rescheduled their summer holidays for the autumn, so as not to have to witness the defeat.

+++4th May 1988, the national daily newspaper *Die Welt* runs the headline: “Terrorists threaten a massacre in Berlin.” The article quotes the head of the National Crime Authority as saying, “Terrorists are joining up with autonomists and non-aligned groups to commit acts of violence during the IMF and World Bank Conference in West Berlin in September.” The Senator of Berlin commented in the article that the cops are faced with their “most difficult task since the war” in protecting the 10,000 delegates, and that the entire borough of Kreuzberg would, “if needed” be sealed off from the rest of the city. The Senator declares that he will have “solved the autonomist problem” by September.+++

The *Interim*, a Berlin-based weekly paper which published movement discussion documents, commentary and flyers, carried an article titled, ‘On the Current State of the IMF Campaign’. It commented, “In the campaign against the IMF and World Bank a new form is developing: In both main tendencies - the reformists and the radical left - an alliance is rejected because theoretical as well as practical differences forbid this. At the same time - and this is remarkably new - both parties are pointing to the danger of the shared opponent distracting us by making the differences between reformists and the radical left the main issue. From this, the practical conclusion has been made that there will be exchanges of information on the campaign, and a ‘schedule’... which has found approval in both camps. The first rule is: False common interests weaken us, blur things and benefit the opponent - this is why they should be separated by space,



Demonstrators gather outside the Conference Centre

time and form of action... The forms of action will not be limited in a one-dimensional way: The radical left will participate in the legal, non-violent resistance where and when they feel it makes sense, and also many ‘reformist groups’ will not desist from examining the legitimacy of police and state measures on their own initiative. This highly charged mix of very different actions - legal, but also unwanted, mass actions down to illegal small actions - is to increase in effectiveness and disruption until the Conference ends... the radical left claims... to demonstrate that resistance to imperialism is more worth acknowledging and reporting in the metropolis of capital, than the hypocritical declarations of the IMF and World Bank.”

+++26th June 1988: On the pretext of searching for the Red Army Faction [West Germany’s most well-known urban guerrillas] the cops set up three ‘Special Control Points’, to check people’s IDs and carry out searches. It is obvious to everyone that these points are part of the state’s preparation for the Conference.+++

The autonomists hoped that the mobilisation would be broad enough, and the range of potential targets large enough, that the cops wouldn’t be able to prevent actions from taking place by shutting down certain parts of the city. Nevertheless, the situation was prepared for. A statement was issued, explaining, “For everybody to have unhindered freedom of movement during the Summit, we are calling for everyone to quickly get themselves smart clothes and maybe even second homes.”

Militant actions really got going in the last few months before the Conference. One day in June, all Metro travel was declared ‘free’ and ticket machines and ticket sales offices were glued shut at 11 Metro stations. In July, five Shell garages were attacked in one night.



By early summer, 1988, both the women's and the men's groups were suffering from internal problems so serious that they were barely capable of organising the infrastructure for the actions. It became increasingly clear that those 'responsible' for the campaign would not get much together

## PARANOIA AND 'THE SILENT MEETING'

Activists were strangely hesitant to get down to preparing concrete actions. In hindsight, it seems that the intensive discussion around the issues for the days of action was just an expression of an attempt to hide the fear of carrying out actions. Throughout the spring of 1988, the media created a lot of hype about the actions, and people felt very threatened by repression, but nobody felt able to talk about these fears. This all came to a climax in what became known as 'The Silent Meeting'.

The meeting was held in a community hall which was full to the brim and was supposed to be an opportunity to discuss action ideas - but nobody from the preparation groups was willing to present the concept. After a while, everyone left. It was more than de-mobilising, it was a catastrophe. It was amazing how intimidating the repression of the rulers could be for us. For me, it was clear from the start: we were risking quite a lot, we could go to prison. But we had so much to win, so much strength and personality. We could show that the world was still changeable - and that's worth a few years in prison. Our mistake was never speaking about our fears and doubts in a larger circle and never making this an issue that we dealt with.

themselves. In response, a lot more people began to take on responsibilities, freeing up those who had been involved for longer to start preparing what they were personally going to do.

As the Conference drew closer, preparations became more intensive, and

more people began taking on tasks, initiating discussions and (finally) forming action groups. In one large meeting a framework was developed for carrying out the days of action, organising sleeping spaces, an information and news systems, a legal team, autonomous first-aiders and people to keep an eye on the movements of the cops. The whole lengthy, lethargic preparation process was over.

In August there was an arson attack on the villa of a banker who was involved in the PR department of a credit institution's development sector. The communiqué was signed, "Committee for a Flaming Resistance to the IMF/World Bank Conference".

+++11th August 1988: Using anti-terrorist legislation, a state of emergency is declared in West Berlin for the period surrounding the IMF and World Bank Conference.+++

A few days after this, a clandestine group visited a West Berlin hotel planning on hosting delegates. They spray painted the walls, cut the phone lines and poured oil over the furniture. Reformist groups were questioned by the media about the actions, and were asked to distance themselves from autonomists and 'terrorist actions'. They explained (as agreed): "Every group is responsible for choosing and justifying their own form of resistance themselves."

In mid-August, rumours abounded that representatives of the city of Berlin and the IMF/World Bank were discussing re-locating to Tokyo at short notice, if resistance to the Summit proved to be too strong. Meanwhile, the head of the National Crime Department commissioned from the secret services a list of 'travelling, violent offenders' to be stopped on their way to West Berlin, and a series of raids was carried out

across Germany on the pretext of searching for the Red Army Faction, and those involved in the IMF campaign.

+++East Berlin: Nothing is to be read about the IMF and World Bank Conference in the East German media. Especially nothing about East Germany's support for the bankers meeting in West Berlin. Both Interhotels in East Berlin, and the newly opened Grand Hotel, are fully booked. Representatives of international banks did this on their own initiative. Luxury limousines are to take these men to the Conference Centre in West Berlin every day.+++

By the time September '88 arrives there was a lot of preparation going on. The counter-conference was prepared, with high-profile scientists invited. The peaceful mass demonstration taking place the day before the Conference got widespread support, and the majority of the autonomists agreed to join under the agreed principle of 'no different forms of action at the same time and place'.

Grassroots activists formed the 'Office of Unusual Measures' and planned to carry out a large number of public actions and ironic spectacles. Preparation and agitation for the days of action was carried out in close co-ordination with the autonomists.

The closer the date of the Conference got, the more active the militant opponents of the IMF became. On September 5th, 13 company cars belonging to Siemens, and three cars belonging to a car hire company catering to the Conference delegates were set on fire by an autonomous cell. A few days later, nine arson attacks were carried out against banks. More attacks were carried out over the next few days. On September 19th, the offices of the company responsible for laying telephone lines and installing computers at the Conference site were set alight.

The preparation among the autonomists themselves was, however, not unified. Many of the theoretical groups failed to produce their analyses with the practical conclusions for resistance that they'd promised. Some individuals from these groups withdrew altogether, while others got stuck in the practical preparations - especially for the final demonstration.

The groups surrounding the Latin America Centre managed to produce pamphlets and flyers for the mobilisation at the last minute, which would not have been possible without the help of those who had recently become involved. A lot of people were

asking themselves exactly why the years of preparation had been necessary.

On September 20th the Red Army Faction fired a shotgun at the armoured limousine of the Secretary of State. The next day the Senator of Justice claimed that the delegates' security was guaranteed. Nine thousand cops were on duty and all people, hotels, banks and corporations considered to be 'threatened' were either overtly protected or covertly surveilled. The cops in Kreuzberg stepped up searches and relied heavily on evidence gathered by undercover spies who 'fit in' to the scene.

## IT BECOMES SERIOUS

### Friday 23rd September

+++350 detainees in a deportation prison are relocated. According to the police, the free prison cells will now be available for demonstrators during the IMF/World Bank Conference days.+++  
+++The World Bank Committee holds a pre-Conference meeting and decides that it will not be necessary to relocate the Conference to Tokyo.+++

The counter-conference began in the University of Art. The opening event against the Summit, a taxi demonstration, was successful. Many people were nervous about potential arrests, attacks by reactionary colleagues, the seizure of taxis and the like. Despite these worries, more taxis than expected took part.

### Saturday 24th September

The reformists remain active: At 8 am the counter-conference resumes.

10 am: The *Zahltag* newspaper about the Summit mobilisation is distributed across the city. During the days of action there are up to 50,000 up-to-date editions produced every day.

12 noon-8 pm: The BUKO pharmaceuticals campaign bus parks up in a city square and performs street theatre, other theatre groups also take part.

8:30 pm-9 pm: Drummers from across the world meet in the city square for a performance organised by 'The Office for Unusual Measures'. The cops are everywhere, but the drumming provides cover for people, disguised in suits, to create all kinds of chaos.

Meanwhile, in the late-afternoon the autonomists hold a final meeting, where they discuss various kinds of worst-case scenarios. There are rumours of entire parts of the city being sealed off, the mass arrest of anyone who looks 'alternative', and people being preventatively detained. A few people

dress up smart and head off to check out the city. They come back with good news and - at last - the autonomists join the action.

### Sunday 25th September

The pre-Conference demo is one of the biggest in the post-war history of Berlin.

11 am: The march to the Conference Centre begins. The mood is aggressive and 80,000 people are there! The demonstration is colourful and surprisingly militant. The cops hold back, as do the few black-clad demonstrators (in accordance with the no-different-forms-of-action-in-the-same-place-at-the-same-time agreement). Everyone's confidence rises, and even those who were most afraid now find the courage to take part in the up-coming days of action.

8-9 pm: The forbidding of the 'fire-drumming' event doesn't have much effect upon it. Loads of people turn up, and head off to track down and insult Conference delegates, blow whistles in front of hotels and pull faces at people eating in posh restaurants. In a few restaurants, tables are looted and overturned.

In short: The day is a victory!

Meanwhile, on the other side of The Wall: On Sunday evening, around 800 mainly young people occupy a church in East Berlin to put their criticisms of the IMF and World Bank into practice. The East Berlin week of action, organised by autonomous groups and various grassroots church organisations began on the Friday with a benefit concert. On Saturday and Sunday a seminar was held to question the idea of a 'just' world economic order. Representatives of national liberation movements, and experts from the Eastern Bloc were invited. Almost 80 participants discussed the future of capitalist industry and the developing world, the role of the IMF and World Bank, and whether it is possible to 'democratise' the world economic order, or whether it needs to be abolished.

### Monday 26th September

+++The Conference begins.+++

The programme for the next day remains fairly united: The early-risers gather from 7 am in front of the airport and hotels, equipped with all the instruments and costumes imaginable. Throughout the day, prepared and pre-publicised actions and rallies are held, despite an enormous police presence. By night, the Conference delegates and their luxury cars are sought out.

10-12 am: The day's actions begin with rallies in front of HQ of Adler and the ADIA temping agency.

12-4 pm: Anti-nuclear action at Siemens office - "No Energy for the Conference!"

5-6 pm: Actions against sex tourism at travel agents and porn shops.

7 pm: At the same time as the Gala Evening at the German National Opera, an alternative cultural event is organised by 'the anarchists', and more bankers are harassed. Alongside the 'official' actions, groups continue to suddenly appear at banks, sex shops, insurance companies, restaurants and hotels, leaving behind traces of their mood.

+++In the meantime, the Conference delegates and the security forces become nervous. Instead of going to the opera in their luxury cars, they are shipped there - on grounds of security - in their finest clothes, in ordinary buses. They are returned to their hotels amidst a massive police presence. Some delegates, however, still thought it possible to have a look

## TURN OFF THE IMF

Among the many great ideas we had in September 1988 was the plan to cut off the power supply for the IMF Conference. We did have experience in making molotovs and timed explosives, but we weren't too up on Berlin's electricity networks. Of course no one could just go to the electricity companies and ask where the important lines were. But our research beforehand could have been more thorough.

In the end, we were convinced that some principle of circular flow existed: If one junction failed, a second would jump in. So if the ring for the Conference Centre was interrupted at two points - we hoped - the supply would collapse, apart from any backup generators that, of course, probably existed. But just a short flickering of the spotlights in the Conference Centre would have been a nice success.

We found the two nearest transformer stations and tried to set them on fire at the same time. Of course we were quite nervous, as the city was on the highest security alert and there were cops everywhere.

Something didn't seem to work. We never found out what went wrong. Did the ignitions fail? Was the fire not fed enough? Were the fire brigades too quick? Or, is this the best kept secret of the IMF: that the delegates now always go places with candles in their pockets - just in case?





"Whether hippies or punkers, we shit on the bankers"

around the city. The newspapers go wild when outrageous stories hit the headlines, such as the former Japanese Foreign Minister being ripped from his car. Some delegates begin to consider a hasty departure, others suggest that the Conference be cut short.+++

### **Tuesday 27th September**

National day of action against airports. The anti-IMF Women's' Group wants to repeat a successful piece of action theatre. The piece is, however, forbidden due to 'disturbances' the previous night. All the women who attempt to take part are detained, identified and arrested, and - after a long wait - released. To celebrate their release, many of the women take part in the 're-designing' of a travel agency. The Korean Ambassador, who happened to be

visiting the agency at the time, later complained to the Conference organisers and the press about the unfortunate damage done to his expensive suit.

Demos also take place in front of pharmaceutical and insurance companies, and the German Institute for Development. A bicycle action takes place in Neukoeln and Wedding (districts on the outskirts of West Berlin) whilst Latin American Solidarity Groups hold actions in the centre of the city, highlighting the exploitation involved in coffee production, the activities of the Contras in Nicaragua and the power of large landowners.

In the meantime, a huge bike convoy is making its way to the Conference Centre. The cops had barely noticed,

and ended up having to chase the convoy, in full riot gear, on foot. Some bikes were eventually blocked at an intersection by cop vans, but others made it all the way to the Conference Centre!

In the evening: The 'fire drumming' action of previous nights is repeated.

+++ It was now too late to move the Conference, that would have meant 'giving in' to those on the streets. There was also no real option of clearing 'the mob' from the streets through force - that would have been too chaotic. The only solution was to keep the delegates in their hotels, shipping them around the city in secured convoys, and pleading that they keep their criticisms of the organisation of the Conference until the closing meeting.+++

+++ "I'm totally impressed by the other side." said one Berlin cop, ironically. "Their plans are working. Every target that they set themselves, they've achieved." In contrast, the cops were in total chaos.+++

### **Wednesday 28th September**

7 am: Bankers are harassed leaving their hotel, whilst meandering demos visit dole offices, deportation police headquarters and the Stock Exchange. There was chaos across the entire city - and all of it was being documented by the world's media.

In the afternoon, a huge convoy of cars drives through the city looking for bankers, whilst 'ordinarily' dressed people wander around the city with little boxes of matches in their pockets hoping to create as much chaos as they can. They were fairly successful.

Due to the amount going on during the day, very little took place that evening.

### **Thursday 29th September**

This was intended to be the 'highpoint' of the mobilisation.

Early in the morning, numerous routes from the delegates' hotels to the Conference Centre were simultaneously blockaded by barricades of burning cars. Despite delays, however, the Conference eventually gets going.

At 4pm the Berlin cops show the Revolutionary Internationalist Demonstration their military superiority by battering their way into the demonstration using highly trained anti-terrorist police. Despite inflicting a lot of injuries, they aren't able to stop the demo from leaving - and the very intelligent decision to end the demo early meant that the clashes in the city centre planned by the cops were avoided.

## **LET'S GO TO THE OPERA!**

What should you do when you've had nothing to do with the anti-IMF preparation? When you haven't been to any of the hundreds of meetings? When you have no 'insider info'? I decide, with a mate, to go for the decadent option. We spent about £350 each on shoes and a suit and headed off to the Opera!

Outside was a ring of demonstrators and a tight line of cops. The Opera was completely sealed off and nobody was coming in without a ticket. Except for us. Dressed up smart, we explained, helplessly, that my father was inside with tickets and was waiting for us. We had cleared the first hurdle. After that, getting past the second checkpoint was easy. They thought we wouldn't even have gotten there if we didn't have tickets. But the final checkpoint was impossible to get past without actually having a ticket.

What were we to do? We were completely surrounded by cops. We could either start a fight with a yuppie, or start shouting slogans and get kicked out. It looked, for a while, like we weren't going to be able to do anything. It was gutting. Outside everyone was having a laugh, and here we were standing around like idiots.

Then came our saving grace. We spotted the Chief of Police, standing around joking with a group of people. We were off! We mingled into the group, then quickly slapped him on the back of the head. He turned around, but saw nobody but yuppies. As we tried to leave we were stopped just before we reached the last line of cops. The one that grabbed me punched me and threw me against a wall and tried to search me. I was furious, and demanded that he let me go so as I could remove my jacket and stop it getting damaged. Unbelievably, he let me go and apologised. We were arrested and eventually released. We went back to dressing like normal people for the rest of the action days.



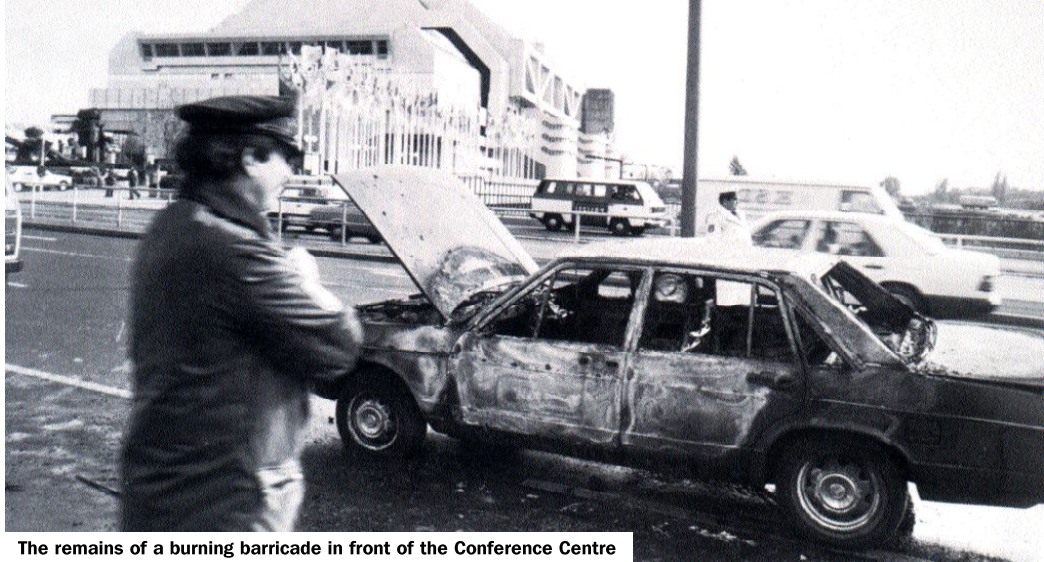
+++The official programme and the boring resolutions were barely mentioned at the IMF and World Bank's closing press conference. The main question addressed was whether or not the next Meeting should be cancelled.+++

## CONCLUSION: THE PITFALLS OF HIGH DEMANDS - OR WHY DID EVERYONE SPLIT UP AFTERWARDS?

+++Altogether there were almost 1,000 arrests during the days of action - all but one were released. Three hundred cop cars and 40 bankers' cars were damaged, and 150 windows broken. In West Berlin alone, police counted 110 arson attacks in 1988 in connection with the IMF Conference. Representatives of the autonomists and anti-imperialists declare that the days of action and Thursday's demonstration were "a complete success", as they managed to "conduct a political and practical attack on the ruling class."+++

+++The TAZ newspaper reports in early October, "There was a debate yesterday in Parliament about the limitation of the freedom to demonstrate and the freedom of the press during the IMF and World Bank Conference in West Berlin. Members of the CDU/CSU and FPD claim that the Green Party and the Alternative List, among others, fabricated a civil war-like situation in West Berlin. The CSU member Zeitlmann said a "dangerous situation" had been created by "the anarchists", that only led to one conclusion: "We had 8,500 soldiers in the city to protect the lives of the 12,000 bankers." The Senator of Berlin justified again the police's handling of the situation."+++

Compared to the broad discussions before the Conference, only a few autonomists participate in the evaluation of the campaign. There is consensus on considering the days of action as a success. An activist writes in the *Interim* of October 7th, 1988: "If we are talking about success, we must ask ourselves what our goal was. We didn't prevent the IMF Conference. That was 'successfully' held. The actual prevention wouldn't have been possible short of a people's uprising. Of course we knew this beforehand. But we did succeed in attacking the IMF and World Bank... We saw scenes taking place here in West Berlin that we previously only had seen on TV when US State dignitaries visited Latin America. It was



The remains of a burning barricade in front of the Conference Centre

reported in *El Pais*, the most important Spanish daily newspaper, that "the city collapsed" on two evenings in a row. They report, miffed, that the Spanish Ambassador's car was totalled. The Ambassador was lucky enough to get out of the way seconds before. The English *Guardian* reports that the Conference would not have been possible without massive police protection against "radical opponents" and that the city scene had been dominated by protest. We have probably managed to send out a picture of resistance to the whole world. And this has a significance that we shouldn't underestimate... As to the declared goal of autonomist and anti-imperialist groups - that of focusing beyond the Conference on the structures of imperialism here in the metropolis - there is much food for thought. Our demonstrations and actions were carefully prepared theoretically over a long time. Even so (or maybe because of this), we remained amongst ourselves during the actions. We were obviously not able to mobilise many with this. The main trigger of mass resistance, the drumming on the Breitscheidplatz, didn't even belong to the autonomist action plan... But now the success must be measured in what comes after. First, this campaign is probably a turning point for us. For many it was an important radicalisation, allowing for new political perspectives and structures to be developed. There are also probably many who are just glad it's over without having been a disaster."

Looking back now, it's amazing that people put so much energy into producing discussion documents and holding meetings to mobilise, yet hardly any serious evaluation exists. The last issue of the *Unzertrennlich* looked extensively at the division between 'old and new internationalism', and compared their different analyses - but that's about it.

The autonomists worked towards the IMF/World Bank Summit for a long time. For weeks, the IMF opponents had been in the spotlight of the world's media. As things returned to ordinary political life, it was difficult for people to come down from the fight against the Big Bosses and return to the struggles against the small property owners and dealing with the porn cinema next door.

The structures built up for the campaign dissolved, and the others returned to their usual level of activity. Unfortunately, none of this was done in a pre-planned process of bringing the campaign to an end. Many had the feeling of having 'fallen into a big hole' after September. 'Where now?' was the thought - not only of many new-comers, but also of a lot of the old-timers from the internationalist scene.

*This text is a translated and edited excerpt from the excellent book, Autonomie in Bewegung: aus der ersten 23 Jahren. The book was written by an anonymous collective of five, writing under the name A.G. Grauwanke. All five were involved in the autonomist movement in West Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. The book, which unfortunately is only available in German, is published by Association A. (ISBN: 3-935936-13-3). The book, and more, can be viewed online at: <http://autonx.nadir.org>*

