Notes on Summits and Counter-Summits

Some Roveretan anarchists

Contents

The Illusion of a Center 3
A Gust of Unpredictability 4
An Experiment in the Open Air 5
The New Ugly Face of Domination 5
Acid Rain and Fig Leaves 6
Riva Is Everywhere 7

The Illusion of a Center

Capitalism is a social relationship and not a citadel for the powerful. It is starting from thins banality that one can confront the question of summits and counter-summits. Representing capitalist and state domination as a kind of general headquarters (it's a question of the G8, the WTO or some other such organization) is useful to those who would like to oppose that managing center with another center: the political structures of the so-called movement, or better, their spokespeople. In short, it is useful to who propose merely a change in management personnel. Besides being reformist in essence and purpose, this logic becomes collaborationist and authoritarian in method, as it leads to centralization of the opposition. This is where the concern of these leftist adversaries, so anxious to make themselves heard by the "masters of the world", in investing money and political hype on the summits in which those in power more and more frequently set the dates with them comes from. In the course of these summits decisions that were made elsewhere are merely formalized, but this certainly does not disturb the various representatives of the social forums; after all, their opposition is also completely formal, consisting mainly of paid seminars in which it is shown that neoliberalism is wrong and humanity is right, or, for the more lively, in some combative performance opportunely agreed upon with the police. Besides, how could an opposition subsidized by institutions, represented by municipal and parliamentary councilors and protected by the grave-diggers of the workers' movement (we're referring to the monitoring patrols entrusted to the CGIL in collaboration with the cops) be real? The paradox is that people are called into the streets in the name of another possible world, but with the intention that… absolutely nothing happens. Every time that a more or less oceanic crowd moves peacefully, visibly supervised, it is proclaimed to be a great victory for the movement. And yet these social pacifiers know quite well that their capacity to pose as negotiators with the institutions doesn't particularly depend upon the number of people that they lead into the streets (millions of demonstrators opposed to the latest military aggression against Iraq have not greatly worried the governments involved in the war), but rather upon the power of mediation and repression they manage to put into practice — or to justify — against all social rebellion. In fact, if summits and counter-summits are so frequently talked about, if the representatives of the social forums have come together at the negotiation table and been flattered by the mass media, it is only because in Seattle first and later on other occasions, something happened: thousands of comrades and poor youth attacked the structures of capital and the state, upset police city planning schemes by opening up spaces for communication and clashed with the uniformed servants. Without this subversive threat — together with the many insurrectional explosions that have shaken up the last few years, a mark of the times we have entered — the masters would have nothing to do with the various Casarinis and Agnolettos. Hasn't something of this sort happened with the unions? Listened to and bribed by capital in times of great social conflict with the aim of dividing, demoralizing and denouncing revolting proletarians, in more recent times, they have been put in storage. For the time being, they are forced to again raise a loud voice against the very attacks of the bosses that they themselves once justified and ratified.

The "disobbedienti" spokespeople must then distinguish themselves from the bad ones, the extremists, the violent ones (i.e., those who practice direct action) and give political visibility to the others. On the one hand, therefore, the slogans of the social forums end up being perfectly suitable for the enlightened bourgeoisie: taxation of finance capital, democratic and transparent regulation over global trade, more state and less market, critical consumption, ethical banks,

pacifism, etc. On the other hand, what they sell with their "democratic mobilizations" is a valuable commodity: the illusion of doing something against the injustices of the world. In this sense, counter-summits are a juicy spectacle. The bad few repressed and the good ones heard in their just demands: end of story?

Power knows that it isn't so simple. The disgustingly realistic proposals of the domesticated opposition have nothing to say to the millions of poor people parked in the reservations of the market paradise and repressed by the police. There was a bit of confirmation in Genoa: only during the lashes and the lootings of supermarkets did the youths from proletarian neighborhoods unite with the insurgents. While the White Overalls with their gaudy spectacles appeared as Martians or buffoons in their eyes, those excluded from every political racket immediately understood the language of revolt.

A Gust of Unpredictability

There is no doubt that in Seattle and Genoa, and again more recently in Thessaloniki, a critique without mediation against domination and its false enemies was demonstrated. Despite the dates being set by the masters, the direction by reformists in the streets was leapt over. We mention this, even though we were among those comrades who maintained that Genoa is everywhere: that if domination and dispossession are in every part of society and in daily life, attack has no need for dates set by the enemy. We have found interesting the practice of those who, deserting the stage of the "red zone" to violate and the trap of frontal clashes with the police, moved with agility, striking and disappearing (notably, in this sense, the attack on the Marassi prison in Genoa). This powerful gust of unpredictability, this subversive "federalism" of actions and groups, signified an important rupture with the logic of those who centralize the enemy in order to centralize the struggle (and render it symbolic). But we still hold that being in the place where the enemy does not expect you, far from the appointments, is the best perspective. Even in their most interesting aspects, counter-summits limit this perspective. Besides, without taking anything away from the explosions in Seattle and Genoa, it seems to us that chasing after such dates is becoming a cliché, and more, a devourer of energy: as soon as one counter-summit ends, preparation for another begins. The dates are fixed more and more by the mass media, to the point that, if many revolutionaries have demonstrated, for example, against the war in Iraq, almost no one has managed to express any practical solidarity with the insurgents of Argentina or Algeria. Often more importance is ascribed to clashes that involve almost exclusively "militants" as compared to authentic social and class uprisings.

We know very well why many comrades go to counter-summits: wide-spread direct action and the generalized clash with the cops is only possible in mass situations. Since the perspective of attacking elsewhere is extremely minoritarian, only in greatly expanded situations can a certain sort of street guerrilla warfare be tested. Other actions can be realized at any moment that are not in any way incompatible with certain practices in the streets during counter-summits. And yet we think that in the long run such a practice limits autonomy of analysis and action (in the face of how many social conflicts have we just stood there looking?) transforming it in spite of itself into a sort of extremist model within the "disobedient" caravan. Not to mention that it would still be a matter of asking why on earth power publicizes so many summits in which decisions that have already been made are ratified. All this seems to us to be a great terrain for the police to study

and experiment with anti-riot techniques. A kind of homeopathic treatment: power is inoculated with tiny doses of the virus of subversion in order to reinforce its immune system in view of much broader social plagues. It must know how the bad ones move and organize themselves, and with which good ones it is possible to dialogue in such a way that nothing really changes.

An Experiment in the Open Air

But above all, summits constitute another form of experimentation: seeing what level of oppression the population is willing to put up with. Bringing a bit of Palestine, with its checkpoints, its permanent red zones and its armored patrol cars around every corner, into the "rich West", domination is informing its subjects that, until proven otherwise, they are criminals; that nothing is secure enough for the police and technological apparatus; that city planning is the continuation of the social war with other weapons. More that sixty years ago, Walter Benjamin wrote in his Theses on the Concept of History that "the state of exception in which we live has become the rule". If this is true, we must understand what links a lager for undocumented immigrants to the stadiums into which war refugees are loaded, certain poor and working-class neighborhoods patrolled by the police to the various Guantanamos scattered throughout the world, some evacuation operations utterly disproportionate in relation to the declared aim (entire neighborhoods evacuated in order to defuse some implement from the first World War) to the rationing of electrical energy carried out without warning — in the style of the 1920's — by the ENEL. Up to now it is a question of successful experiments that confirm what a comrade wrote in the 1970's: the people of capital are a stoic people. They upset traffic circulation, they put surveillance cameras everywhere, they install noxious antennas over the roofs of our homes, they criminalize more and more behaviors: no one says a word.

Summits are the concentrated representation of all this, the legal suspension of every right. "What's going on?" the average citizen asks, forced to take a detour in order to go shopping. "Nothing, it's just the anti-globalization people," the woman at the supermarket responds. Meanwhile, they ar even privatizing the drinking water, while the police are everywhere.

But precisely because it is a concentrated representation of a daily situation, the practical critique must be widespread and constant, for example through the destruction of video cameras and other systems of electronic surveillance. It is important to map out the locations of the instruments of control, spreading awareness of them and theoretically supporting the necessity of attacking them.

The New Ugly Face of Domination

Power is increasingly brazen. On the one hand, the masters know that the current social conditions, increasingly marked by precariousness and dependence on commodities, can be imposed only through terror: such terror is manifested in the exterior in the form of war and in the interior in the form of fear for the future (for example, fear of remaining without work) or through the repression of increasingly widespread social groups. On the other hand, decades of social pacification — in which every despicable act has occurred simply because nothing has been done to prevent the preceding ones, an incredible acceleration of degradation — have given power an arrogance without precedence. We have seen it at work, for example, in Genoa, in the beatings, the

torture, the murder of Carlo Giuliani. And it continues. The new police chief of Trento is Colucci, police chief in Genoa during the G8 summit, a certified pig. He will be managing the summit of foreign ministers of the European Union that will be held at Riva del Garda next September 4 through 6. Do you understand the message? A Trento committee "for truth and justice" has found nothing better to do than to invite him to a public confrontation.

Acid Rain and Fig Leaves

The foreign ministers who will be meeting in Riva on September 4 through 6 must achieve a common platform to present at the WTO summit in Cancun, Mexico on September 14 through 20. The topic is the General Agreement on the Trade of Services (GATS) that anticipates precisely the liberalization of the principle "public services" on a global level. Among the many decisions in process, the most scandalous is surely that of the privatization of water, which may become a reality for the 144 member countries of the World Trade Organization. It is a process that started a while ago, since seven multinationals have contended for decades over the concession for bottling mineral water and in the last few years over the concession for managing the water system as well. The "Trento board for a social Europe" also dwells upon the privatization of water, and on its scarcity due to pollution, as the mark of the most unbridled neoliberalism. Apart from the usual complaints about the non-democratic aspects of these agreements (as if those made by individual governments were instead subject to who knows what public debates…; besides, weren't the state institutions supposed to save us from the savage market?), what is equally scandalous in the discourse of the reformists is the gap between the amplitude of the disasters that they denounce and the solutions that they propose.

On the one hand, they indicate the causes of these disasters to be the industrialization of agriculture, the concentration of populations in increasingly gigantic cities, the pollution produced by factories, the waste of drinkable water for industrial machinery and for cultivation intended for the intensive breeding of animals; in short, the very essence of the techno-industrial system. On the other hand, they propose… new laws, transparent rules, even citizen participation in the form of short term treasury bonds in the S.P.A.s that privatize water. Thanks to the marvels of progress, there are whole countries in which a collapse of the banking system would leave the countryside without water, and these citizen, so proud of being so, want different laws. Somewhat as if, in the face of a downpour of acid rain, one were to suggest covering the head with an organic fig leaf. The proposals of the various social forums, reasonable in terms of political and economic rationality, are simply crazy from a concrete ad social point of view. It is not a question of denouncing a world in ruins, but rather of snatching the space for resisting and the time for attacking. It is not just a question of how radical one is in the streets. The point is what sort of life one desires, how much one has submitted her or himself materially and spiritually to an increasingly inhuman and artificial social order or, on the other hand, what relationships one is ready to fight for.

There is no need to go to Riva to oppose the water racket. Those directly responsible for this absolute commodification (for example the big businesses that bottle mineral water) are just a few steps away from us at all times. If the civilized can't even defend the water they drink — or at least understand that others do so in a clear and direct way — we can all just go to bed. In this case as well, it is a long chain of dependence and oppression that now presents us with an

exorbitant bill. Only through autonomy toward industrial mass society and through open revolt against the state that defends it could something different be born.

The same is valid, for example for the question of patents, including those on the genetic code. It is simply idiotic to claim protective laws are of any use in confronting the entry of capital into the human body. Techno-scientific delirium, which consists of wanting to transform nature and human beings into a sort of variable of the computer, passed the point of no return some time ago. Any illusion of reforming a science that is entirely in the service of power is only a dismal hoax. The actions that have happened in most countries against transgenic cultivation or against private and state laboratories that experiment on the human genome have shown quite well that the critique of mercantile reason has no need of spectacular dates.

More generally, what is euphemistically described as globalization would be unthinkable without the material basis furnished by the technological apparatus. We simply think about the things that are presented as principle factors in development and economic and military conflict: energy and information. This thing that can appear to be an unassailable Moloch is in reality a gigantic web formed by cables, antennas, substations, trellises and transformers that can be easily struck.

Riva Is Everywhere

The CGIL will be taking care of monitoring during the counter-summit in Riva. The outgoing police chief of Trento has pointed out — rightly — that the more demonstrators make themselves into police agents, the less need there will be of the latter.

After long negotiations between the social forum and the police force (managed obviously by national leaders), it seems that the Municipality will make a villa outside of Riva available to the Disobbediente and their associates, granting them the right to demonstrate (always outside of town, in deserted streets) through Sunday. Riva will be closed, which means that the cops will simply block three access roads. The government commissioners' office has passed an order prohibiting and suspending every exhibition or demonstration (including sports and cultural exhibitions) in more than twenty municipalities in the Trentino region. The police want empty streets, the population must understand that Big Brother is not just a televised transmission. And us?

Let's again take up a thread that comes from far away. Günther Anders wrote in the 1950's, "Hiroshima is everywhere", and in the 1980's, " Chernobyl is everywhere". Some rebels against the technologized world in the 1990's said, "Mururoa is everywhere" (at the time when the French government subjected that island in the Pacific to murderous nuclear tests). Two years ago, other comrades claimed, "Genoa is everywhere". Because revolt explodes without limits and against every spectacle, because the Apparatus expects an enemy that is not there and reveals its totalitarian character still more, we say Riva is everywhere. We will not be in the streets against the summit of the European Union, because with the struggles of these times and those that will be, we have wanted and still want to strike other paths. Because following the logic that "This time it is close to my home" one does not escape the circle, since summits will always occur close to someone's home. Because the real conflict is elsewhere. There are other ways to oppose the armoring of the cities and the valleys in which we live, ways within everyone's reach. We want to free ourselves from the dictatorship of the number and from its worshipers. We know this is a perspective that may only give few results in the immediate, but it is by deciding for ourselves

how, where and when to strike and tenaciously defending our reasons for it that we will cause individual and social insubordination to advance.

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