

A Report From The G20

mpls
2017

The following report is authored by a small informal collective of people who found themselves together in Hamburg during which time the G20 summit took place. We cannot offer any perspective besides our personal, limited experiences and don't intend to claim either objectivity nor a comprehensive view of events. Given the scope of the decentralized and spontaneous rebellion in the city, it is quite possible no one has a clear understanding of everything that happened over the weekend.

Within our group, our experience levels in the German territory differ significantly. We come from different backgrounds politically and tactically. For these reasons and others, writing as a single voice entails inevitable contradictions. We don't attempt to solve these contradictions, just acknowledge them.

Tomorrow

The citizens initiative to clean up the streets of Hamburg was only a more dramatic manifestation of the reimposition of normality that comes after such fleeting moments of revolt. St Pauli is no longer a police-free zone today. Many of us are back in our quiet hometowns, with little more than a reinvigorated sense of determination. Many of the tactical and strategic lessons we could take away from the G20 are of no use in contexts where there aren't tens of thousands of active rebels converging.

As of this writing, there are still dozens sitting in jail from this weekend in July. While we might celebrate how small this number is, relative to the magnitude of the unrest, we can not leave anyone behind.

Nothing forgiven, nobody forgotten.

afternoon
Hamburg
announced
that it was
requesting
reinforce-
ments for the
20,000 offi-
cers already
in the city.
12. Enough
is Enough's
report back
from the G20
is only one of
several that
we've read
in the weeks
following
the summit.
While we
appreciate
all the work
the Enough
is Enough
collective
has done,
we believe
in boldly
critiquing
this point.

1. Sponti:
unpermitted
spontaneous
demonstra-
tion. Spontis
are legal if
there is a
justifiable
reason not
to have
registered
the demo 48
hours ahead
of time
(reacting to
an immediate
event, for
example).

Gee Two Zero

All over the German territory, every surface was decorated with calls against the G20. Advertisements for the many demonstra- tions, calls for sabotage, or just invitations to Hamburg. Against this backdrop, it's hard to imagine the possibility for ignorance on what exactly the G20 is, and why people don't like it. But let's be- gin here, just in case.

The G20 summit is an international forum for the leaders from 20 major economies across the world. This year, the likes of Donald Trump, Angela Merkel, Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin and more all got together to discuss world issues, or, how to maintain the stability of the world we so despise. Then there are those who wish they would maintain this world in a supposedly nicer way, a more benevolent way. These are the ones who march in the streets to denounce the G20 policies, who demand their human rights. For us and apparently many others, this was a flashpoint to con- centrate rebellious forces and confront the militarized police ap- paratus and wrest the city from its grip. The goal here becomes less about disrupting or shutting down the summit itself, but the struggle as it manifests in the streets.

Alles Voll!

We arrived at the Altona camp in the middle of the afternoon on July 6th, in a large park northwest of the city center. This is one of the only camps that has seemed to survive a week of repression from the police, who stormed and evicted the anticapitalist camp earlier in the week and prevented new camps from forming. Even at Altona, we had heard sleeping materials were not permitted but a few hundred tents had already been erected when we arrived. As we walked in, a meeting had just begun introducing the actions that would take place early next morning (July 7th, the first day of the G20 itself) which intended to blockade various elements of the city's infrastructure. One aimed for the port—Hamburg's be- ing the largest in the country—while others wanted to shut down the transit of diplomats.

Soon after the meeting concluded, a large group assembled in the center of the park began to move, chanting anti-capitalist slogans. These few hundred were marching to the main demo tonight, "Welcome To Hell" which would start later tonight at the St Pauli fish market. We hurried along to catch up with this sponti¹ as it

marched along the dirt paths out of the park. It only took a few minutes after stepping into the streets for the nearby police to block the path towards the S-Bahn station.² Here we saw the german police's strict enforcement firsthand: the demonstration was not permitted and therefore would not be allowed to happen.

On the other side of this police line, tens of thousands of people flowed into Barclaycard Arena for the Global Citizen Festival. Few seemed to pay any attention to the conflict only a few dozen meters away. This concert was one of several pacified alternatives to the week of resistance, designed not to interfere with either the summit or city's daily functioning.

After standing around for some time, the march rerouted to another exit out of the park. Unsurprisingly, when we got there we were again blocked from entering the streets by police who now were wearing riot gear. After more standing around, and someone negotiating with the police they backed away and facilitated the rest of the route to the S-Bahn.

Another particular facet of german policing is the strict enforcement of anti-mask laws. Just as they refuse to let unpermitted demonstrations march, they will shut down a demonstration if people are wearing masks, or just arrest those who are. It is for this reason that this anti-capitalist demo was entirely unmasked.

As we walked away from the first police line of the demo, I noticed that many of the people who had pulled on their black hoodies when we approached the police were now taking them back off. What had at one moment been a line of nearly identical looking people in black bloc—even maskless—now looked like they would have been very comfortable hanging out on their dad's yacht. Light colored polo shirts tucked in to their jeans which, I only just now noticed, all matched perfectly. The group also wore identical shoes. This dedication to having secure outfits suddenly seemed so simple. Why shouldn't every riot look like an innocuous gathering until the moment it happens?

The entire demo sat for a moment on the platform until our train arrived. We then boarded as an entire group, filling the cars to the brim. There was only one problem—the riot police wanted to board as well. It turns out that the car we were on was the only one that had managed to keep them from getting on, although it's more due to the fact that our car was genuinely full than a concerted effort. However when the police began to push into the train,

2. S-bahn is one form of public transit in German cities. The S-bahn are usually aboveground trains that go further out from the city, whereas U-bahn is the underground metro.

9. Obviously the state bears the only responsibility for the violence. But that doesn't mean we can't critique the choices of organizers.

10. Hafenstrasse was home to several squatted houses during the autonomous movement of the 1980s and '90s. Twelve of the squats were legalized and still exist today.

11. On this subject, we are inspired by the work of U.S. anarchist Tom Nomad, notably his book *The Master's Tools*, and were thrilled to see it play out in real time. Much like the Pittsburgh police running out of gas just a single day into the G20 protests of 2009, early Friday

the water cannons were powerless to put out, unable to drive within range. Even when police charged, they retreated just as quickly, making no territorial progress.

Making our way back to the camp at the end of the night we realize just how much of the city has been shut down due to the unrest. Even those at a distance from the rioting, S-bahn stations are shut down and the bus depots are overrun with people.

No Cop Zone

A police-free zone is a fairly accurate description of most of St Pauli and Schanze on Friday night. The streets were blockaded and police were vastly unsuccessful in penetrating the interior of the neighborhoods. With the police kept at bay by the fierce street fighting, those on the inside of these neighborhoods were free to do as they please. Some looted stores, others wrote graffiti, many simply enjoyed themselves. On one side of the street, bricks would be flying through the air while on the other side people were enjoying a meal on the sidewalk.

The transformation of these areas into police-free zones was made possible by the favorable terrain in terms of the physical streets themselves as well as the support amongst the local residents. This differed dramatically from Thursday night's demonstration in both respects. The Welcome to Hell demonstration, despite organizers knowing the strong possibility of the police preventing the demo and attacking, lined up against a wall, ensuring participants would be trapped.⁹ The narrow elevated pedestrian walkway restricted people's movements and nearly caused a stampede. On the other side, participants had nowhere to go but the river. The symbolic choice of marching through Hafenstrasse¹⁰ was overshadowed by the tactical disadvantages of the fish market.

In the neighborhoods, rapidly moving through narrow streets worked to the advantage of the police, who found themselves having to cover more and more ground, spreading thinner with every new front.¹¹ By Friday evening, there was no clear distinction between the "anarchists" and the "average citizens" who were coming together in front of the riot lines. While several other reports lamented that the protests lost a political character because of this generalization, we saw the contagion of rebellion spread quickly throughout the areas of conflict. Certain attacks not being targeted or politically legible does not make them worthy of condemnation—otherwise we are doing the job of the state.¹²

their arrival, a resident above their position blasts KRS One's "Sound of da Police" out their window as the crowd below cheers and continues to mock the police. The song has barely ended when the group of police retreat.

A few blocks down, a stage is being built to host the speakers for tonight's demo. But this feels inadequate for the moment—thousands of people are milling around, taking over the city and enjoying themselves in what could be described as a massive informal block party. People are flowing in and out of the crowd constantly, and before long we decide to follow one of the stronger flows into the St Pauli neighborhood north of Reeperbahn where there are no police. As we walk block after block, the surrounding crowds grow larger, we see street signs and planters dragged into the street, and people write graffiti on the walls.

The crowd, at this point including a few hundred dressed in black, has met a police line at Neuer Pferdemarkt. Bottles and rocks fly through the air, followed by the booms of less lethal weaponry. There is less panic in the streets than the previous night. The black bloc falls back, but then pushes forward on a different street. The police don't seem to have an interest in, or perhaps they don't have the ability to, take back space in the neighborhood. We continue to walk through the narrow streets, at every exit we see to larger streets there are crowds of fifty to a hundred dressed in black shooting fireworks or tossing bricks at police, who in some cases are just driving past the intersection. This is a scene that repeats as we wander through the area.

We stopped outside a bar with a large TV where customers watch a livestream of the riots happening right on the streets in front of them. The camera cuts to a shot of a large fire and we look up, trying to see which direction it is. After wandering for a few more streets, we do indeed encounter a burning barricade. If this is the one from the TV, we can't be sure. Many fires were burning this night.

Eventually we returned to one of the main sites of conflict, Neuer Pferdemarkt. Every side of this intersection was filled with people, all angry at the police. It became more and more difficult to discern the difference between those who might be considered "political", meaning those who were here because of the G20, and those who were simply hanging out in the neighborhood. It was the north side of the intersection where the most intense resistance was taking place. A large fire was burning in the intersection, that

flag poles and umbrellas appeared as if from nowhere to push back. The train car's cameras were quickly covered up with stickers to avoid any incriminating footage. We shouted "alles voll!"³ but the police wouldn't take no for an answer.

After a very long wait, police were eventually let on the car but at a different entrance than the one we were standing near. Then we were off towards St Pauli. We exited the station as a group and retook the streets for a couple blocks to the fish market where we saw at least ten thousand people waiting for us. To be specific, ten thousand fellow demonstrators, and even more spectators who had gathered to watch the G20 be welcomed to hell.

Who Welcomed Who?

There are probably not words to describe the feeling that comes with being in a sea of people all dressed in black, some masked, some ready to be. As far as the eye could see; people who share a disgust for this world, people who have your back. The aerial photos that have circulated since may illustrate the size of the black bloc, but also it's finite expanse. The world seemed so much larger before maps were filled in.

We had plenty of time to take in the sights of the massive crowd because the demonstration was not moving. It was a possibility that was certainly known,⁴ we had joked about it ourselves, that the police would simply not let the demonstration happen tonight. As we stood there, groups of riot police slowly positioned themselves on one side of the street. The other side of the street was a large wall, with a pedestrian walkway, and the other side a ten foot drop onto the riverside plaza. The police soon picked a fight with people who refused to take their masks off not fifteen meters away from us. There was a few minutes of pushing, a bottle thrown, backing off. Then suddenly there were charging. If they used pepper spray, tear gas, flash bangs, smoke, or whatever weapons, it is hard to say. We were caught in a panic of people who, on the one hand were trapped between a large wall and brutal police, and on the other hand many who had likely never experienced such a bloodthirsty assault on a demonstration that hadn't even started.

I clutch my comrades hands as we make our way towards the wall where people are climbing over. The wall is just low enough for people to reach down to grab your hands but it is smooth with no supports to climb besides pulling oneself up. I help my comrades up, boosting them up from below and then

3. Alles voll
– Literally,
"all full".
4. In December 2013,
A massive demonstration took place outside the squatted Rote Flora in Hamburg against the eviction threat. The head of the demonstration moved only a few meters before the police began spraying water cannons.

reach out to climb myself. Two arms grasp my to pull me up but there is no one to push me from below. I turn my head and see that I am alone, with the black bloc a few meters to my left and a line of riot police a few more meters to my right. They are firing less lethal weapons directly behind me. I drop back down and run back into the black bloc. The night was young and I was already separated from my crew.

The next ten, twenty, sixty minutes are a blur. The black bloc spreads out across the pedestrian walkway, many more drop down on the other side into the plaza. Groups of riot police rush from every direction, swinging their batons indiscriminately, under falling rocks, bottles and flares. Few arrests are made at this time—the police appear to only be interested in hurting people and getting them out of the city. We left to regroup away from the action, feeling disheartened that the police had been so successful in violently squashing the resistance of the evening. Little did we know that autonomous groups had gotten to work all over the city and that the first attacks on police were just beginning to be carried out.

After changing into brightly colored clothes and tossing my black ones into the river, I navigate my way through the massive police presence around the fish market to the agreed upon meetup point. When I am back on the street that we took with the sponti, I see a large group in black bloc marching up the street away from the police and the remnants of the official demo. A construction site is torn apart and used to build barricades that will no doubt slow the police down for some time. This group is much calmer compared to the chaos enveloping the situation just minutes ago a few blocks away. I split off toward the meetup point, and an older man walks out of a store on the corner—he smiles ear to ear at the destruction.

On A Journey

In the morning, we make our way to the Jugend Gegen G20⁵ demonstration, organized by students and leftist groups. It is scheduled for 10:30, a few hours after the morning's blockade actions were supposed to begin. Our access to news is limited throughout the day but a picture slowly comes together of the revolt that occurred—or, more accurately, was ongoing—after we left Thursday night and Friday morning. Before the student demo, one speaker announces successful blockades of the port and of one of the G20 entrances. During the demo, we see a water cannon

drive past, and notice that it sports some new colors. Later we see the images of hundreds dressed in black bloc roving through the Altona neighborhood in the morning burning cars. A local tabloid recounts nearly twenty attacks within a few hours on Friday morning alone—attacks on police, on their stations, on cars, storefronts, and more.

This is contrasted with the student demo, which has a very festive atmosphere while the speakers remind us constantly how peaceful the demo is supposed to be in between pop songs. What we can only assume is every leftist group in Germany walks around passing out their newspapers to anyone who will take it. In a refreshing change of pace, the organizers ask all parties, organizations and unions to keep their flags and banners at the back of the demo, later asking them to put them away entirely. An ATTAC⁶ flag is stolen and spray painted with a circled A, as well as the letter K added to the end of their name.

The march is long and mirrors the route that Saturday's mass demo will take. The police presence is minimal compared to the previous night. The chants don't vary too widely, repeating mostly "Siamo Tutti Antifascisti!"⁷ "A- Anti- Anticapitalista!" and a few related to education reform. Regardless, we indulge ourselves in a fun, colorful walk through the city. We deserve it after the repression meted out last night.

Sound Of Da Police

An anti-capitalist demonstration is called for 8:00 PM at Reeperbahn. We arrived quite early but the crowd is already immense, although it's unclear who is here for the demo and who just hangs out on Reeperbahn, the city's party district. Walking through, we see that the crowd spans at least five blocks, with people taking up the entire street. A person passing by tells us that down the street there was a gay pride event with live music, adding further numbers. When we arrived, police were only monitoring from the perimeter, although later on squads attempted to penetrate the crowd.

I am sitting with my crew at one the intersection of Reeperbahn and Hein-Hoyer-Strasse, nervously watching the water cannons positioned nearby. After a few minutes, twenty or thirty riot cops march the crowd, taking position on the opposite street corner. They are immediately met with boos, and some chant that the whole world hates the police.⁸ Not two minutes after

6. ATTAC is a veteran of the anti-globalization movement, and as such there are countless critiques of them available online.

7. We are all antifascists, in Italian.

8. Die Ganze Welt Hasst Die Polizei, equally popular in its French iteration, Tout Le Monde Deteste La Police

5. Youth Against G20