

Part of the second PGA global day of action, J18 took months of preparation. Educational materials were produced in order to demystify the arcane games of financial capital, and included a map of potential protest targets (banks, exchanges, corporate HQ's, investment houses, etc.) in the square mile known as the City of London. 30,000 copies of a spoof newspaper with a front-page headline declaring "Global Market Meltdown", were distributed across London the night before.

The City was chosen as a target due to its looming importance on the world financial stage. With a daily turnover of \$504 billion in foreign exchange, its infrastructure completely enervates the body of global capitalism. If it were a country, it would be ranked the twentieth richest in the world. The City contains more foreign banks than anywhere else in the world, is the primary market for international insurance, and is also the world's leader in currency exchange, most of which is speculative, and has led to global economic crises like the devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1994, the collapse of the Asian 'tiger' economies of 1998, and the 2001 financial meltdown in Argentina.

Despite media hype about the "organized anarchists... plotting on the internet", and complex security precautions (City workers were instructed to "dress down" for the day), the event took everybody by surprise. 10,000 revellers wearing carnival masks split into dozens of autonomous groups and invaded the heart of London's financial district, disrupting trading while dancing to the wild sound of samba music, and causing over a million pounds worth of damage. The police reported that they had never witnessed a demonstration with such a "level and sophistication of planning".

"City of London Besieged by Anticapitalists", proclaimed the Financial Times the next day. The sheer audacity of J18 gave confidence to US activists, already organizing for the seemingly impossible task of shutting down the WTO in Seattle five months later.

Dancing at the Edge of Chaos: a spanner in the works of global capitalism

by Wat Tyler

Glistening. Silver and white. The river escaped over the shadows of the narrow city street. Released from centuries of subterranean captivity, the Walbrook rose and fell in billowing arcs, sending clouds of spray onto the growing crowd below. Laughing, people danced under the cool fountain. Shrieks of delight mixing with the sound of falling water. Between their toes, the water slipped down the dark tarmac retracing an ancient course to the Thames below. Looking upwards. Breathing the moist air. I grinned to myself. We'd done it. The roar of profit and plunder in the world's largest financial centre had been replaced with the sounds of party and protest.

Ten months earlier, a number of predominantly anarchist grassroots direct action groups had come together to plan and co-ordinate UK actions against the G8 summit on June 18th in 1999. The lack of a handy name for this coalition, and the day of action, led to the adoption of the simple tag 'J18' (as in 'J-eighteen' or 'J-one-eight'). A habit which has continued for every global action since (simple and meaningful acronyms to counter the wilfully obscure abbreviated titles of the ruling institutions of capitalism). Our action would be directed against financial centres. The

thinking behind this was straightforward. These small urban areas, dotted with glass and concrete towers, wield inconceivable power. Decisions made in an instant on the trading floor, behind a desk, or in a wine bar, affect the fate of people and their environment in distant lands. Who dies, who lives. What grows, who goes hungry, who is well fed. What is destroyed, what is preserved. All for private profit. Consequently, financial centres are vital nerve centres in the anatomy of global capitalism. For J18 in the UK, our coalition decided to take action in the financial centre of London, 'The City' or 'Square Mile'. For all its ancient history, grand architecture, and glittering monuments, the City has no soul. IRA bombings in the early nineties prompted the authorities to erect a 'ring of steel' around the Square Mile. Police checkpoints, roadblocks, and blanket CCTV surveillance cameras, transformed the City into a modern fortress. A sanitized surveillance zone delimiting a territory ruled by profit fundamentalism, where the foreign exchange turnover equals that of Tokyo, New York, and Paris combined.

I became involved in the J18 coalition through Reclaim

the Streets (RTS). I'd been part of RTS for a couple of years. An involvement that grew from a frosty January walk along the route of a proposed road in the English countryside on the edge of a town called Newbury. Ancient woodland and floodplain had been earmarked for destruction. Nine miles of dual carriageway wrecking a beautiful lowland landscape, sacrificed to satisfy an unsustainable and pointless car culture. Instead of conceding quietly when the farce of liberal petitioning and lobbying inevitably expired, opponents of the road took direct action. Treehouses, tunnels, digger-diving, sabotage. Till Newbury registered on my consciousness, I'd relied on annual subscriptions to environmental NGOs, recycling once a week, buying 'green' in the supermarket, and taking public transport, as the sum expression and solutions of my ecological concerns. What I experienced at Newbury went beyond any of that. My view of the world underwent a radical metamorphosis. Here was something that finally made sense, the antithesis of the passive abdication of representative politics and what we're told is democracy. Later that year, I danced on the M41 motorway with 10,000 other people. RTS had organized the



>> **January 30** >> In a dramatic midnight announcement the Indian government orders work on the Maheshwar dam to stop. The site of the enormous hydropower project has been occupied for three weeks by up to 8,000 demonstrators from 2,200 families in 61 villages whose homes would have been submerged by the reservoir. Resistance to the Narmada Project had been ongoing. The people demanded a complete

halt to construction warning that they intended to launch a major campaign against the project if it was not halted by 31 October that year. People from all over India hail the importance of this victory, seen as not only the first milestone in the fight against the destructive development symbolized by dams, but as an important symbol in the on-going struggle against economic globalization.

illegal party and protest, and the experience filled me with an irresistible urge and impetus to join them. A few months later I made it to the weekly RTS meeting, and was hooked. For me RTS offered a rare union of the cerebral and the visceral, acting as a catalyst but never a vanguard, with no leadership or static membership, and motivated by eclectic but coherent inspiration ranging from the sixteenth-century Diggers movement to the Situationists of 1960s Paris. It didn't take long for me to progress from going to meetings to taking action.

A dozen pubs, community centres, lecture halls, kitchens, bedrooms, and parks provided shifting venues for J18 meetings. The monthly coalition meetings, and weekly open RTS meetings, provided punctuation that marked the rhythm of our planning, and when people weren't meeting in the same room, an email discussion list with over a thousand participants added to the mix. Lists of books were swapped. Everything from impenetrable tracts on the inner workings of the global economy to exhilarating histories of carnival. There's always a certain looming inevitability once you get deeply involved with action on the scale of J18 that it will gradually take over your life. Other commitments are waylaid as missionary fervour takes hold. Piece by piece we began to put together a plan for the RTS action on J18. In my vision the City would get a green makeover. Dismantled block-by-block. Tarmac dug up. Exchanges and banks levelled. Steel girders ripped down. Trees planted in place of towers. Rivers flowing in place of roads. Allotments in place of wine bar and chain coffee stores. A lush garden to replace

an urban desert, somewhere vegetables, not fortunes, could be grown. Countless meetings passed before we had managed to distil a common theme from our individual dreams. Our action would be a carnival. A carnival of resistance, a carnival against capitalism. The carnival would meet in the City, and then tour notable institutions of global capitalism. As pragmatism slowly set in we decided to focus the carnival on one financial institution, the London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE).

In the mid-nineties, LIFFE had an average daily turnover of 160 billion pounds. Three thousand traders working a two storey trading floor. Big business doesn't get much bigger than this. Roughly two thirds of all global economic activity is speculative gambling on short term price fluctuations, and it's places like LIFFE which act as the venue for this insane casino. Our plan continued to grow, and eventually took on a life of its own, mutating, evolving. By the time J18 came 'round, not one of us knew the plan in its entirety. Just a handful of many interlocking pieces. Our plan to take the carnival to LIFFE had to remain secret; only a handful of us knew what the end location would be.

J18 started not long after midnight passed. Paintbombers redecorated the London Metal Exchange pink. A young couple visited each of the City's guardian dragons, whose occult significance is as carefully guarded as the treasure they protect, and left offering of flowers to nullify the dark magic. As morning came, a banner reading 'Life Before Profit' hung on Tower Bridge. Upstream, London Bridge was blockaded, disrupting commuters trying to reach their jobs

in the City. Hundreds of cyclists joined together in a slow moving Critical Mass, stopping traffic around the City. Animal rights protestors marched, and McDonald's junk food outlets were picketed. Anti-arms trade activists staged a fake-blood covered die-in, chaining themselves to Lloyds Bank in Cheapside. Early editions of the *Evening Standard*, London's daily right-wing newspaper, mistook prologue for climax and wrote the day off prematurely: "...the forces of Mammon proved once again that it takes more than a mere protest to bring to a halt the money-making machine that is the Square Mile". They hadn't counted on the 'mere protest' of the carnival yet to come.

While the morning actions unfolded, I met my affinity group to go over our part of the plan one last time. After convincing ourselves we were all accounted for and holding it together, we went our separate ways. I took a circuitous and nervous tube journey to Liverpool Street Station, a large rail terminus in the City that we'd advertised as the meeting place for the carnival.

Arriving at the station, not knowing what to expect, I realized the transformation had already begun. The usual

miscellany of lost-looking tourists and harried grey-faced City workers yelling into mobile phones had been supplanted. Waves of thumping samba rhythms merged with scents of expectation. Journalists worked the gathered masses. The environment correspondent of *The Guardian* asked a well-dressed City worker, company ID hanging on a slim chain around her neck, what she thought of it all. "I think it's f*@kin excellent John, don't you?" came the reply in a gruff voice, as the cross-dressing anticapitalist disappeared into the crowd. Thousands filled the concourse and the galleries above. Optimism and excitement surged through my body. We began to hand out masks. Whispering the message written on their reverse: On the signal follow your colour! We'd made 8,000 masks in four colours, red, green, black, and gold. The idea was simple; we'd split the carnival into four groups, each group wearing the same colour mask, and each taking a different route to LIFFE, some overground, some underground. That way the cops could never stop us all. Coloured streamers, waved above our heads, would guide each group through the City. What's more the masks would work at several

>> **February 4** >> In Brussels, Belgium, Bill Gates, the Microsoft CEO, receives a cream pie in the face while on his way to give a talk on education. The action, carried out by the International Pastry Brigade, gives light to the fact that the richest man in the world has standards higher than can be met by Belgium's renowned patisseries. In what is sure to become an international scandal, Gates is overheard complaining that the pie

"didn't even taste that good."

>> **February 23-26** >> A network called People's Global Action Against Free Trade and the WTO is born at a meeting of about 400 people from all continents in Geneva, Switzerland. Inspired by work done at the Zapatista encuentros, PGA's intent is to coordinate global days of action, and to link activists worldwide through face-to-face meetings and improved

communication channels.

>> **March** >> Three thousand Nepali protesters demand an end to child labour in the country as part of a global drive to highlight the situation of the world's 250 million child workers.

>> **March 23** >> A battle against a new uranium mine in Australia's tropical Kakadu National Park in Jabuluka kicks off when 9,000 people protest in three major

levels. Not only would they give us the means to move the carnival, but they would protect individuals from the Big Brother-like impositions of CCTV, while giving us a collective identity as a carnival.

Preoccupied with handing out masks, I missed the shut down around us. Every entrance to the underground was closed up by the cops. There wasn't a plan B for this. People started moving, but the signal hadn't been given. It wasn't time. Hundreds of people wearing red and green masks lurched their way out of the lower concourse, heading west. This wasn't meant to be happening. All those months of painstaking planning. A few seconds and they had become meaningless. Making eye contact with my worried affinity group, I held up my streamer and started waving. Desperate gesturing in the hope something would happen. A handful of people followed suit, then a few more. Everyone taking their prearranged cue from someone else. I led our red with a hint of green group east, up the stairs and escalators, out onto Bishopsgate Street. Red streamers writhing overhead we wove a serpentine trail through the straight lines of the City, looking for the path of least resistance to LIFFE.

A likely route beckoned, and we left the sun and on-lookers of Bishopsgate, for the shadows of the side streets. Ahead, a deserted street curved gently towards Bank Square, the centre of the City. Buildings rose up on either side of us like stony walls in a dead-end gorge, forcing the sky far away. An eerie calm descended around us. We kept the pace up. Not knowing what we'd find. Take it a step at a time. Then the ominous and unmistakable drumbeat of hooves

clattering on tarmac echoed around the bend. The line of mounted riot police, long batons swinging at their sides, trotted into view. We stopped in our tracks. I swallowed. Someone else swallowed. Run. I sprinted ahead into a beckoning alley and could hear everyone frantically following behind. Blindly careening down twist after turn, we emerged just two streets away from LIFFE. We'd shook off our mounted pursuers. Lost them in a medieval maze of back alleys. Now there was only one direction to go. Downriver. We were at the top of Walbrook Street, its sign the only visible clue to the presence of the buried river beneath our feet. Red streamers fluttering in the summer sun, we followed the flow. Move like water, adapt to the situation, stay fluid, and ride on the submerged river's energy.

I could see the non-descript ugly functionality of Cannon Bridge House, the rented home of LIFFE, looming ahead. Four-tonne grey and brown cladding interspersed with metal ventilation grilles, and sharp triangular doorways. A stale presence choking the life out of the narrow road running alongside. No visible sign on the outside to mark the significance of the activity that took place within. The bulk of the building sits over Cannon Street rail station, whose concealed platforms span the B132 dual carriageway carrying traffic east and west along the north bank of the Thames. Suspended, unconnected to the earth, LIFFE feeds off the energy of travelling commuters.

It was difficult to convince the flowing carnivalistas not to pond up on Cannon Street. The lure of stopping traffic was too seductive. Here was a situation that made sense. A

road. Traffic. Let's stop it. I started to yell at people. We're not there yet. We have to keep going. My affinity group took up the call. Our frantic gesticulating managed to convince enough of the crowd to cover the last few yards of our journey. It was time to check in with the rest of the carnival. "We're there", I whispered into my mobile phone. "What, at the station?" "No, LIFFE !"

Things started to happen. CCTV cameras were put out of action. A fire hydrant was opened and the buried Walbrook was freed. A couple of guys with a ladder started to prise open the cladding that covered the side of the LIFFE building. One of them climbed in. I didn't see him come out. Maybe he managed to penetrate the inner sanctum of LIFFE or maybe he just ended up confused on platform seven.

It didn't take long for Upper Thames Street – normally an exhaust-choked and gloomy four lane arterial conduit in the capital's private 'autogeddon' – to undergo a radical metamorphosis. Instead of cars and lorries racing between traffic lights, colourful banners hung across the street. Each sending out a clear message about what we thought of global capitalism: "Global Ecology Not Global Economy", and "The

Earth is a Common Treasury for All". A soundsystem boomed out electronic techno and the dub-ska-punk supergroup PAIN played further down the street. People danced, dazed in the sun, bumped into old friends, and made new ones. But this was only a small part of what was happening.

The City had been declared off limits. Bridges closed to traffic, trains not stopping. A group of a few hundred had gathered outside the Stock Exchange, using steel crowd control barriers to ram reinforced glass doors. It was like this everywhere. Sounds of breaking glass harmonized with the sounds of celebration. Passion for change mixed with frustration and anger against the present system. Some are content to dance. Some take it further. Everyone expresses themselves differently. Unplanned and unexpected, carnival finds its own voice.

By mid-afternoon attention turned to LIFFE. Word had got round about what the building in the backdrop symbolized. The lower entrance got bricked up. Grey breeze blocks, joints oozing cement, walled up the lower entrance. Messy but solid, a sealed doorway, representing the future we desire, when such institutions will be

cities. Weeks later, two people chain themselves to machines while 50 more enter the site. A blockade is established, and the Mirrar Gundjehmi people, who are the aboriginal land owners and are working closely with environmental activists, vow to prevent development of the mine until the project is abandoned.

>> **April** >> The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), negotiated by the 29 rich nations that form the

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in a bid to open up the world for "free" trade is postponed after a vigorous international campaign by anti-corporate activists.

>> **April 1** >> Hundreds of health care workers, in Tameside, England, defy their union and go on strike against pay cuts, saying, "We realized in the first few weeks of the strike as we traveled round the country

that this wasn't just happening to us... Everywhere you go, it's privatization and slashing wages."

>> **April 22** >> Construction begins again illegally on the Maheshwar dam in Madhya Pradesh, India, and over 4,000 people penetrate police barricades to stop it. Despite sweltering heat, police block the protesters' access to clean drinking water and shelter, forcing people to drink oil-contaminated river water. That

derelict and abandoned.

Further up Dowgate Hill, the top entrance to LIFFE was forced open, and people battled up a narrow escalator (crushed glass in the mechanism forced LIFFE staff to use the stairs for the following six months) only to be stopped just yards from the trading floor. Fists flew, flares and smokebombs added to the confusion. I wish I could say I was inside, but by the time I arrived, the riot police had formed a cordon across the entrance, shields held high against a hail of missiles. LIFFE staff were evacuated, but the carnival never reached the trading floor. We'd failed in our under-ambition. Unprepared, we never imagined we could get so close to occupying a trading floor in one of the City's major exchanges. We'd planned the wall, and built it. We'd planned to free the Walbrook, and done it. But we'd stopped short of planning for full-scale occupation.

Then the police rioted. Word must have come down from above that the unexpected rebellion must be put down at any cost. Stepping over piles of burning files and papers, and past a trashed Mercedes show room, we retreated west. Wails of distant sirens merged with cries of distress and anger. A slow motion tidal choreography of rising and falling batons, cracked heads, and dripping red faces, played out around me. The riot police, dumb mutes, high on confiscated amphetamines, hiding behind uniforms, shields and visors, dealt out on-the-spot punishment for anyone who dares to dream or act. Eventually, we were pushed back, and the carnival fractured and fizzled out. A crowd of a few hundred was trapped on Southwark Bridge. Another

crowd made their way to Trafalgar Square. Gradually people left the City. It didn't matter. The carnival had happened, and London's financial centre had come to a grinding halt.

By the end of J18, 46 people had been injured by the police. Sixteen had been arrested, and another fifty arrests followed before the end of the year. Three days later in the House of Commons, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, failed to "...understand the direct connection..." between J18 and the G8 summit. In the House of Lords, Lord Simon of Glaisdale compared J18 in London to "...the storming of the Winter Palace." The Lord Mayor of the City, who'd walked the streets on J18 in disguise, described the area around LIFFE as "...nothing short of a war zone..." and the day itself as "terrorism". A year after, the police were still hunting suspects. Sixty officers trawled through 5,000 hours of CCTV surveillance footage, 138 'offenders' were identified and their photos distributed up and down the country. One man was tracked down by DNA analysis of blood he'd left on the door handle of a riot van. Prison sentences were handed out, as the state sought revenge. The media called us "evil savages", and worse.

Predictably, over the following days, self-styled journalists from so-called newspapers went to town, misrepresenting us all. None of the pictures showed people dancing, peaceful or happy – the only moments deemed sufficiently photogenic for the tabloids and broadsheets are fighting and bleeding and smashed windows. Of course, they'd all missed the real story. It wasn't the practical disruption, the two million pounds of damage. It wasn't the

damage suffered by the international reputation of the City. Instead, it was something more subversive. Until J18, the idea that there was a global movement against capitalism remained just that. An idea. I hoped it was true, but I couldn't really feel it. Many of us felt the same way. Now, because of J18, it had become tangible and real. Our movement had passed some invisible threshold. Tearing down the barriers that usually keep us apart. While we shut down the City of London, people were doing the same all around the world. Those that seek to dominate and rule our lives rely on keeping us apart. If you think you're alone in your desires, you're less likely to act. Divide and rule. tolerate single issues but don't let them join up. To spectators it must have seemed that the movement had appeared from nowhere. But nowhere does exist. It's anywhere people dream of leaving capitalism behind. To feel part of this global movement that transcends boundaries of language, culture, distance, and history, is empowering beyond words.

I left the carnival and found myself walking along the river. In the distance, smoke spiralled into the sky over the

silhouette of the smouldering financial centre. I stood for a while, looking at the water, following the passage of muddy tides and spinning eddies. Enjoying the silence. Imagining the hidden undertows as the evening light glinted on the water's surface. In nature, small, seemingly insignificant changes can have disproportionately large effects. A trickle can become a flood. Raindrops coalesce, tributaries join. Our movement is like a river. A fractal network of converging and anastomosing channels, defying straightforward analysis, and rising from a thousand distant sources. On J18 a new, stronger current emerged into the light. A flow we need to sustain, keep free, and above the ground.

Wat Tyler is a pseudonym

Resources:

- » J18 coverage in *Do or Die* issue 8, See www.eco-action.org/dod/
- » Documents and reports of the day: www.infoshop.org/june18.html

evening, police arrest 1,200 people. Hundreds more return the next day and are beaten, charged by horses, sexually harassed, and 800 more are arrested. They are replaced by surges of new protesters who, in their determination to prevent the dam's construction, set up seven continuous blockades of the key entry points to the construction site.

>> **April 27** >> Half a million Danish workers go on

strike (ten per cent of the population) demanding an extra week's holiday and a 35 hour work week. The strike lasts ten days and virtually shuts down heavy industry, transportation, construction, and even newspapers. It ends with a weak compromise between union leaders and the government.

>> **May** >> For 250 miles, a shipment of high-level radioactive nuclear waste running through Germany

meets numerous demonstrations as 10,000 activists along the way blockade train tracks with cars and their own bodies in an attempt to stop what's referred to as "mobile Chernobyl". Many residents living along the route are relocated, and some areas are enclosed by fences. Some people lock themselves to the rail tracks, and eventually police are forced to pull up the entire section of track and lay down a new one. Throughout