

It's a question that is sometimes asked: "I can see why you might target global organizations (G8, WTO, IMF) that are clearly undemocratic, secretive and self-serving, but why target the European Union? Surely protesting against that is the preserve of right wing nationalists and xenophobes...?"

Some answers were to be found on the French Riviera. The EU summit in Nice from 7-11 December 2000 was a crucial meeting, for it continued the expansion of the EU from the Atlantic in the West, to the borders with Russia and the Ukraine in the East. For corporations who have lobbied for expansion, this signalled new markets, with fewer local controls and lower production costs achieved through a reservoir of cheap yet often highly skilled labour. Of course they also understand that cheaper wages in the East might also be the lever to lower pay in the West!

What activists understand is that the imposition of 'fiscal discipline' and 'liberalization' – as the new entrants try to bring their economies in line with the EU – means that transnational corporations eventually replace domestic production. The export of raw materials will increase with obvious environmental impacts, unemployment will grow, and social provisions will be lowered, leading to greater inequality.

At Nice, the EU also proposed and subsequently implemented the rather grand sounding 'Charter of Fundamental Rights', which despite its name is effectively a retreat from hard won rights gained in struggle. This Charter allows the European Commission to negotiate directly at the WTO in order to deregulate services and erode the conditions of those who work and benefit from them. In the US they call this 'fast track' negotiating power.

As Nice approached, the time had come to begin to tear down the walls of Fortress Europe and to disrupt the creation of yet another extended 'free' trade zone.

Nice – If You Could Only Breathe

by Arnau Facillio

It's January 2000, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The ex-communist President of Poland is surrounded by a horde of high-ranking executives asking him about the next privatizations. Without the slightest blush and in full view of the cameras, the director of a transnational demands immediate measures, and licks his moustaches. The President retorts that he has already privatized 75 per cent of the public enterprises, even while admitting that the energy sector is ripe. But the horde wants more, they're hungry, they love to see their prey caught in a trap. Then the prisoner-President pulls back a bit more, and in an excess of Stockholm syndrome [when the kidnapped falls in love with the kidnapper] he quips: "Hey, when everything's private, what's going to be left for you to privatize?" At which point a hyena rises up amidst the laughter, proposing: "The Government!"

The story, which is true, continues with mounting laughter and the President saying yes, he's with the programme, but maybe some of his ministers won't agree. Let's take this as a parable of the European construction as it stands today, amidst the transfer of powers from the parliaments to the boards of directors. All beneath the guiding lights of the Washington Consensus, the theoretical basis for the domineering expansion of the big North

American, Japanese, and European firms, promoted to the rank of owners of the global village, with police support from the single superpower, the United States. Just to sum it all up. So the politicians have nothing left to do but to validate on paper what's already happening in reality. And that's why they all went to Nice. They went to sign for liberalization (with article 133) and the cutback of social rights (with the Charter of Fundamental Rights). And we went to try to stop them.

Unions and social movements from all over Europe marched massively on 6 December, with different agendas but a shared critique – you have to start somewhere. There were 100,000 of us. The next day we weren't quite so many. The big unions went home. The Global Action Express carrying 1,500 Italians was blocked at the border by – 4,500 policemen! Those who tried to go on the free French trains were gassed at their departure cities. But anyway, we hit the streets early Thursday morning, not very organized but full of desire. The confrontations were settled indiscriminately by the cops with volleys of tear gas. A man who went to get information about the prisoners was hit with a tear gas

“[Enlargement] will bring great economic benefits. These countries will bring... material resources, including land and energy, and they will bring markets for our products.”

– The European Round Table of Industrialists, corporate lobby group

grenade right in the police station, and suffered an epileptic seizure. The demonstrators who went to the Central Station to protest against the delay of the Italians were dispersed by apprentice 'robocops', who banged on their shields with truncheons to drive fear into our hearts, and courage into theirs. The ATTAC members – an international network campaigning for a global tax on financial speculation – who tried to 'invade' Monaco to denounce offshore tax-havens also ran up against the forces of disorder when they lay siege with tear gas and water cannons to the gymnasium

the TABD delegates, resulting in a police attack under the chandeliers; and a picket greets the TABD delegates at their banquet. On the final day, the police turn up costumed in brand new riot gear, and busy themselves harassing and issuing tickets to activists. They disrupt the closing march, arresting and tear gassing the group, and the day ends with martial law imposed.

>> **November 19-22** >> Fighting the privatization of

their water, the Sri Lankan National Alliance for Protection of Water Rights holds four days of action. People from three different parts of the country caravan to Colombo, holding picket lines, distributing handbills exposing and denouncing the WB and WTO policies, and collecting signatures along the way.

>> **November 26** >> A caravan of 150 Egyptian people bring donations of food and medicine to Palestine.

Intending to set up an art exhibit in tents at the Egyptian border of Palestine in Rafah, the activists are shocked when Egyptian border guards refuse them crossing. They are forced to surrender the donations to representatives from Palestinian NGOs in the city of Aarish, 12 miles before the border. Unexpectedly, demonstrations arise throughout Aarish and on the Palestinian side of the border. Thus is born the Popular

that the municipality had finally conceded to the demonstrators. Tension and bad weather, but no lapse in spirits, with the cry of "Tous ensemble!" (we're all together) repeated every moment.

"A great step ahead for the Europe of business": that was the headline of *Le Figaro* the day after the riots in Nice. So not only did we fail to stop the summit, but the great 'decision-makers' went on reinforcing the ultraliberal principles that serve as the guiding spirit and fundamental life-breath for the reconstruction of Europe, while they continued dismantling the social pact that had been put together by the post-war societies. Even with all that,



Tear gas and water cannons protect the EU summit. Nice, France

Meyer / Tendence Floue

"In the West we have mature markets. We are already consuming everything that we are able to consume. You cannot drive two cars at the same time. So we have a slow growth economy... To the East of us, we have around a hundred million people with sophisticated tastes who lack all the items we are already consuming. They need those items."

– General Zygmunt Tyszkiewicz, Director of the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe

political infighting and disputes over vested interests kept them from signing things definitively, and for the moment there are only non-binding agreements. In any case the decisions are taken and will continue to be taken, inexorably. Decisions proving that Thatcher and Reagan didn't preach in the desert: the borders close ever more tightly down on people, and open up ever wider to commodities. Genetically modified foods will find their place, with the help of their lobbies. The real decisions drift toward technocratic organs like the European Commission, the European Central Bank. The tax havens and offshore exchanges will go on coughing up speculative bubbles. The employers' organizations will keep on growing, in Brussels, Berlin, or Davos. Not to mention the

decisions that won't be made – the decisions that could put an end to this era of transnational feudalism, and give politics back to the citizens.

But it's not all about blocking international summits. In Prague the meetings were put off, but the wealth goes on concentrating around its own navel: the supermarkets are still overflowing with useless junk; the structural adjustment plans are still being applied pretty much everywhere (Europe included: the convergence criteria for the single currency are nothing more than disguised adjustment plans); banks go on making 20 per cent profits annually, and foreign debt, the arms trade, and open season on immigrants are all doing fine – to give just a few examples.

Still the most important thing about these counter-summits, the dissonant notes of globalization, is not to break the bones of some high-ranking executive but to break out of the ghetto, end the isolation, or in other words, to go on weaving ourselves into a great network, and to nourish a transcontinental cry. Because despite the media circus, these counter-summits are a good opportunity to see each other, and to be seen.

Committee in Solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada.
>> **December 6-8** >> At least 90,000 people demonstrate in Nice, France, despite the lifting of the Schengen Agreement, which leaves thousands of internationals stranded at the border, and the halting of many domestic Nice-bound trains. The protests are against European Union expansion of 'free' trade negotiating rights, and are the largest Northern protests

of their kind to date. Tear gas and pepper spray are used liberally by the 15,000 police, who in their zeal, also manage to gas delegates inside the meeting due to faulty ventilation systems, sending President Chirac into coughing fits during his opening speech.

>> **December 9** >> Thirty people from six different countries storm the stage during a closed session of government negotiations over global warming at the UN

It's about finding spaces where money doesn't measure the value of all things; it's about leaving lies and solitude behind. Next stop: a better world.

Arnau Facillillo currently lives in Can Masdeu, a squatted paradisiacal eco-community in rural Barcelona. He was a freelance participant in the recently dissolved MRG (Global Resistance Movement) – dissolved to avoid the boring politics of representation and branded resistance.

Resources:

» **Corporate Observatory Europe's incredible website detailing your worse fears about capital:** www.xs4all.nl/~ceo

» **State Watch monitors the erosion of civil liberties in the EU:** www.statewatch.org

COP6 climate summit, in Den Haag, Netherlands. The hall is eventually cleared of delegates and sealed off to press while the protesters are assaulted by security. Meanwhile, five activists drop a banner from the roof in protest at emissions trading. Another banner is hung directly outside the Congress Centre, which says "Climate Talks = Money Talks."

>> **Continued on page 317 >>**