

## AUTONOMOUS SPACES AND THE ESF Looking back but moving forward....

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But it's not just grassroots environmental and direct actions groups that have been critical of the ESF processes. Recently a coalition of the major UK trade justice and environmental NGOs wrote in a letter: "Many British NGOs are keen to get involved in the ESF but have found it difficult to do so because of the lack of transparency and openness in the UK process".

The Autonomous Spaces themselves are made up of groups from many different backgrounds,

with many political visions, that do not have, nor represent, one single unified position on the ESF.

It is important to say that there are some who believe "Another ESF Is Possible". Throughout the last year they have fought inside the process to "democratise" the ESF, and as such their criticism is borne from direct experience and cannot be dismissed. They believe the co-option of the ESF process and the financial manipulation of power by authoritarian organisations (Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Action, and representatives of London's Government - the GLA) represents the hijacking of

the democratic and participatory principles of the Social Forum.

Some believe that it is possible to rebuild the ESF to make it closer to the ideals it claims, and to build a truly participative process, but others - after their experiences - believe this is simply not possible.

Then there are others who stand in opposition to the ESF because they believe it only represents a space of recuperation of struggles, a space that does not promote the overcoming of capitalism, but only its preservation with a more "human face".

There are finally those who prefer to define themselves by what they do, and are not interested in identifying themselves in relation to ESF.

"We all however are united in our diversity and in our desire to act together in ways that respect these differences"

So, instead of standing idly by while the ESF claims to be the new representative body of "sensitive, political active citizens", we want to demonstrate "another possible world" - a world which is already here today... **The world of... Autonomy, Self-Organisation, Solidarity, Sustainability**

"If you listen carefully to the celebrating voices, those of the rich and the powerful in their corporate offices and government buildings, you can pick up a nervous undertone.

If you watch the policymakers closely, you may notice that the smiles are often thin and the hands that hold champagne glasses sometimes twitch, involuntarily.

If you listen even more carefully, you can discover why. In the background you can hear another set of voices - those from below - far, far more numerous.

These are voices the powerful do not want to hear, but they are having a harder and harder time ignoring them."



**In 2005 the G8, the rulers of eight of the worlds most powerful nations, return to Europe for their major annual Summit. Being held from 6th-8th July at the Gleneagles Hotel, Perthshire, Scotland.**

The last time the G8 met in the UK was in Birmingham in May 1998. Then, up to 70,000 people encircled the centre of Birmingham, forming a human chain and demanding an end to third world debt. On the same day, up to 7,000 people took control of the centre of Birmingham for the second Global Reclaim the Streets Party - with simultaneous co-ordinated actions and protests resisting the G8 in around 40 cities across the world, with over 400 social movements taking action under the banner of Peoples' Global Action.

Since then, the summits and conferences of the global elite have resisted in every country in which they have attempted to meet. Spectacular acts of disobedience and direct action which have taken place around these international summits: in Seattle, Prague, Genoa, Cancun and Evian elsewhere. These mobilisations have had enormous repercussions, successfully delegitimising these institutions, creating lasting connections and a sense of global solidarity between previously disconnected local struggles. A global 'movement of movements', which is historically unprecedented in many respects, has emerged at a phenomenal speed.

In response to this growing resistance to the policies of the G8, next year, the eight rulers plan to fortress themselves off from reality in the plush surroundings of Gleneagles. The luxurious golf resort has long been the playground of the well-connected and privileged. People from across the UK and beyond are vowing that the well-tended lawns of Gleneagles will not be a 'protest-free zone'. The surreal bubble in which the elite have retreated will be punctured.

Six years on from 1998, people in the UK are again organising around the G8. A growing network of dozens of groups with nodes across the country has been created called Dissent! - an anti-capitalist network planning radical resistance to the G8 Summit and building alternatives to the current social order.

The network was formed in the autumn of 2003 by a group of people who have previously been involved in radical ecological direct action, Peoples Global Action, the anti-war movement and the global anti-capitalist movement.

Groups and movements across Europe have also called for a global day of action against the G8, and all it represents, on the opening day of the Summit. It is a call for people to converge in Scotland to disrupt the Summit, and for action to be taken simultaneously in villages, towns and cities world-wide.

But how can we continue to resist and push for radical social change that goes beyond a day of spectacular action and more intense repression? To move forward we need to be careful not to fulfil the roles that are expected of us. We need to evolve and innovate, to take 'them' and ourselves

by surprise and reveal the creativity and dynamism at the heart of our movements.

Many people are now looking at other forms of creative political engagement and action. Training programmes are being created and over the next months the Trapeze "Educate the G8" Roadshow is travelling the country and preparing community teaching tools. From Peace protesters to Direct Action activists, Party people to Pagans, all are gearing up for a spectacular 2005.

Plans are already afoot for building inspiring convergence spaces, self-managed zones which will house and feed thousands while providing a living example of leaderless, free and ecological community. Some are planning on working together with groups based around Gleneagles, creating and developing social and ecological initiatives in the area, while others are developing new blockade techniques. There are even rumours of a huge, rebellious clown army, and a 'peoples' golf tournament!

This is a call to learn from our history and our successes; a call to assess our current position and our current strengths; a call to debate and strategise; a call to formulate a response to the heads of the world's most powerful states meeting in Scotland next year.

What do you want to make happen? Get together with others, start planning how you want to be involved in this process and get in touch with the Dissent! Network so you can link with others across the UK and beyond. If we co-operate and co-ordinate we can start building new worlds. It has never been so vital, or so possible.

### CONTACTS

**Dissent! Network** [www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk)  
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**Peoples' Global Action** [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)  
Info on global social movements

### G8 Events Around the ESF

**There are many mobilisations against the G8 gathering force in the UK. From the largest ever coalition of NGOs and church groups campaigning on debt and trade rules under the banner "Make Poverty History" to a growing number of campaigns around Climate Change, it's clear that the 2005 G8 is going to be a significant moment in history.**

**Around the ESF there are many opportunities to meet, discuss, plan and explore the possibilities for taking action, with seminars and workshops both in the main ESF as well as the Autonomous Spaces. Friday 15th will see over 12 workshops on the G8 organised by Dissent! at the Beyond ESF space, while Saturday will see two major ESF seminars and the closing session of the Schnews conference, all dealing with the G8, the issues around it, and the plans for mobilising next year. Also see Dissent! Network Stall at Alexandra Palace.**

**See you in Scotland!**

[www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk)