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## **STRASBOURG: BRAINSTORMING WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE VIOLENCE OF THE STATE.**

April 6:

I have come away from Strasbourg full of questions and it seems to me important to discuss them with you all: collectives against war, alterglobalists, activists from all these splinter left-wing parties, though you seek each other out and aspire to unity, but also all you radical feminists and anarchists.

Geneviève and myself went to Strasbourg to take part in a workshop (Friday) organised by WILPF and the "Women in Black", within the context of the Counter Summit. This workshop brought together activists from a dozen different European countries, some of whom were also members of the World March. What was said during this meeting explained why we, as women, are fundamentally opposed to NATO, the armed wing of a patriarchal and capitalist society. On Saturday, we joined the demonstration in order to publicly show our refusal of NATO.

First of all, what this day was like for me.

The gathering took place 7km away from the town centre in an empty port. Most of the demonstrators walked these 7km. There were neither buses nor trams. I covered about 4km by taxi with a few other women. All cross-streets were blocked off by police cars or vans and by battalions of "robocops". (The previous day, women who were taking a bus home were stopped by a tank, barring their way; it strangely resembled the Israeli tanks that invaded Gaza. They were obliged to get out of the bus, along with Strasbourg residents and their children, and to show their papers!) After a long walk, we are the first to arrive at this empty abandoned space from which the demonstration is to depart. Groups of demonstrators start to arrive in dribs and drabs.

The people in charge of the associations and parties start to speak. Two helicopters fly over, trying to cover the voices of the speakers with a deafening humming. Then, a dark cloud of smoke rises into the sky, followed by another close by that engulfs us. Our eyes start to sting and we move away in a disorganised manner. We try to spot the different association flags, but everywhere we look, the area is suddenly full of people in black. I took Geneviève's arm and stayed to the side so as not to be crushed in case of a sudden reflux. Suddenly, we can't move forward anymore. We're stuck. We want to go left, then right; impossible. Lots of people are trying to find a way of moving forward. We're stuck in a cement rock slide. About ten metres above us is a railway ballast. We climb, slide down, then climb again. We finally get out of the rock pit but find ourselves face to face with a load of police vans, full of unmoving/immobile policemen. All of a sudden, one of the vans takes off like a shot. We get off the pavement and it misses us. We then find ourselves on a road in front of a wrecked petrol station. Women unfold their banners; finally a recognisable sign. We regroup, but do not stay long. Journalists are taking photographs; we don't want to be in these pictures. We start walking and turn left.

We're on a motorway in the midst of the demonstration. In the distance, there is a bridge covered in "robocops". We meet up with more women. We walk on and end up on the bridge. We sit down in the grass area below. There are four women among us who are over sixty. We are tired. Flash balls, police grenades. Some demonstrators come over to talk to us and offer us some eye drops, worried to see us amidst all this violence. Above us, on the road, a young man in black is kicking a signpost with the bus timetable on it. Again, we find

ourselves in a Black Block. We're fed up...

My story is incoherent. No one understands anything. But this is what I experienced among with thousands of other demonstrators. We were in real danger, especially when the van charged us.

I was in Geneva. It was terribly violent, but I never had this impression of being trapped like a rat. There were a lot of streets we could use to run away. And one didn't find oneself in the Black Blocks unless one wanted to be there. In Strasbourg, as soon as the demonstration started, they were all around us, without any thought or consideration for the demonstrators.

The contrast was all the more striking for us, since we had held a workshop the previous day with women from lots of different European countries; a workshop during which we showed that patriarchal and capitalist systems reinforce each other, making violence natural - a violence that is expressed through militarization and war. The evening after the demonstration, we felt bad and we started to reflect on what was, for us, a failure. We had lived through a day that completely contradicted what we wanted to build/accomplish: a world of peace and mutual respect. We felt like we had been trapped between two forms of mindless violence, that of the police and of the Black Blocks. Two different sources of violence that seek each other out and answer each other. Both indifferent to people, and putting these same people in real danger.

Continued on April 11<sup>th</sup>

I wrote this story the evening I got back from Strasbourg. Since then, eight days have passed. There are websites that show the story in photographs, analyses in the papers. One begins to understand what happened and that the police voluntarily did all they could to bring this violence about and divide us if possible.

### **Discuss, reflect, Seek new strategies.**

The events in Strasbourg must act as an electric shock that shakes us and obliges us to think of other ways. Which ways? I don't know. But we cannot go on full of innocent enthusiasm, as if we didn't know the realities.

A counter summit that takes place 10km away from Strasbourg in a hidden gymnasium - what does that mean?

How could we accept a demonstration route that goes through an empty area? Have we the means of imposing another route?

What should we do, knowing that the state often doesn't keep its promises and that we risk finding ourselves in the same situation again one day?

What should we do, confronted with such a show of violence from the state?

How can we make our refusal of the essence of the matter clear? (In this case, our refusal of NATO.)

Clearly decide what effect we want our public appearance to have. Do we simply want to state our refusal? Do we want to make the state retreat(?)? Who are we addressing? Do we want to convince our fellow citizens of rightness(?) of our position?

How can we make a difference? Are demonstrations going to help?

How can we take part in the same demonstration if we don't have the same positions versus the state?

How can we do things together when some of us think that what are needed are mass demonstrations and others just want to destroy the symbols of capitalism? How can we have mutual respect and care for those who are demonstrating with us?

How can we defend our right to demonstrate and insure the safety of those who come? I am 68. I find it hard to walk. But a democratic country is a country where even old disabled women are allowed to demonstrate/show their (divergence of) opinion.

It seems to me that, based on these past events, we could discuss these matters with the greatest mutual respect and without resorting to caricature of each others positions, so as to decide what we can and cannot do together. It will be difficult, but necessary.

Let us not forget our essential positions on NATO.

We must not fall into the government's trap, focusing on the police violence and forgetting the reasons of our trip to Strasbourg. We, women of WILPF, "Women in Black", activists of the "World March", we are resolutely opposed to NATO, and not only to the position of France who wants to reintegrate the military command(?), but to the actual existence of NATO and what it has become, a war machine in the hands of the capitalists, and in particular the Americans. The counter summit on Friday enabled us to hear the accounts of people from the East, Afghans, Czechs, who told us what NATO, having destroyed their respective countries, meant to them. The accounts only reinforced our absolute opposition to NATO.