

Irmgard Heilberger, Munich Strasbourg Evaluation notes

For women who understand German, here is a link to the speech I gave on the so-called Easter demonstration, a German tradition in the peace movement, where I gave an overview of the Strasbourg actions (in Augsburg on Saturday, April 11, 2009). Some women came over immediately to ask more about the results of our workshop.

Some short remarks

Workshop:

I liked the networking with women from different countries and organizations. We should think about sorting it into a campaign, or having a sort of review in half a year, concerning ideas coming out of the Gender workshop.

Conference:

We all know that it was very difficult for the organizers, but nevertheless we must say that the conditions for the conference were difficult, with no technical equipment, and in a sports hall with curtains separating three simultaneous multi-language workshops.

There were not enough of us women, but for the next event, we could try a little gender- analysis, counting how many women and men speak in the different plenaries and workshops.

Demonstration:

The French police treated us as enemies, not civilians. At one point, as the demonstration broke up, they "emprisoned" us in a railroad underpass with the 'black block' and used tear gas on all of us. Some of the black block members were violent and criminal, they instrumentalized us and broke out of our midst to destruct or burn houses, to steal things. And they were protected by face masks, unlike us. As I came through the tunnel with Brida and stones were thrown in front of us and above us, blocked by the wall and the ongoing police cars I felt in danger and very powerless and reflected about the responsibility of the peace movement and my responsibility, too, as we had tried to get as many people as possible to Strasbourg.

German peace movement organizers who have a long experience with large demonstrations told me that they were "surprised" by the way the French police worked - but I remember that Tobias Pflüger, for instance, a member of EU- parliament in Strasbourg, said at the first preparation conference in Stuttgart in October 2008 that the French police was used to blocking the entire city center and that it will be very difficult to get them wished way. The French and German police did what they had told us from the beginning. For they never told us, yes, you will demonstrate together, the bridge will be open...

I understand that you have to signalize "hope" to get a lot of people there, which succeeded. But I really missed a worst-case scenario on the part of the organizers. I missed some peace movement 'peacekeepers' in the demonstration, I never saw one. I missed an organized shuttle for the older women.

I read a lot in the internet about the escalating behaviour of the police, that is true. But in the inner circle of the peace movement, we really should discuss the effects of the non-violent actions taken in our names, too. And I do not mean, to be very clear, actions of civil disobedience.

1) If the alternative to war is respect, love and non-violence, we can only prove this by being respectful, full of love and without violence. The media focused on the prominent people and the violence coming out of our demonstration, articles about our topics and interests were rare. I am really convinced that violence is the creator of new violence and is never a solution.

2) How can we (the non-violent demonstrators) prevent being instrumentalized as a protection shield against police, which puts people's lives in danger? For me, building a separate 'black block' is not the answer, it is merely an 'outsourcing' of the violence. I couldn't applaud Petros Constantinou, when during the conference on Sunday he praised the young Greeks in Athens who had destroyed police stations... is this our youth army?

How can we organize some kind of group of experienced men and women to prevent violence and aggressive actions during the demonstration?

3) We should keep in mind what we discussed after the demonstration, about being more cautious the next time, for example building groups of three and four who exchange phone numbers and keep together.