

ECB: Exponentiated high security zone

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A building has now been opened for business in the middle of Frankfurt with a police and military security proliferation that not even nuclear power plants are granted. The city of Frankfurt, however, pretends that this is a regular state of affairs and if framed at all as an anomaly, that it is created by the critics of the Troika policies. A bank that excludes journalist from most media outlets from its opening ceremony and refers the public to its own sources – a bank which therefore ignores the public - is supported by the city of Frankfurt; by policies that as a matter of course announce a state of emergency when a handful of politicians and special guests meet.

The everyday security of the ECB is already high, with a security fence the vast terrain between the same and the building under constant surveillance. On the occasion of the official celebration of the opening of the new building, which considerably shrank in size in the run-up to the event, the authorities created a no-go area in a public space. The public street was no longer accessible for citizens. Crowd control barriers were not deemed sufficient to cordon off the area. Two rows of temporary fencing were set up with razor wire, which can lead to serious injuries, in between. But even that was not enough – concrete blocks were used to weigh the barriers down. The police had entrapped itself within this high security zone. To make sure that citizens would not even reach this comprehensive blockade, another ten metre-wide restricted zone was invented, demarcated by white lines on the ground, including grass fields. One white strip traced the line of the fence, filled in by white diagonal lines. In the morning this imaginary fence was indicated in parts by barrier tape at eye-level. But even this was not enough. Police barriers were erected before the line, in order to stop the demonstrators from accessing the area where they were allowed to demonstrate.

Organisers and stewards of the demonstration were yet again given the impossible task to ensure that even the symbolic barriers marked on the ground were respected. They are supposed to be responsible if individuals violate the legal restraints. They should do this, that and the other and - if in doubt - they should announce an end to the demonstration. It is in fact a miracle that there are still people who volunteer as organisers and expose themselves to this kind of pressure. This is what democracy looks like; in particular the right to demonstrate, which the police continuously claimed to support in loudspeaker announcements throughout the day.

The bank had thus excluded the public; the authorities had agreed to it and even participated in the 'celebrations'. The police had accepted the task of occupying the public space to represent the interests of a bank. Does this kind of politics not ridicule itself? Shouldn't a loud laughter have resounded throughout Europe, at a political regime that requires that level of protection? There was no need to block the celebration, it had already blocked itself.

The laughter, however, dies away in view of the suffering that these policies produce. In this self-made ivory tower, the consequences of the policies are not felt by those who devise them. And those who want to bring their criticism to the streets and into the media, were discredited from the outset. Violent riots were predicted. And this is what the media eventually had to report on.

There is hardly a single mass demonstration after which there is not the demand from organisers to distance themselves from the violence that has occurred. This time, however, the situation is different, and there is indeed a need to talk about the violence. Not because of the material damage incurred, but for the sake of the ideas for which Blockupy stands. What remains the same though, is that yet again there is much more to report about than the one-sided picture presented in the media. The political analyses of the Blockupy movement, and how the critique should be communicated, warrant debate.

We read in the media that on 18 March 2015, Frankfurt was hit by an excessive wave of violence. We saw pictures of burning cars, stones flying through the air, shattered windows. Stones and fireworks were thrown at people, at the police, at workmen and at other persons. A group of people, not small in number, but small in relation to the rest of the demonstration, wanted to create mayhem and fear.

We can also report, however, about a colourful, peaceful, vocal protest that even respected the absurd and insolent imaginary fences demarcated by white lines on the ground, 10 metres in front of martial barriers. We can report about the actions of the Clowns Army, about choirs and theatre groups that presented their political criticism in an entertaining manner. There were many groups that marched through the city with banners or blocked a bridge and did not let themselves be intimidated by arbitrary police violence. This form of protest, which characterises Blockupy, resonates widely with the population. Several thousand citizens, be they 7.000 or 10.000, had come together to protest and rally on an early midday morning and by the afternoon their numbers had increased to around 20.000; even after the shocking news reports about the morning's events.

We can report about a police force that bullied demonstrators with batons, pepper spray and CS gas grenades. They did not target those groups that produced the first media images in the morning, but rather peaceful demonstrators. For hours, the police encircled one group that was obviously not connected to the rampaging demonstrators who had roamed the streets in the morning. Although the police let some demonstrators through to the barriers at the Paul-Arnberg-Platz, where a picket was granted by the authorities, they stopped groups of people from getting to the site. We can also report that despite the violence that

took place in the morning, the police – although in martial appearance – did not intervene in the mass demonstration in the afternoon. Parts of the demonstration were, however, accompanied by police lines more tight-fitting and menacing than necessary.

We live in a world that is characterised by violence all-round. Germany as a nation is central in devising EU policies that have benefitted the country but led to much more direct negative consequences in other countries. If only the governing mayor Feldmann's inauguration speech were true: "Frankfurt has also always been home to a radical critique of capitalism, but violence has always been rejected by the population and all critics of the financial system. It has to stay this way." These are the Sunday speeches of those whose policies are based on violence.

In view of the insufferable consequences of the current regime, of the poverty in large parts of Europe, of the deadly rejection of refugees, of a politics that produces the rejection of migrants and that makes martial policies a status quo, is it not rather surprising how peaceful and diverse and even joyous this protest was, to a much larger extent?

Violence

It is not the first time that cars have been set on fire. But the apologetic and indifferent reaction 'what does one burning car matter', is arrogant towards those who have deliberated about means and aims and have taken responsibility and built up trust. Material damage is one thing. But this form of planned violence was aimed at exercising power over others. Violence was their means, as it is the means of the powers that be.

Time and again, protest movements have to defend themselves against an inflationary use of the term violence by the authorities. Even those who write on the ECB's windows with chalk are pronounced to be violent. Acts of civil disobedience are deemed violent, even if it is precisely those acts that are characterised by a consideration for all participants, by mutual agreements and by refraining from taking actions that could endanger others.

The self-declared street fighters that roamed the streets Wednesday morning do not want to be considerate towards any of these actions. They captured a well-organised 'finger' that was intending to march towards a blockade. They exploited the demonstrators and enforced their own agenda with martial macho behaviour. In their propensity for violence and lack of consideration for others they hardly differ from the logic of the current world order. This is why they should not be part of this protest.

The question, however, remains: what can a protest against the dominant impositions look like, which conveys the seriousness of the situation, does not pander to the language of those in power, reaches broad sections of society and does not sink into oblivion? A protest against a high security zone appears to be rather fruitless. The police sent in to defend the building, blocked the ECB itself. How could these military proliferations had been made visible and the perversion of those in power been ridiculed? What kind of policies make banks into military enclosures, and how can this been dealt with innovatively by protesters?

At the end of May 2013, many creative forms of protest were visible in Frankfurt, they were based on solid arguments and the 'culprits' were identified, sometimes tongue-in-cheek. But this was followed by police encirclements and the successful ban of a mass demonstration.

We will lose as soon as we succumb to the military logic. Not because this war cannot be won anyway, given the state's military powers, but because we would start supporting ideas that we have to fight. Human rights and democracy are not won by military means.

Yes, one could despair that the policies never change, that the rich multiply their wealth in ever more audacious ways whilst others suffer or even die. The Troika policies that are responsible for poverty and suffering are being enforced with power and arrogance onto a Greek government that was democratically elected by the people of Greece. Who would not want to despair or finally resort to violent means? The power of the oppressed, however does not originate from violence but from critical analysis, perseverance and humour, from the love for life and from solidarity. This is why Blockupy continues to be so important; because it combines critical knowledge with the willingness to act. This is probably the worst of all: that this brief violent orgy did not respect the trust that was built up between the different groups participating in Blockupy or the movement's ability to act in forms that enable broad participation. The Blockupy network uses civil disobedience and creative forms of protest. The goals should become visible also in the means that are used to achieve them. Those who argue lightly that change can only be achieved by violent means and that peaceful protest is illusory have already become part of the prevailing system.

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