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The Rebel Colours of S26: Social Movement 'Frame-work' during the Prague IMF/WB protests

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Abstract

This paper presents data gathered during and since the protests against the IMF and World Bank meetings in Prague in September 2000. It describes the parallel decision-making processes that occur within the network of social movement organisations that coalesce around these summits and evaluates the implications for social and environmental activism of these newly opened democratic spaces. The paper describes the construction and application by activists, of three separate marches denoted by different colours, which took place on September 26th in Prague during the 'Global Day of Action'. It examines the process of originating these 'action frames' the elaborate negotiation of conflicting ideological and tactical dispositions that lay behind them, and the variety of democratic decision making forums which were instrumental in their design.

Introduction

This paper originates from research carried out for an ESRC funded project on 'Global Social Movements', which focused upon activist and media framings of the mobilisations in Prague against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in September 2000. The concept of 'framing' is now a familiar form of analysis in social movement studies (Snow et al, 1986, Snow and Benford, 1992, Gamson, 1992, 1996) and originates from the pioneering work of the American sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) and the British social anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1973).

The concept of frame is used here to denote interpretive schemata which allow actors to make sense of a 'strip of activity' (Goffman, 1974:10) and represent that activity through expressive and communicative means in a manner designed to aid understanding of a particular level of abstraction within the complex social category of collective action. In this instance the strip of activity concerned is a protest event, the Prague protests against the IMF and World Bank, and the 'length' of this 'strip' is relative to and is determined by the actor's engagement with the process of originating, carrying through and reflecting upon the protest.

The model of framing used in this paper is reflexive and nested; we consider that activists construct frames which are in turn framed by the research process through a discursive academic translation that facilitates understanding of different degrees of abstraction. These are revealed through data analysis and by reference to a body of literature about social movements. We appreciate that to a certain extent this is stating the obvious: we as researchers are involved in interpreting and making-sense of the processes where by actors engaged in a protest interpret and make-sense of their actions and the actions of others, a so-called double hermeneutic. However, we feel it is important to recognise and distinguish between these different layers, which are sometimes conflated in a manner that suggests the revelation of a particular and fixed truth about a given event. An example would be the frequent simplification of activist frames in media accounts through the substitution of a deviance model,

which steers debate towards reductionist explanations based upon the levels of criminality exhibited by differing groups within the protest event[1]. This is not to say we favour a radical constructivism, merely that we presume and acknowledge the dynamic processes of interaction through which our construction of knowledge occurs and the contingent factors which impinge upon that process.

To these ends, the research team developed a process-oriented methodology in an attempt to map the construction and articulation of frames within the communities of activists engaged in the Prague mobilisation. A variety of data was collected prior to, during and after the Prague protests, this included video-footage and photographic materials recorded by the research team, field notes from participant observation, narrative interviews, activist produced video and audio recordings and the collection of activist samizdat and agit-prop materials, as well as media product from the Czech republic, UK and the USA. The arguments proposed in this paper originate from scrutiny of this material informed by reflection upon the original theoretical exposition of frame analysis that is found in both Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974).

The paper has four sections:

- Context – the history, setting and structure of opportunities of the Prague protests
- Actors and processes – key players and their relationships, decision-making forums, emergent frames
- Description – S26, colours, marches, manifestation of protest repertoires
- Analytical and activist frames – negotiation and construction of meaning.

It begins by examining the context of the Prague protests and situating them in relation to their immediate antecedents, including the mobilisations in Seattle against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) the year before (1999). It then moves on to consider the key actors and processes and to explain their roles relative to each other

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[1] A factor which introduces considerable methodological problems for those social movement scholars who rely upon mainstream media reporting (c.f. Kriesi *et al*, 1995).

and to the construction and articulation of emergent collective action frames. I describe this as the elucidation of an 'ecology of action' which I define as: the system of relations between differing groups and individuals who are engaged in producing collective action within a context determined by fixed temporal, spatial and material constraints which are themselves a product of contingent social, political, and cultural forces. [2]

It is my contention that at the point of interaction between social movement groups this 'ecology' is a fluid, open and dynamic system and it is therefore a fertile terrain for the transference of ideas and/or social practices between one domain, and one group or individual to another, a process which can include adaptation, assimilation and amplification. An example, perhaps, of a system of social relationships and interaction that is adept at (or susceptible to) memetic[3] transfer, the viral like movement of clusters of ideas and practices. Consequently, as we shall see from the discussion in the latter part this paper, seemingly marginal actors may have a more pronounced effect upon the strategy, performance and outcomes of certain protest events than their profile within the social movement would indicate. This is particularly so, when their approach is novel and/or coincides with existing modes of understanding within the movement milieu[4].

This ecology of action is interrogated further through description and analysis of the three marches that took place on September 26th (S26), the opening day of the World Bank/IMF Conference in Prague. These marches, distinguished by colours (Blue, Pink and Yellow), were the outcome of protracted intra-movement negotiation about the political and strategic goals for the protest event and they have since come to delineate and in some instances to represent emergent collective identities, that are

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[2] This is an extension of the metaphor Bateson uses in *Ecology of Mind* (1973), it describes the analytical field of collective action (c.f. Melucci 1996:25) with which this paper is concerned.

[3] Richard Dawkins (in his book *The Selfish Gene,* 1976) first used the term meme to describe the transference of ideas and cultural products in a manner that mimics viral infection. This concept has also influenced the increasing penchant for corporations to attempt 'viral marketing', the utilisation and subtle manipulation of memetic transfer through new informative technologies and the increasingly networked patterns of communicative association displayed by groups and individuals in real and virtual situations.

characterised by a particular orientation towards collective action based upon political perspective and the use of certain protest repertoires. Our research suggests that these colours act as frames, sense-making devices that were applied using different levels of abstraction that varied according to the individual's capacity and need to orientate his or herself towards the entirety of the event or movement s/he was helping to constitute. In this paper, I describe these marches before moving on to consider what we can conclude from these strategic and tactical choices about the composition of this social movement network and its future trajectory.

The 'Rebel Colours'[5], which were manifest in the three marches and their particular outcomes, provide us with three categories, three analytical frames, which we use to interrogate the protest event and the data collected. Whilst these correspond, in colour, to the frames employed by activists and were visibly manifest on the streets, they should not be considered as reducible to, or interchangeable with activist frames. Instead, the three frames we utilise should be seen for what they are: analytically discrete models of ideal types, which are unlikely ever to correspond precisely with the messiness of large-scale collective action. Explanation of this model, which forms the premise for our analytical framework and the basis of our subsequent findings provides the remainder of the paper's content.

Contexts - Prague and Post-Seattle Protest

The Seattle protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in November 1999 had a significant impact upon Social Movement Networks (SMN[6]) in Europe. The WTO is the successor institution to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and it plays a crucial role in the continuing neo-liberal re-structuring of capitalism that begun in the early 1980s and subsequently accelerated with the fall of the Soviet Union. It promotes a free trade agenda and a rules based system of settling

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[4] This is a similar claim to Granovetter's (1973) seminal argument concerning 'The Strength of Weak Ties'.

[5] 'Rebel Colours' is the title of a video produced by the Prague Independent Media Centre (IMC) which used the three colours (Pink, Blue and Yellow) to organise its narrative account of the day's events.

[6] I define a Social Movement Network as a constellation of quasi-autonomous groups and individuals linked through belief, value or common practice which engage in communication and exchange.

trade disputes that protects the interests of the most powerful international actors, the so-called 'quad group' of the U.S., European Union, Canada and Japan[7]. Its critics suggest that it is undemocratic, that its processes exclude the poorest countries and that it provides a platform for corporate lobbyists who exercise undue influence over decisions that are binding for member states (see Dannaher & Burbach [eds.] 2000, also Brecher et al, 2000).

That it should be effectively blockaded and shut down, simultaneously drawing media attention to its role and functioning whilst empowering those member states from the majority world[8] to exercise power in forums where they had previously been ignored was widely considered to be a momentous victory for campaigners who had taken to the streets (see Cockburn et al, 2000). Consequently, the meeting of the IMF and World Bank which had already been scheduled for Prague the following year became a focal point for those who believed the success of Seattle could be translated into a European context. Some of those for whom this idea was attractive were present in Seattle and many had already had experience of organising internationally through nascent international social movement networks such as Peoples Global Action (PGA)[9], which has been prominent in focusing opposition to the WTO.

In setting the context for the Prague protests it is important to note that the events in Seattle were not unprecedented and that the WTO had faced organised opposition and protest at its Ministerial Conference only the year before, a fact which is noticeably absent from any of the most recent accounts of these movement networks (Brecher et al, 2000, Dannaher & Burbach [eds.] 2000, Cockburn et al, 2000, Starr, 2000). In 1998, the WTO met in Geneva (where it is based) to celebrate 50 years of

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[7] Evidence from trade disputes during the past few years suggests that in fact, it is the U.S. that benefits most (see Bello in Dannaher & Burbach, [eds.] 2000).

[8] I have purposely avoided the term 'developing' countries as this discourse affirms a model of development which is neither socially nor environmentally sustainable.

[9] People's Global Action originates in the process begun by the Zapatista communities of Mexico in 1996, when they called for an *encuentro,* a meeting of international civil society 'for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism'. The second encuentro which took place in Spain in 1997 laid the foundations for the PGA which then held its first conference in Geneva to coincide with the WTO ministerial meeting.

free trade (GATT) and to announce Seattle as the venue for its next Ministerial Conference. This led to the most significant instance of public disorder in Switzerland's post-war history, including mass protests, clashes with riot police and property damage to the outlets of Multi-National Corporations (MNCs). People's Global Action held its first conference in the run-up to the WTO meeting and were prominent in the Geneva protests, which occurred only a few days after a 'global street party' held in 72 countries and timed to coincide with the Group of Eight (G8) meeting in Birmingham, England[10]. Reports from the Geneva protests also pre-figure some of the seemingly 'novel' aspects of Seattle; such as the coalitions formed between diverse groups, the involvement of organised labour and the wide range of international participation:

> 'The Genevan police, used to dealing with unruly young people, was thunderstruck. Medha Patkar and other very "respectable looking" women in magnificent saris suddenly swinging themselves gracefully over the police barriers; a huge Maori woman, six foot tall and very broad, leaning over a helmeted young policeman, sticking her tongue out about six inches in the traditional grimace of provocation; an irrepressibly jolly young Spaniard, head-diving into the police lines, consistently being thrown back over the barriers and consistently diving over again; a nimble elf from Reclaim The Streets climbing like a monkey to the top of the WTO gates; the incredible, from the gut speeches of a Canadian postal worker, and our local passionaria.' (E-mail report by 'Red-Red 2' of Action Populaire Contre la Mondialisation [APCM])

In the context of this intra-movement dialogue, the Seattle protests were considered important because they demonstrated the momentum and consolidation of a global social movement network and provided the first clear example of 'success' in a country widely held to be *the* apotheosis of free-market capitalism. The capacity of social movement disorganisations[11] to mount and sustain confrontational protests

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[10] 'Thousands of anarchists occupied city centre streets in defiance of the massed ranks of hundreds of police... The 'green' protest was organised by the underground Reclaim The Streets movement.' Taylor, B & Walker, J. (May 17th 1998) 'Brum shut off by road demo' *Sunday Mercury,* p: 1, 10.

[11] The term (disorganisation) has long been popular in the discourse of environmental and social justice activists and many groups self classify with this label. It emphasises an empirically observable method of organising which favours individual and group autonomy, participatory decision making structures and a lack of hierarchy.

was proving effective at mobilising increasing numbers of people and Prague rapidly became a focus for the continuation of this strategy.

> 'I'd known about Seattle and sort of thought about going but couldn't because it was too far away and I didn't have the time. So, when Prague came up, I heard about Prague through the Internet, through the discussions, when that happened it just felt that this was going to be the focus point really. And similar to XXXX there was part of me that wanted to be actually part of that, witness that and involve myself in that. And also it seemed to be a very high profile way of making a point and being able to use that to get back and say the same things in this country' (Interview with respondent N, a British activist)

Actors and Processes – INPEG, PGA and the International Meetings

INPEG is an acronym of the Czech words for Initiative Against Economic Globalisation. INPEG formed in Prague in September 1999 from a number of different Czech groups including environmentalists[12], anarchists[13] and socialists who came together with the express purpose of providing a platform for opposition to the meeting of the IMF and the World Bank. INPEG formed before the Seattle protests which occurred later that year - at the end of November and the beginning of December.

The post-Seattle interest in the IMF and World Bank meeting meant that INPEG had quickly to adjust from being a loose affiliation of Czech based groups to become a focus for other European social movement disorganisations who were seeking to develop the opportunities that were emerging after the collapse of the WTO Ministerial.

> '…by March or April, we had a lot of contacts with groups in England and all of Europe' (Interview with respondent P, Czech INPEG)

During this period, PGA convened a meeting at a large squat on the outskirts of Prague called 'Ladronka', during which there was considerable reflection about the nature and goals of the forthcoming protests. This meeting has been referred to by

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[12] Czech Earth First! and 'Acontra'

activists as the 'first international meeting'[14] and marks the beginning of a significant move towards involvement by groups external to the Czech Republic. However, it was not until June that this involvement became solidified through the work of five 'internationals', including one U.S. and two British activists who chose to engage on a full time basis with INPEG, living and working alongside them in Prague. One of these, a British woman with a background in anti-roads protest had already been in Prague for some time and had become a contact point and liaison for INPEG. Two of the others, a U.S. woman with recent experience of protests against the IMF and World Bank in Washington and British man with a long history of direct activism arrived at the same time, during a large international meeting held on June 18th to discuss the strategic objective for the Prague protests. These activists were not 'sent' to Prague, nor can they be considered as 'delegates' from particular groups or organisations, instead each of them arrived in the Czech Republic as individuals with particular affiliations, friendship networks and sufficient experiential understanding of this global movement for them to assimilate easily into the process of planning and decision-making.

It was during these large international meetings that the idea of dividing the protesters into separate marches using colours was raised, a strategy which eventually became the *modus operandi* for S26[15], but not before considerable debate. These meetings, some of which continued for in excess of twelve hours, were ideologically split along the familiar fault line that have engendered division amongst radical groups since Marx and Bakunin clashed over the future direction and organisation of the International. This socialist/anarchist dichotomy was rendered most visible through discussion of the methods that various groups wanted to deploy during the day of action on the 26th September. The International Socialists

[13] The anarchist movement in the Czech Republic is markedly differentiated along political lines, INPEG was the umbrella under which groups such as Wera, ORA-SOLIDARITA (Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists) and FSA (Federation of Social Anarchists) operated at various times.
[14] There is some difference of opinion over whether this was the first international meeting. This is due to concerns about the protocol for convening such meetings, and the democratic implications of an extra-territorial network such as PGA calling a meeting in the Czech Republic.
[15] This tactic had been successful during an action in the City of London organised by Reclaim The Streets the year before, a protest which was part of J18 (June 18th) the first 'Global Day of Action' which had been inspired by the PGA process, c.f. Chesters (1999).

(IS), familiar in the UK as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) were in favour of a mass protest that culminated in a march around the perimeter of the conference centre. Opposed to this were various groups with anarchist, autonomist or ecological orientations who had developed and were familiar with direct action repertoires that were explicitly critical of the 'mass march'. Within this section were prominent actors within People's Global Action, including Ya Basta! – the Italian autonomist and Zapatista support network and the current European convenors of the PGA, and Reclaim The Streets the ecological direct action disorganisation from the UK who were the original and former convenors of European PGA.

Despite the deep philosophical and political divisions amongst anarchist and socialist groups within this process and the ill-defined and frequently ignored question of the applicability of decisions taken in these international meetings, there is broad acknowledgement amongst our respondents of an emerging consensus during these discussions which was subsequently assimilated within the INPEG process. This position was, as might be expected, a negotiated compromise, involving a mass gathering at a central convergence point, followed by 'a unity march' during which the assembled protesters would be divided in to separate marches each of which would be assigned a colour. These 'coloured' marches would be characterised by political affiliation, ideological standpoint or affective links determined by regional identity, language or affinity with particular protest repertoires. However, the practicalities of working such a compromise out were far from straight forward:

> 'So we had a horrible compromise which was doing a unity march first and then split, and this took an incredible amount of energy and time, with the logistical nightmares of looking at maps at how on earth can we do a unity march and then split. And it was clearly ridiculous. I was trying together with a couple of other people in the street group to respect that consensus, that sort of horrible, painful, wrong – in my opinion – decision that was taken at the international meeting but that was meant to be the decision-making body so we were trying to respect that. And because of not wanting to widen the schism become socialist and anarchist organisations, anti-capitalists. What was interesting is that decision was largely ignored by people on the day. People thought this is utterly ridiculous, why are we going to start marching round the streets and then split up. They just went on their separate directions. So people, even if you come to a

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consensus at an international meeting which may be because everybody is exhausted and wants to go to bed or eat their food or get drunk, if you make a decision which is clearly not practical then people will ignore it anyway and they'll just make autonomous decisions on the day when they get to look at the situation on the ground and go with whatever they think. (Interview with respondent M)

This is indicative of the emphasis placed upon democracy and participation within intra-movement decision-making spaces, the inherent problems associated with ultra-participative processes and the 'disorganisational' capacity for autonomy, refusal and spontaneity that makes any decision contingent upon the decisions of key actors on the day. Equally important is the thread of creative, playful and reflexive thinking that continuously calls in to question familiar modes of protest and their position on the political spectrum. Once agreement was reached on the use of colours to frame repertoires of engagement including routes to the conference centre, the instrumental goals and likely constituency of each march, it was then agreed that where possible the colours assigned to the marches should avoid familiar political significations, thereby confusing the authorities and creating ambiguity around what might otherwise become fixed expressions of particular collective identities.

'… if you had black it was pretty obvious who was going to join that. If you had Red is was pretty obvious who was going to join that. So Pink, Yellow and Blue kinda felt neutral in a way – though Pink was less neutral I suppose – we just thought, I liked the idea of Commies having to say they were Pink.' (Interview with respondent J)

The original colours were to be Yellow, Blue and Pink, although these evolved in a hybrid fashion as more groups became involved and certain actors attached themselves resolutely to particular colours.

Description: Uniting the Colours of S26

On September 26th 2000 three marches set off from Namesti Miru (Peace Square). '*Ya Basta*!'(Enough) part of the international *Tute Bianche* (the White Overalls Movement[16]) led the 'Yellow March' towards Nuselski Bridge, the main traffic

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[16]The White Overall Movement emerged from the network of autonomous squatted social centres in Italy. The white overall has became iconic as a symbol of visibility and as a play on the blue

artery to the Congress Centre, that was heavily fortified by the Czech Police and Military using security barriers, officers in riot clothing and gas masks, armoured personnel carriers, water cannons and buses. Ya Basta! were by their own admission coming to Prague to 'Liquidate the International Monetary Fund' and they presented a formidable spectacle dressed in white, many of them wearing extensive padding made from foam rubber and cardboard. However, the playful and reflexive capacity of this social movement network was soon manifest. This 'liquidation' was to take place via water pistol and water bomb and was coupled with the release of hundreds of balloons bearing the slogan 'liquidate IMF'[17].

> 'We are criminals, delinquents, outlaws: using our weapons we shall take what is ours. And if the booty we are after is a universal citizens' income, where should we strike, if not at a meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund? And if we want to liquidate them, what better weapons than water filled weapons?'
> Ya Basta! Agit-prop.

This performance of protest as play, which was here dramatised through uniform, courage and self-discipline, led to media reports in which Ya Basta! were presented as 'the most disciplined, stylish and effective of all Europe's direct action groups'[18], and this sentiment is to some extent evident amongst activist groups that have since sought to utilise repertoires derived from the white overall movement[19].

Accompanying them on the Yellow march were the International Socialists and the Socialist Workers Party in contradiction to their previously 'agreed' role which was to join with the Pink march. Various suggestions have been offered for why this occurred and it is difficult to separate those accounts driven by political point scoring from those who were privy to the decision making processes within this group. However, what is not in doubt is that this block followed Ya Basta from

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overall/white collar class distinction, which they perceive as having broken down in the Post-Fordist era. It also serves as a riposte to state repression, as following one of the many evictions of *Leoncavallo* Social Centre in Milan the occupants were described by a local politician as 'ghosts', existing on the margins of society, easy to disperse and soon to disappear. These ghosts returned all too quickly dressed as ghosts should be, entirely in white.

[17] See *The Guardian*, September 27, 2000, p.18.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See extensive media coverage of the 'WOMBLES' (White Overall Movement Building Liberation Through Effective Struggle) prior to and post the Mayday protests in London during 2001.

Namesti Miru and took with it a sizeable contingent of people who were either unclear about when and where the march was designed to split or unaware of this plan and who consequently followed the largest group to leave the square.

The Pink or Pink and Silver march as it had now been labelled left almost simultaneously, variously described as 'pink fairies', carnivalistas'[20] or 'samba'[21], in actuality a combination of various Earth First! and Reclaim The Streets activists from the UK as well as a recently assembled Samba band and the self-declared 'Tactical Frivolity' group, a combination of women activists from Lancashire, Yorkshire and the South West of the UK, part of whose journey was documented for *The Guardian* newspaper[22]. The Pink march was the most successful in terms of attempts to get close to the conference centre and it very nearly breached the police lines during the early afternoon of S26 when marchers arrived at a side street approximately 50 metres from the conference centre, defended only by uniformed police officers. This resulted in the 'success' of two protesters getting within the conference security zone where one of them 'had a great chat with a man from the Royal Canadian Mint'[23]. This was a highly mobile, fluid and infectious march, ultimately drawing people away from the other two routes to join it as the day progressed.

The Blue march set off shortly after the Yellow march had departed, they were equally unique in appearance with a large contingent of what the media subsequently referred to as 'black-clad protesters'[24] and 'black clad demonstrators wearing scares around their faces'[25]. The Blue march was distinctively international in character and included the Infernal Noise Brigade, a uniformed anarchist marching band from Seattle complete with baton twirlers and flags. This march was largely comprised of the wide spread anarchist/autonomist movement who have used a 'black bloc' tactic

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[20] See *The Guardian*, September 23, 2000, p.19. This term had been previously used to signify the UK direct action movement's emergent affinity with carnival as a cultural analytic (see Chesters, 2000).

[21] *The Prague Post*, September 27-October 3, 2000, p.A11.

[22] *The Guardian*, September 23, 2000, p.15.

[23] *The Guardian*, September 27, 2000, p.18.

[24] *International Herald Tribune*, September 27, 2000, p.1.

[25] *Financial Times*, September 27, 2000, p.18.

(wearing balaclavas, black clothing and being prepared to defend themselves and confront the police) throughout northern Europe over the last twenty to thirty years (see Katsiaficas, 1997). A tactic that has been used in the U.S. since the demonstrations against the Gulf War in the early 1990s and came to prominence once again with the Seattle Black Bloc, which inflicted damage on the outlets of MNCs running into hundreds of thousands of dollars. Amongst Black Bloc activists (particularly in Europe) there is a long tradition of struggle built largely around themes of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism and for the establishment of autonomous spaces including squatted social centres.

The Blue march descended in to a valley beneath the Nuselski Bridge, above them were the Yellow march who were engaging the police with water pistols, balloons and bodies. They then began to climb the hill on which the Conference Centre was perched only to be stopped just short, blocked by a line of riot police on Lumirova Street, a narrow road with parkland to the left of it:

> 'Now what happens in my experience of action is that you get there and hang around and then someone throws a stick and it gets heavier and then someone throws a bigger stick and the cops get a bit heavier then it all kicks off. That normally takes half an hour to an hour and there is definitely this moment of pause… This time it was totally extraordinary, we came around the corner there are the cops and the first Molatov went off within twenty seconds of the cops even coming into sight. It was just like- yeaaah and just charge – everyone just charged and the paving stones started getting ripped up and very soon the water cannon came around… I have been in a few riots in my time in different parts of the world and I had never really seen anything like it – the level of confrontation was pretty extraordinary and how bloody prepared people were for it – I mean how do you carry a Molatov cocktail? An arsenal of Molatov cocktails appears seemingly from nowhere.' (Interview with respondent J)

As the day progressed the clear demarcation between the marches, their colours and the strategies each pursued began to break down as groups from each manoeuvred to provide support and seek tactical advantage. Guided by 'Centrum' a makeshift activist communications room in a nearby hotel, groups of protesters moved to block routes out of the Conference centre and as these were sealed a siege situation began to unfold. In some areas this involved peaceful sit down blockades, in others barricades made from bins and debris burned in the streets and stones repelled the

police. The Samba band from the Pink march and the Infernal Noise Brigade from the Blue helped move people towards areas requiring support or where it was feared preparations were being made to bring out delegates. For the most part this siege was successful, however by the time darkness descended on Prague word began to circulate that the delegates had been ferried from the Conference Centre by train using a metro line that stopped within the security cordon that surrounded it. After communication between the various 'street groups' and Centrum a decision was made to move back towards the centre of the City and to surround the Opera House where delegates were expected to spend the evening:

> 'So we thought OK we'll go to the opera, so we got the marching band to lead a very big portion of all the crowd down through the town and that was an amazing moment. It was great a great carnivalesque moment and all these groups joined us and then the mass was getting bigger and bigger and then arriving at the Opera just as the point that the opera was cancelled...' (Interview with respondent J)

During late evening the first damage to MNC outlets and banks began to occur in Wencleslas Square and riot police clashed repeatedly with groups of protesters that were now becoming dispersed around the city centre. This was also the time when the first mass arrests began to take place; people were trapped in various side streets where they had taken refuge from percussion grenades fired by the police, they were then made to kneel or lie down, before being handcuffed and arrested.

Analytical and Activist Frames: Deriving meaning from colour

The emergence and coherence of a global social movement, which is continuously called upon to renegotiate its identity in relation to external threats and internal diversity is the analytical puzzle for social movement theorists. As Alberto Melucci has suggested, understanding how the 'we' is formed in the 'cultural laboratories' of 'subterranean networks' remains a key task (Melucci, 1989:208) and one which is aided by analysis of the perceptual and sense-making capacities of social movement actors engaged in framing activities:

> 'Undoubtedly, the emergence of concrete actions is aided by conjunctural factors (such as the structure of political opportunities, the existence of entrepreneurs, the existence of equilibrium or crisis in the environment). But it would be impossible for these factors to

exert any influence were the actor not able to perceive them and integrate them into the system of orientations which frames the action.' (Melucci, 1996:41)

How can this global social movement which is by definition international in reach, comprised of diverse groups and individuals drawn from differing social and economic strata, holding positions which are often incompatible, on a range of issues, how can it coalesce and manifest itself with any air of unity? Fischer (1997), in her review of the framing literature suggests that 'The frame itself will be the smallest common denominator that subsumes all of the main elements' (1997:4.12). I would argue that in Prague the Rebel Colours were the smallest common denominator through which the complex set of orientations towards collective action exhibited by different individuals and groups were assimilated. Diversity of political perspective, preference for protest repertoire, distinctive cultures of resistance and strategic orientation were subsumed using a mechanism that allowed for difference, holding it in tension, both within the respective marches and between them. These Rebel Colours require considerable unpackaging however, if we are to deduce from them their spectrum of meaning.

To borrow from Melucci once more, I would concur that this protest event, this 'strip of activity' is the result of purposive collective action that 'combines different orientations, involves multiple actors, and encompasses a system of opportunities and constraints which shape the actors' relationships' (Melucci, 1996:40). Our task as researchers is therefore not only to provide a detailed and descriptive empirical account of the manifestation of this ecology of action, but also to break it down into its constitutive parts and to explain something of the complex of social relationships that it contains. This epistemological shift requires, however, that we recognise what we are developing as conceptual tools for the analysis of differing forms of collective action; our frames are not those of the activists albeit they may overlap, and these categories are not in themselves empirical entities with hard and fixed boundaries. With these provisos in mind, we have derived the following analytical frames from our data.

Yellow.

The orientation of key actors on the Yellow March and the negotiation of a yellow frame in the pre and post-event period was premised upon an intellectual, knowing, disciplined and symbolic critique, both of the neo-liberal regime represented by the IMF and World Bank and of traditional methods of engagement with political and economic elites. The *Tute Bianche* and *Ya Basta!* , prime movers within the Yellow March, mix currents that have become familiar on the Italian political left; the valorisation of 'new social subjects', autonomy and radical disobedience[26] with a Zapatista inspired emphasis upon dialogue and democracy. *Ya Basta!* framed the Prague protests as another step in a circulation of struggles that offer the prospect of globalization from below:

> 'Regaining our international relations thus means a **direct contact** with people, groups, movements, individuals and communities that identify with the same, mutual condition as fodder for the many-headed neoliberalist monster. It means avoiding the mediation of large national and multinational bodies and fighting material and mental boundaries, so as to build direct relationships consisting of shared struggles, exchange of information, memories, future plans.' Associazione Ya Basta!, *The Age of Clandestinity,* Agit-prop.

As a frame, yellow is oriented towards communication and mediation, it is appreciative of the powerful effect of symbolic multipliers and privileges the maximisation of representational control by social movement actors. Yellow was Ya Basta! in their white overalls with their comic provocations of balloons and water pistols facing lines of riot police clad in black and armed with tanks and guns, a classic exploitation of the black/white binarism of good and evil, which was used to maximum effect. If the media has become, as some commentators suggest - *the* political space (Castells, 1996:476) then Yellow is the means of making-sense of this gift of *dramatis personae,* it provides a script for concrete action, contestation and symbolic appeal.

Blue:
The blue frame is direct, confrontational and without compromise, violence is problematic but acceptable defensively, and where necessary in offence. When

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[26] c.f. Virno & Hardt, (1996). Hardt and Negri, (2000)

manifest in collective action it overlaps variously with Black Bloc strategies and uses the symbolic resources of anarchism. Our observations are limited to this frame as it was constructed, articulated and manifest in Prague, however these strategies have a long history within northern European (c.f. Katsiaficas, 1997) and more recently amongst US groups and they draw upon a wide range of political and theoretical resources which it is outside the scope of this paper to cover.

The Blue march attracted most of the traditional central European anarchist groups and it was apparent to a number of our respondents that blue 'was going to be the really heavy confrontational pretty violent block' (respondent J). The presence on the day of a large number of black clad young people with ski-masks and scarfs and the ubiquitous anarchist flags and 'Anti-Fa' and 'Anti-Imp' (Anti-Fascism/Anti-Imperialism) slogans on banners was sufficient to indicate that this march was likely to follow a very 'traditional' pattern of engagement including attacking the police if blocked on route. The account of an Irish anarchist from the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) affirms the make-up and constituency of the Blue march:

> 'I had chosen to march with the anarchist block that headed up (and indeed comprised the majority of) the blue march. The front of this was taken up by Czech anarchists followed by anarchists from the other Eastern European countries numbering perhaps a thousand in all. Holding the banners down one side of the march and taking position behind the eastern Europeans were anarchists from all the western European countries and a large number of automnen from Germany. This anarchist block probably numbered at least 3,000 but we may have had as many as 5,000… At the head of the blue section we were to march in tightly packed rows with our arms linked and banners stretched across the front and down the sides of the march. The majority of those on the march wore masks to protect their identity and offer some limited protection from tear gas. Those at the front also wore construction helmets and many had gas masks.'
> Source:
> http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/wsm/news/2000/prague_sept.html

The blue frame provides an unapologetic rationale for engagement with few limits, it positively affirms the distinction between violence against property and violence against the person, yet maintains a pragmatic assessment of power which suggests that violence against the person is a likely outcome of 'revolutionary activity'. It is a

familiar and recurrent frame has been manifest to various degrees in numerous social movements in both Europe and the US.

Pink:

The construction of the pink frame is where our data is richest, this is largely as a result of the access we have been fortunate enough to obtain to those (mainly UK) actors who were directly implicated in the construction and articulation of this frame. This frame is derived from protest repertoires developed most recently in the UK by Reclaim The Streets and the Earth First! network, disorganisations that have both been active in anti-roads protests, the organisation of impromptu street parties and a variety of ecologically oriented and 'anti-capitalist' direct actions. This frame privileges playful, ludic and carnivalesque forms of protest[27], valorises the creative and expressive over the instrumental and rational, and utilises a variety of performative repertoires that are dependent upon sophisticated and nuanced understandings of protest dynamics. The origination of the colour pink as a signifier for this frame, in this context, is particularly enlightening coming as it does from at least two separate sources, both of whom take pleasure from its apparent ambiguity and immediately invest it with a revealing playfulness. As mentioned above a UK activist who latterly participated in the Blue march suggests the original choice of pink was because of its lack of political connotations[28] and as a provocation to socialists who would have to self-classify as pink instead of red.

Alternatively, 'Tactical Frivolity' a group of mainly women activists, whose choice of name brilliantly evokes the playful, performative and carnivalesque repertoires familiar from the UK direct action scene also chose pink and silver as a signifier:

> ' XXXX came, who on Mayday had worn like great big carnival costumes and had a feather stick, you know, a feather tickling stick, a feather duster, so we started to talk about that and talking about going in a total non-violent way and being really up-front about the fact that we've been non-violent, you know, not disguising ourselves, not wearing black, you know, being quite blatantly dressed up for a party, for a carnival. And XXXX like said right from then well, we'll wear

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[27] See Jordan, (1998), Chesters, (2000).
[28] We recognise that the colour Pink has long been associated with the Gay and Lesbian movement, however this is absent from the argumentation in our respondents interview.

> pink and silver, we've got to wear pink and silver' (Interview with respondent R)

Although Tactical Frivolity were composed of individuals who were marginal to the decision-making processes and organisational networks through which the Prague protests evolved their influence was significant. Tactical Frivolity, in both name and practice managed to distil some of the symbolic resources and affective currents that have helped construct successful roads protests and large scale carnivalesque collective actions in the UK since the early 1990s. Theirs was a deliberate intervention provoked by a desire to move set piece confrontations in a particular direction, a standpoint that is implicitly critical of a perceived slide towards routinized conflict leading to violence.

> 'I think quite a lot of us had got, you know, from RTS things and just different things that, you know, it had got violent and we wanted to able to say in a way that couldn't be misunderstood, you know we're not here for violence and by wearing sort of vulnerable sort of clothing rather than protective clothing, you know, that we weren't going protected in any way shape or form, apart from our pink feather dusters!!!' (Interview with respondent R)

The emphasis they placed upon non-violence here is important, for it signifies a far more fluid concept than one might initially presume and it represents a nuanced understanding of protest events that emerge from a process of 'reflexive framing' (c.f. Welsh, 2001), of which this social movement milieu is a prime site. The pink frame derived as it is from a movement culture that prizes the affective, emotional and intuitive dimensions of collective action facilitates the opening of a performative space where provocation and contestation can take place, a space Tactical Frivolity sought to inhabit:

> 'And this sort of like stage space appears, this performance space seemed to appear between like the rows of policemen and the rows of people blockading, like physically blockading and then there's this little gap in the middle, you know what I mean, and we found ourselves going into this gap and tickling policemen's toes, do you know what I mean, with your feather duster on the side of their face and just like performing…' (Interview with respondent R)

An understanding of the contingent nature of this space and its potential capacity to 're-key' (c.f. Goffman, 1974: 40-82) the meaning of interactions between police and

protesters, to re-order them and to provide further, new, or different interpretations through play, requires a considerable reflexive capacity and a sophisticated understanding of the complex of social relationships that are temporally and spatially contiguous. This space is constantly opening and closing as it becomes refined through the ebb and flow of the protest event, it facilitates opportunities for routinized or playful encounters, yet simultaneously it threatens rapid closure. A miscalculation or failure to 'read the signs' can result in violent confrontation, the prospect of which is sufficient to qualify the position of Tactical Frivolity:

> '…well, yes, okay, if you're protecting yourself maybe you have to use violence. I mean it's difficult the whole no-violent/violent thing, I know it's difficult and there's so many levels to it, and it's difficult to say I'm completely non-violent because you just don't know.' (Interview with respondent R)

Instead, pink for Tactical Frivolity is a frame that infers an 'active non-violence':

> 'I felt that a lot of non-violence in the past has been more passive non-violence like the sitting blockade, you know what I mean, whereas we were being actively non-violent, the whole, sort of, the way that we were moving as a group of people, I thought that was really creative. We had people on bikes reporting back to other people and then this flag would go up with a fish on it which meant that everybody had to go over to the fish and make decisions about where we're gonna go, and I thought that was really sort of creative, active kind of thing that we're doing, you know' (Interview with respondent R).

Interestingly, the consolidation of the pink frame through the process of reflexive framing occurring within this milieu (c.f. Welsh, 2001) has prompted its assimilation within other European social movement groups, as a signifier of both political orientation and protest repertoire. The protests against the G8 in Genoa, Italy during July 2001, contained a Pink march, despite there being little involvement from amongst UK activist networks. The leaflet accompanying it is a powerful example of what I previously referred to as memetic transfer, the remarkable capacity for cross-fertilisation within the global social movement milieu, which is capable of rapidly assimilating, adapting and amplifying resonant frames:

> 'We are a colourful party in the street, a carnival with theatre, pink fairies and radical cheerleaders, clowns and music, a creative, magical and confrontational dance that takes decisions in a horizontal manner through affinity groups. We want to reduce aggressivity to

the minimum with imagination, samba, art, playing with space (and with the police), to create an relaxed atmosphere with good vibes. While we dance we denounce the brutality of capitalism, patriarchy, racism and all the forms of oppression and domination, denying any legitimacy to those 8 men who meet as if the world belonged to them and they could exploit and destroy at their will' Pink March, Agit-Prop, Genoa, July 20th, 2001.

This text ends 'Our strategy: Tactical Frivolity, Our identification: Pink and Silver'. The pink frame it appears has come to act as a symbolic multiplier, it has escaped the site of its first articulation and provided a means through which a collective identity constructed through engaged, playful and carnivalesque repertoires of collective action can be signified.

Conclusion

'I suppose my fear was that Prague was the first attempt – in this recent phase of struggle – putting all these groups together and seeing how they can work together. Given the circumstances I think we worked well, given how chaotic, badly organised and under-resourced and all that. The fact that it even happened was amazing actually.' (Interview with respondent J)

Prague was a crucial juncture in the sedimentation of the global social movement against neo-liberal capitalism. The construction, articulation and manifestation of Rebel Colours was an organic development for which the seeds were sown in previous actions, most notably the use of coloured masks in actions against the City Of London on June 18th, 1999, the first 'Global Day of Action'. This formula also represents in action the often repeated slogan of this movement - 'unity in diversity', the Rebel Colours indicate difference and pragmatism, they demonstrate an internal dialogue that is strongly opposed to homogenisation of a political perspective, protest repertoire or tactical orientation. This is a strategy that emphasises the struggle to accept difference and tension without trying to reconcile any one faction to another, a task which is notoriously difficult and may, as was apparent in Prague, only prove possible through the creation of spaces and opportunities for expression of difference that are themselves relatively homogenised.

These colours were sense-making devices which framed the event and justified the tactical and strategic repertoires adopted by the particular marches. They were constructed dialogically through a disorganised and discursive process which privileged participative and democratic forms. However, as in most 'open' systems of decision-making this gave rise to a range of problems including those associated with what activists refer to as the 'tyranny of the most committed', the disproportionate influence of those with specialist knowledge, experience and the capacity for intensive engagement in organising processes. Equally, those groups who cohere ideologically and have a developed structure with practised repertoires of collective action are more likely to influence the shape of the protest event than those who are relatively new to large scale protest organising, this was apparent at an organisational level between individuals and also in the division between the 'internationals' and Czech activists. The valorisation of autonomy within this movement culture can also militate against the synthesis of perspectives and protest repertoires given that any group at any point can easily retreat into familiar methods of engagement. However, whilst I have referred to these as process-oriented problems, they might also be considered strengths, enabling movement actors to retain a familiar *modus operandi* whilst negotiating their coming together in the construction of a global social movement milieu.

In summary then, I would argue that the construction, articulation and manifestation of Rebel Colours provided the frame-work that enabled diverse social movement groups and disorganisations to act in concert for the duration of the IMF and World Bank protests. To utilise protest repertoires that were already meaningful from their particular standpoints whilst facilitating dialogue and cross-fertilisation and creating 'new' symbolic signifiers around which to construct a coherent collective identity.

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