

Anti-globalisation

From anarchy to apathy

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Anarchists seem to be having trouble getting organised. Let's give them a hand

AS THE March winds drop, England looks forward to the familiar heralds of spring—the primrose, the cuckoo and, on May 1st, the anti-capitalist protests that in recent years have left London's streets full of glass and the pockets of its policemen full of overtime pay. But now there is worrying news from the London Mayday Collective, an alliance of anarchists, communists, greens, and associated window-breakers and street-partyers that has organised, if that is the right word, the rougher side of the event in previous years. It says it is not planning anything this year. The police are not convinced. The announcement may be a bluff. But things sound quiet on the front line of the war against global capitalism.

There seem to be four reasons. First, internet debate suggests that the fragile alliance between, on the one hand, communists and what is deliciously described as the “official” anarchist movement and, on the other, “direct actionists” has broken down. The former think the latter have no ideology (“petit-bourgeois/muddle-headed types”), the latter think the former don't know how to party (“insipid leftist culture”). Second, the police have learnt how to manage the protests. Third, Iraq means there are bigger issues on people's minds than the evils of Starbucks. In which case, why not meld anti-capitalist with anti-war protests, as happened last year? Because, fourth, apathy has spread among the ranks. Discussion papers include sad references to “disappointing and poorly-attended meetings” and “sheer lack of turnout”.



As the mouthpiece of global capitalism, *The Economist* might be expected to rejoice at the movement's discomfort. Not at all. Everybody needs an opponent to keep him on his toes. The sight of nose-studded mohican-haired louts who hadn't seen a bath in a month wreaking havoc in the City served to remind the foot-soldiers of capitalism of the chaos that their daily grind was helping to hold back. Well, it gave them something to talk about, at least.

Let's party in Pyongyang

Given that the anti-globalisation movement has lent ideas to capitalism—at the mushier end of corporate social responsibility, for instance, where fear and conscience meet to try to placate the mob—capitalism should surely return the favour in anti-globalisation's dark days. There are plenty of modern management techniques which the movement could employ to reinvigorate itself. Has, it, for instance, tried benchmarking itself against comparable movements? If street protest is too arduous for the membership, should it not think of outsourcing its more strenuous activities to the immigrants who already do most of Britain's tougher jobs? Taking that argument further, if domestic apathy is the problem, perhaps the answer is offshoring. A Mayday protest organised in, say, Libya or North Korea would really make a splash.