

“Live 8”—a political fraud on behalf of imperialism

Statement by the Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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The Live 8 events, which are the focus of the “Make Poverty History” campaign, are perpetrating a political fraud against all those genuinely seeking to overcome the terrible hardship facing the poor of Africa. The organizers and spokesmen seek not only to provide a mask of humanitarian concern to British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush, but to legitimize the designs of the imperialist powers on Africa.

Live 8 amounts to a multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign on behalf of Blair and Bush at a time when both are anxious to put political distance between themselves and an occupation of Iraq that is proving to be a political disaster. All the leaders of the major powers will be happy that the hostile protests that have greeted previous G8 summits have been replaced by such a humble petition.

Some of those backing the appeal to the supposed largesse of the leaders of the major powers gathering in Edinburgh on July 6-8 claim that whereas Iraq was an example of power and wealth being used for reactionary ends, public pressure can force world leaders to act in the cause of progress. This is sophistry. Imperialism’s plans for Africa are not in contradiction to its offensive in the Middle East, but rather part of the same geopolitical strategy.

Blair and Bush have rightly earned the hatred of many millions for their warmongering in the Middle East and attacks on social and democratic rights at home. But Bob Geldof, U2 frontman Bono and the coalition of non-governmental organisations and church groups that comprise “Make Poverty History” now ask us to believe that they can be won over to the cause of the poor and oppressed.

They are seeking to exclude any hint of genuine protest at the Live 8 events. A manager of one of the bands performing in the concert in London told the *Telegraph* newspaper that artists were being instructed by Geldof not to criticise Bush. This is because the concerts have been organized with the express aim of winning popular support for the Commission for Africa proposals drawn up by Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, in which Geldof participated. For the same reason, Brown is being given pride of place at the “Make Poverty History” rally in Edinburgh on July 2.

Returning the favour, Geldof and Bono have been invited to attend the G8 summit. Almost every utterance made by the pair portrays Blair and Bush as the potential saviours of Africa, whilst keeping silent on their war against Iraq. Bono described Blair and Brown as “the John [Lennon] and Paul

[McCartney] of the global development stage,” and has said that if Bush “in his second term is as bold in his commitments to Africa as he was in the first term, he indeed deserves a place in history in turning the fate of that continent around.”

Geldof hailed the pre-summit announcement that there would be a debt forgiveness package for some countries in sub-Saharan Africa as a “victory for millions,” claiming, “Tomorrow 280 million Africans will wake up for the first time in their lives without owing you or me a penny.”

What nonsense! In the first instance, Africa’s poor do not owe “you and me” anything. Their debts are to major corporations, financial institutions, imperialist governments and multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. None of these contemplate any measures to seriously alleviate Africa’s plight because they are intent on perpetuating the exploitation of the continent.

The June 11 G8 agreement covers just 18 countries that have fulfilled the pro-market criteria set down under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), and accounts for at most \$1.5 billion per annum in repayments, and possibly only half that amount. The move is largely aimed at staving off criticisms of the major nations’ failure to honour other commitments on aid.

Whatever is given must be offset by a corresponding cut in aid to the poor countries, meaning that, in reality, they will get nothing extra. And to qualify, they must continue to “boost private sector development” and eliminate all “impediments to private investment, both domestic and foreign.”

Compared with the announced sum of \$40 billion in debt forgiveness over 10 years, sub-Saharan Africa alone has \$230 billion in external debt, and the so-called “developing” countries owe a combined total of \$2.4 trillion. For every \$1 of aid officially provided to Africa, \$3 are extracted by the Western banks, institutions and governments. And far more is plundered by the transnational corporations who operate there.

The political leaders in Washington, London, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Ottawa, Tokyo and Moscow can no more be persuaded to act altruistically towards Africa than they can jump out of their own skins. They are the representatives of financial elites whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of working people everywhere.

The massive levels of debt that afflict the world’s poorest countries have the same essential cause as their economic backwardness. The countries in which capitalism first emerged in Europe, America and Japan were able to use their economic and military might to exploit the markets

and resources of the entire world. These imperialist powers still look on Africa, Asia and South America as a source of valuable raw materials and markets for finished products. They cannot tolerate the development of domestic competition in these regions, or any genuine expression of democracy for the oppressed masses.

The ruling elites in the economically backward countries depend on their relations with the major powers and giant corporations for their privileged position. In return, they are charged with imposing the dictates of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the working class and peasantry to ensure that oil, minerals, agricultural produce and other essential raw materials find their way to the advanced countries or to production facilities set up by the transnational corporations.

The forms in which imperialism has exercised its dominance over the underdeveloped countries have undergone certain changes, but the fundamental economic and social relationship between oppressor and oppressed nations remains the same.

In the nineteenth century, the subjugation and exploitation of Africa were achieved through colonialism and occupation, as the world was carved up between the rival imperialist states. The mass anti-colonial movements that developed in the aftermath of the Second World War, together with the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, forced the major powers to retreat from direct colonial forms of rule, as the “winds of change” swept Africa.

But the regimes established under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie remained subordinate to the great powers both economically and politically. Not only did they require access to a global market for their goods, rendering their nationalist policies of import substitution impotent, they were hostile to any development of an independent movement in the working class that could threaten their own rule.

The collapse of the USSR has led to a resurgence of neo-colonialism. The Bush administration has spearheaded this turn, seeking to impose America’s unchallenged hegemony

by force—as epitomised by the bloody conquest of Iraq.

What is now taking place is a renewed scramble for Africa. At stake is the struggle for control of vital mineral and oil reserves, as well as other raw materials and markets, as a component part of a global struggle for hegemony between the major powers. That is why all aid and debt relief is tied in with demands for free access to domestic markets by the global corporations.

As in Iraq, access to oil is a primary concern of Bush, Blair, et al. Africa contains 7.2 percent of the world’s proven reserves of oil, more than the proven reserves of North America or the former Soviet Union.

Sub-Saharan Africa’s crude oil production exceeded 4 million barrels a day in 2000 and accounts for 16 percent of US oil imports. The importance of Africa’s oil in Washington’s strategic planning was the subject of a January 2002 seminar entitled, “African Oil—A Priority for US National Security and African Development.”

In the Victorian era, there was no shortage of supposedly enlightened people who justified colonialism as taking up the “white man’s burden” to civilise the “dark continent.” Their modern-day equivalents are the liberals and celebrities who glorify paltry aid initiatives based on pro-market “conditionalities” and the demand that governments pursue pro-Western policies in the name of “transparency” and “democracy.”

The real allies of the workers and peasants of Africa are not to be found in the opulent environs of the G8 summit in Gleneagles, but amongst the working class in Britain, Europe, Asia and the Americas. Hope for the future of Africa and all the oppressed peoples of the world will not come through aid packages, or even forlorn appeals for “fair trade.” It depends on the building of an anti-imperialist, internationalist and socialist movement, dedicated to replacing the profit system that is the source of class oppression and want with planned production to meet the needs of all.

This is the alternative fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*.