

Tens of thousands to protest on eve of G-8 summit

Fight against war and social reaction requires a socialist strategy

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Millions of people are deeply disturbed by the current state of society. They are vehemently opposed to the policies of the ruling elites all over the world and are seeking ways to resist them. They face, however, a contradiction. Experience shows that protest, even if it embraces masses of people, is not sufficient to resolve the great problems of war, repression and social reaction.

This has been amply shown by the mass demonstrations against past G-8 summits, as well as the international rallies against the Iraq war. As long as the protests are politically dominated by illusions that the old reformist parties can be pressured to the left, they are doomed to failure.

This however, is precisely the standpoint of Attac and other organizers of the June 2 demonstration against the G-8 summit, who maintain that “another world is possible” within the framework of the capitalist system.

This perspective flies in the face of reality.

The G-8 summit being held in the German resort of Heiligendamm casts a powerful spotlight on the current state of capitalist society. The leaders of the world’s most powerful states have entrenched themselves behind a kilometres-long, reinforced barbed wire high-security fence, and are being guarded by the largest deployment of police in German post-war history.

The 12-million-euro fence is a stark symbol of the relationship between governments around the world and the broad masses of the populations they purport to represent. Democracy has been turned into a hollow phrase. In the run-up to the summit, the police have carried out a series of raids, organized massive surveillance and imposed bans on demonstrations, seeking to intimidate oppositionist groups and individuals in brazen violation of basic democratic rights.

Those participating in the summit represent the interests of the narrow social elites that have enormously increased their wealth over the past three decades. This international financial aristocracy includes the 500 billionaires who together possess as much wealth as the poorer half of mankind. It embraces the speculators whose annual income totals up to a billion dollars; the top executives of large companies, whose salaries and bonuses range into the hundreds of millions; and the “new Russians” who have acquired colossal fortunes by plundering the assets of the former Soviet Union.

Social inequality has reached unprecedented levels worldwide. It is expressed not only in the gulf between rich and poor countries, but also within the countries themselves. While some two percent live in extravagant luxury, the vast majority of the people eke out a precarious existence, plagued by economic insecurity, stagnating or declining living standards, or outright poverty.

Such levels of inequality cannot, in the long run, be maintained through peaceful means. Sooner or later social contradictions must erupt into violent class confrontations. This is why the ruling classes are seizing every opportunity to build up the police powers of the state and expand their military forces.

The Iraq war is a concentrated expression of this process. It is now universally accepted that the official reasons given for the

war were based on lies. The US led-war was always about oil and strategic influence. The oil lobby, with Vice President Cheney at its head, played a significant role in the war preparations.

Four years later Iraq has been destroyed as a sovereign country and Iraqi society has been devastated. An estimated 700,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the war and occupation, and four million have been turned into refugees. Nearly 3,500 American soldiers have been sacrificed on the altar of imperialist interests.

The regime in Washington has established an extensive police state apparatus within America itself. Elementary democratic rights such as habeas corpus have been repudiated, but the war continues unabated. Barely a week ago the US Congress, controlled by the Democratic Party, voted a further \$100 billion to continue the war.

All those heads of state participating in the G-8 summit are agreed that the US cannot be allowed to lose this war. Regardless of tactical differences with Washington, they regard a military defeat for the US as a blow to their own imperialist interests. They are therefore responding by sending their own troops into the Middle East and other strategic regions of the world.

It was none other than the German Green Party leader and former foreign minister Joschka Fischer who, at a meeting at Berlin’s Humboldt University, complained of the “shocking loss of significance of Europe in the world,” and urged a more resolute approach towards foreign policy and security interests, placing particular emphasis on Europe’s “geopolitical neighbours in the Middle East.” The tragic deaths of three German soldiers in the Afghan region of Kundus have been exploited by the German government and media to prepare the population for further military operations and further casualties.

The Italian head of government, Romano Prodi, went so far as to threaten his resignation in order to continue, in the face of massive popular opposition, the Italian military deployments in Afghanistan and Lebanon and the expansion of the US military base in Vicenza.

In France, the new president, Nicolas Sarkozy, wants to build a second aircraft carrier in order to increase the country’s ability to intervene militarily around the world.

Rising militarism goes hand in hand with growing tensions between the Great Power nations, who quarrel over their respective spheres of influence and imperialist interests in the manner of thieves dividing their booty. There are indications that this could be the first G-8 summit in many years to end in open disagreement.

Russia sees itself as threatened by America’s planned anti-missile defense system. It demonstratively tested a new intercontinental missile just prior to the summit.

The host of the summit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, has used the issue of climate policy to put pressure on the US, which, for its part, categorically rejects any commitment to international environmental targets.

It would be the height of naivety to believe that the conservative German chancellor has suddenly discovered her love for the environment. The objective of the summit—the limitation to two degrees of any increase in world temperatures—is non-committal and, in view of the impending environmental disaster, entirely inadequate.

However, the environment issue is ideally suited, working in collaboration with the rising industrializing countries China and India, to gain an advantage over the US. China and India have rejected any commitment to a reduction in greenhouse gases as long as the US does not do the same. In pursuing this policy, Merkel is able to rely on the wholehearted support of the Greens.

Those taking part in the Heiligendamm summit are completely united on one question: They all agree that the assault on the living standards and past social gains of the working class must continue unabated.

The election victory of the right-wing Gaullist Sarkozy in France is seen by the political elite throughout Europe as a signal to finally press ahead with the introduction of "American conditions" across the continent. Sarkozy is intent on introducing drastic laws this summer to restrict the right to strike and inflict harsher punishment on juvenile offenders. His prime minister, François Fillon, has used the phrase "electric shock" to describe the French government's plans.

Against the right-wing politics of the Social Democrats and the Left Party

Any serious opposition to war, repression and attacks on social benefits must proceed from the fact that all of these evils are inseparably connected to the crisis of the capitalist system. The subordination of all aspects of social life to the dictates of the capitalist market has become such an immense anachronism as to threaten the future of human society.

Revolutionary developments in computer technology, communications and transportation have created the possibility for interconnecting the labor of millions all over the world and making enormous gains in productivity and scientific progress, which could lay the basis for solving all of mankind's basic problems. However, within the framework of the capitalist profit system, globalization produces the opposite results. Technological progress is being used to lower wages and destroy jobs, while a tiny elite amasses ever greater personal wealth.

Whoever declares that this state of affairs is merely the result of a misdirected policy, which can be corrected simply through popular pressure, is either indulging in self-deceit or consciously misleading others.

All those political parties that defend capitalist property relations, whether nominally of the left or right variety, have adapted themselves to the demands of big business as soon as they assumed governmental power. This in itself demonstrates that militarism and welfare cuts are not simply the result of the subjective will of this or that politician, but rather a product of the failure of the capitalist system as a whole.

In Germany, the former governing coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party carried out the most comprehensive attack on social welfare benefits in recent history, while overseeing the transformation of the German military from a defensive army to an offensive, interventionist force. The Italian government led by Prodi has pursued a similar course, with the active support of the successor organizations to the Italian Communist Party.

The German Left Party is following the same course. On a national level, it seeks to pose as a pole of opposition, and supports the protests against the G-8 summit.

In Berlin, however, where the party shares power with the SPD, it has been responsible for implementing cuts in public services that go far beyond those carried out in any other German state. The drastic laws now being implemented to repress protesters in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where the summit is being held, were also passed by a coalition of the Left Party and SPD.

The Left Party seeks to limit the opposition to the G-8 summit to protest politics. It spreads the illusion that moral pressure and appeals to reason can force the ruling elite to change course. It thereby creates a safety valve for social opposition, without endangering capitalist rule. The Left Party is strictly opposed to a genuine socialist perspective directed against the basis of capitalist property relations.

The Left Party is supplemented by autonomous and anarchist groups, which seek to compensate for their lack of perspective by provocative and sometimes violent acts of protest. Such tactics are also aimed at pressuring the ruling class. These groups have absolutely no interest in a socialist perspective and the struggle to spread such a program within the working class.

At the same time, the German authorities use these groups to brand any opposition to existing social conditions as "criminal" or "terrorist." Police agents are often directly involved in their provocations. A revolutionary socialist strategy has nothing in common with the infantile antics of such anarchist groups.

At the centre of a socialist strategy is the construction of a political movement of the working class that combines the defense of social and democratic rights with the struggle for a socialist society in which human need takes priority over the profit interests of big business. Such a movement must be completely independent of the old reformist organizations, which use all available means to defend the capitalist order.

Objections are often raised to a socialist program by claiming that such a perspective failed in the Soviet Union and the former East Germany. Such an argument is based either on a lack of knowledge of the history of the twentieth century, or a distortion and misrepresentation of that history.

The forms of ownership established by the 1917 October Revolution provided an impetus for enormous social progress. One of the most backward countries in the world was transformed in a short period of time into a powerful industrial nation.

The Soviet Union, however, was wracked by a profound contradiction. It remained internationally isolated, and the backwardness inherited from its past took its revenge in the form of a parasitic bureaucracy, which, under Stalin's leadership, wrested power from the working class and wiped out the genuine socialist and internationalist elements in the country in a series of bloody purges in the 1930s. In a final betrayal, the heirs to the Stalinist bureaucracy organized the reintroduction of capitalism in the 1990s.

As a result of the Stalinist repression, the working class was unable to defend the gains of the October Revolution. The consequences have proved dreadful. Since the reintroduction of capitalism, the broad masses in the former Soviet Union and the states of Eastern Europe have experienced an economic and cultural decline unparalleled in a period of peace.

The fate of the Soviet Union confirms the Marxist standpoint that socialism can be established only on an international scale. It presupposes the political unity and cooperation of the working classes of all countries and nationalities.

The Social Equality Party is building an international, socialist mass party as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The *World Socialist Web Site* (www.wsws.org) provides a comprehensive analysis of all important international developments on a daily basis in up to twelve languages, and provides a vital political orientation. The International Committee of the Fourth International has also established its own international student federation, the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE).

We invite all those participating in the demonstration against the G-8 summit to study the analysis of the WSWs on a daily basis. Establish contact with our editorial board and assist in the building of the SEP and ISSE.