

Anti-globalisation demonstrations in Copenhagen

Our reporters
24 December 2002

On Saturday, December 14, one day after the end of the latest European Union summit in Copenhagen, a number of demonstrations took place in the Danish capital.

Under the slogan “Our world is not for sale—People before profit”, several thousand demonstrators from all over Europe assembled in Copenhagen. The demonstrators were predominantly young and came mainly from Sweden, Norway, Germany as well as Denmark.

The international demonstrations had been called by an alliance calling itself “Another Europe is possible!” and the protests were directed above all against the threat of a US-led war against Iraq. Other themes taken up by demonstrators were the attacks being mounted against the welfare state throughout Europe as well as the process of growing militarism in the European Union and the repressive policies of the EU with regard to immigrants and refugees.

The demonstrations last Saturday were part of a range of activities which included an alternative European summit organised by nongovernmental agencies united in the NGO Forum, which took place December 13-15. The alternative summit included numerous lectures, discussions and further demonstrations.

It is not easy to discern any political basis for the alternative summit because the organisers had issued no joint document nor made any attempt to formulate one. Many of the appeals and handouts distributed were limited to very general formulations, such as the demand for an “open, collective and democratic Europe in a humane world economic order” (leaflet issued by the *Young Democrats—Young Left*).

A statement by the Attac anti-globalisation movement in Denmark began with the words: “Encouraged and pleased by the renewed momentum of the European Social Forum in Florence, where 60,000 took part in discussion over ways of developing resistance to war and neo-liberalism” the protests in Copenhagen are principally directed against the economic and social consequences of EU plans for eastward expansion. Especially in the sphere of agriculture it is necessary to anticipate “substantial social problems”. The statement continued: “Our request is more democracy and social development” in opposition to the attempts to develop Europe as an “economic and military superpower”.

At the same time, there were distinctly nationalist tones to be heard in the course of the alternative summit. For example, the Indian agricultural scientist and author, Vandana Shiva, was enthusiastically received at a conference devoted to the theme of “privatisation, multinational concerns, social welfare and democracy”. She explained that privatisation was principally driven by the greed of multinational companies who seek to use their monopoly position to maximise profits.

She emphasised that the starting point for resistance to privatisation must be local. As example she cited the struggle against environmental pollution which, she declared, could only be overcome on a local basis. This was the only way in which a global solution could be possibly implemented. She claimed such a strategy would enable defenders of the environment to find an ally in local governments whose own powers are also being undermined by the process of globalisation.

Tomasz Terlecki from the Polish-based institution “Bankwatch”, an organisation for the supervision of the activities of international finance organisations in eastern Europe, went a step further. He began his lecture by recollecting the time when a state of war was announced by the Polish government in 1981, and then made a parallel to today when the “communists” governing Poland were attempting to bring Poland into the EU—a process which he and many other groups rejected.

The biggest problem for the European Union, he maintained, was the fact that governments were not doing enough to resolve environmental problems.

All of the groups involved in the NGO forum had called for non-violent protests and cooperation with the police, but individual anarchist groups organised their own demonstration on Saturday to protest against the attacks being made on democratic rights and the “EU police-state”. For its part the NGO forum organised a demonstration with the slogan “People’s Meeting”.

In the run-up to the EU summit in Copenhagen, European governments had attempted to criminalise the planned protests, utilizing repressive measures to prevent them from taken place.

A few days before the summit the Schengen Accord, which guarantees freedom of movement in the European Union, was suspended. Such suspensions have become routine in the recent

period as European governments seek to prevent multi-national demonstrations aimed against their policies.

One week prior to the conference the governments of Gerhard Schröder (German Social Democratic Party —SPD), and the right-wing liberal Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Venstre) in Denmark tightened up border controls. According to press reports, 60 percent of the entire Danish police force was involved at one time or another in security measures in connection with the summit.

A series of arrests were made, including those of six persons attempting to travel to Copenhagen who were apprehended by German police at the border crossing point of Puttgarden. The arrests were justified by police on the basis that the group had already come to the attention of the authorities for their “unruly behaviour” at other demonstrations. Their presence in Copenhagen therefore represented a considerable danger to the interests of the German Republic, they claimed. In the meantime it has become clear, however, that none of the six apprehended has any criminal prosecution record. An additional six-strong delegation of Italian protesters was arrested by Danish police.

Anarchist and autonome (anarchist) groups reported that their computer providers had been searched and web sites closed down or sabotaged. Emails had been intercepted and newspapers confiscated in addition to journalists being either arrested or prevented from carrying out their work.

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed several thousand leaflets in Copenhagen, set up a large bookstall, sold literature and discussed a socialist alternative to war and the destruction of the welfare state with many demonstrators and participants at the counter-summit. Many demonstrators were already familiar with the work of the WSWS web site and were pleased to speak to our reporters.

One demonstrator was Håkan Håkansson, a joiner who currently lives in Sweden, but who has also lived and worked in Denmark. When asked why he had attended the international demonstrations in Copenhagen, he replied: “I want to protest against war and militarism, in particular against the sabre-rattling on the part of the US against Iraq and the violent Israeli policies in Palestine; also against international exploitation and the attacks being made on the welfare state.”

When asked what he saw as the cause of this development, he replied: “The money, power and control of rich countries. I am on the side of the poor. I am only a joiner, I do not have millions in my bank account. The poor must stick together. If Israel is being suppressed by the Palestinians then I would be on the side of Israel, but this is simply not the case.”

WSWS: What do you think can be done about the developments you are protesting?

Håkan Håkansson: “Protest, protest and then more protest. We must demonstrate collective solidarity and unite. It is also important to read. Everyone should read about the roots and background of developments and distribute books about it. We

should do everything we can to put a stop to those madmen in power who are intent on destroying the world. I think it is a never-ending task. That’s how I see it, anyway.”

WSWS: What do you think about the political developments in Denmark, where a right-wing coalition won the last elections?

Håkan Håkansson: “I have mostly lived in Sweden, but I believe things were relatively good for the Danes, in other words, there was a developed welfare state similar to that of Sweden. Now everything is being taken away from institutions, local authorities and the poor—piece by piece. The measures are not carried out in a fanatical fashion, but systematically. In that respect the new right-wing government is not so different from previous social democratic governments.”

WSWS: You mean that the cuts and attacks had already begun under the social democrats?

Håkan Håkansson: “Yes, since the end of the 1980s. They started the cuts and thereby laid the basis for the right wing to become ever-more stronger.”

The WSWS also spoke with Tobias Pflüger, the speaker of the Information Office against Militarism (IMI) based in Tübingen, Germany. Pflüger was one of the speakers at the counter-summit. When asked about a realistic strategy against the danger of a war with Iraq, he answered: “We need the strongest possible movement against war, which is both very broad but also based on clarity. I am encouraged about the possibilities for such a movement on a European level.”

He went on to say that in his opinion one could not expect any resistance from European governments, including the German administration: “The German government was in favour of such a war from the beginning and only introduced its abstinence on the issue of war for a few months to ensure an electoral victory. It was clear, however, from the very beginning that they would participate, although stopping short of dropping bombs. We have to continually seek to build a broad grassroots anti-war movement which can also function in terms of content.” Pflüger said he regularly reads the WSWS.



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