Attac holds G8 counter-summit in Geneva

Marianne, Helmut Arens
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Parallel to last month's G8 summit in Evian, the Attac Network organised a counter-summit in Geneva on May 30. The gathering in the Maison Faubourg was held under the slogan "Another world is possible." (Attac stands for "Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens.")

More than a thousand, including young people from many parts of Europe, were present, and the congress proceedings were translated into French, German, English and Italian. All day long, prominent globalisation critics spoke, such as Susan George (vice president of Attac France), Eric Toussaint (president of the Brussels-based Committee to Cancel Third World Debt), Jean Ziegler (UN special rapporteur) and Bernard Cassen (co-founder of the Attac movement).

In a variety of seminars, speakers dealt with topics such as hunger, the worldwide debt crisis, the north-south conflict, the globalisation of militarism and the situation of women. Many stressed that they attached importance to the designation *Alter-mondialistes* (Alternative Globalists) rather than *Anti-mondialistes* (Anti-Globalists), as they were not against globalisation as such, but rather advocated another form of globalisation.

But while many speakers took up and condemned the state of modern capitalism in a clear way, they had no answer to the question of *how* the world could be changed and, above all, *who* could carry out the change. Their contributions were addressed to the left wing of the political elite and to the trade union leaders, not to the broad mass of the population. They made clear that their goal is not to abolish capitalist relations, but rather to reform the capitalist system, eliminating such ugly phenomena—presented as mere "excrescences"—as hunger, war and social decay.

Jean Ziegler, UN special rapporteur and a former social democratic member of the Swiss parliament, gave a sober description of the effects of the hunger crisis, saying: "According to the official figures of the FAO [UN Food and Agriculture Organisation] in 2002, 100,000 people die of hunger or the consequences of malnutrition every day. A hundred thousand! Every seven seconds a child under 10 dies; every four minutes someone loses his eyesight due to lack of vitamin A." This, he pointed out, takes place under conditions where global agriculture has the capacity to supply all 6.2 billion humans with sufficient food, even without the use of genetically modified crops.

After Ziegler's contribution, two reporters from the radio station *France-3* asked whether this meant he was for the abolition of capitalism, and which form of production he preferred. He responded, "We are against the capitalism that breaks with all normative forms, that is exclusively oriented at profit... [T]he capitalist form of production is surely the most vital and most creative form of production that ever existed. It is not about capitalism in general, but about an abnormal capitalism that has diverged from the public interest."

Some speakers made it clear that, as far as they were concerned, the recent protests against the Iraq war and the strikes and demonstrations against cuts in social welfare programs could go too far, threatening to shatter the existing political framework. They warned against speculating "uselessly" about revolution and internationalism, and strove to channel the movement in a national and reformist direction. The evening meeting was particularly informative in this regard, as Attac leaders from several countries gave an estimate of the movement and outlined their own political perspectives.

Bernard Cassen, one the founders of Attac France, made clear that for him the crucial struggles still take place within a national framework. Naturally, he declared, in view of global-thinking "free market" neo-liberalism, it was necessary to develop international strategies. "However, the framework of our struggle remains national....The national level is appropriate... One can still make some progress on a national level—even if less than before—because the rules that are introduced by the various governments are not implemented directly, but are introduced first at the European level, and afterwards we are told: 'Europe has decided.'... Europe does not decide anything. It is the member governments that decide, even if they do not say it openly."

Cassen rejected all discussion of a revolutionary strategy as a waste of time. He said, "The debate which has occupied

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us, and particularly myself, for decades, between reform and revolution, is, frankly, completely uninteresting... I believe it has become a purely rhetorical exercise, which has little value as far as action is concerned. What is important is where the social forces are going, whether they have only just started in motion or whether they are accelerating. Where are they going? Well, frankly, nobody knows. Only afterwards will it be said: it is a reform, or it is a revolution. But the discussion, purely theoretically in advance, is not interesting in my opinion, but a pure waste of time."

He warned against "sectarianism" and called for cooperation with the big trade unions and political parties, adding the caveat that the movement should not be allowed to become an appendage to other forces.

If one really wants to achieve something, Cassen said, one should work toward the vast majority voting "correctly." He declared: "One should not measure the radicalisation of society from the numbers participating in demonstrations. That would be a great error. It is good when many participate in demonstrations. But this is not decisive. Look what happened in Spain: 3 to 4 million demonstrated against war, against Aznar, and afterwards Aznar barely lost ground in the elections. He did not collapse. So take heed!... The demonstrations are not everything. What counts are the voters."

But to which party should the voters give their preference? This question, which spontaneously arose for everyone in the audience, Cassen left open. Since Attac is not a party and does not participate in elections, it can only be concluded that one should again vote for the social democrats, the Greens or the Stalinists of the Communist Party.

The example of France shows that this leads to a dead end. After the great strike movement of 1995, did not the electorate vote the so-called "left" parties into government? And what did this produce? Lionel Jospin's "plural left" government was in power for five years and—just like New Labour in Britain and the Social Democratic Party-Green Party government in Germany—it carried out policies in the interests of big business. For this reason, Jospin lost so many votes in the first round of the presidential election one year ago that only Jacques Chirac, the representative of the big bourgeoisie, and the fascist Jean Marie Le Pen made it into the second round of the election.

The only possible conclusion to be drawn from this, and countless similar experiences, is the need to build a new international workers' party. But Attac seeks to hold back the movement against imperialist war and social reaction and tie it once again to the bourgeois-reformist parties, from which large numbers of workers have already turned away.

The same can be said about Attac's relations with the trade union bureaucracy, another important prop of the old social order. Several speakers presented the conquest of the trade unions as a goal of the *Alter-mondialiste* movement. It seems to have escaped them that the trade unions in every country long ago stopped fighting for social reforms. As junior partners with the large corporations, they carry through downsizing and rationalisation measures inside the factories; as government partners, they support severe social cuts.

Angela Klein, a representative of the "Euro-March" movement and Social Forum in Germany, who is a leading member of the German VSP (League for Socialist Policies), took on the job of painting the trade unions in progressive colours.

She said the social movement had expanded enormously, and had lately been joined by the trade unions. In the strike waves in Italy, Austria, France and Germany, she continued, major concerns of the anti-globalisation movement, such as privatisation, were being discussed. "The trade unions function essentially as national organisations," Klein said. Nevertheless, the Social Forum had to understand that "the trade unions can mobilise masses around the issues on which we have long been focussing."

In Germany, she said, the neo-liberal "Agenda 2010" of Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder aims to destroy the basis of the welfare state. According to Klein, this policy undermines the material basis for integrating the trade unions into the "social partnership" of the political establishment and confronts the unions with the need to find a new orientation. They will recognise that they no longer have any negotiating partners in the government.

"Today," she said, "we see that the trade unions are discussing whether they should return to a form of extra-parliamentary opposition, and whether they should aim at the complete autonomy of union actions. I think that for the German trade unions this a very revolutionary development, which I welcome."

Klein, it seems, lives in another world. The German Trade Union Federation (DGB) has never halted its cooperation with the government, and on May 26 announced a "pause in protests" until the autumn (i.e., until "Agenda 2010" has been adopted by the parliament). For almost 30 years, the DGB has responded to each government attack by moving further to the right, following the same course as the trade unions in the rest of the world.

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