

Live 8 Edinburgh: marching for the establishment

Mike Ingram
4 July 2005

The “Make Poverty History” rally and march by 200,000 people in Edinburgh on July 2 was billed as “the largest and most successful mobilisation against global poverty in history.” Whatever the intentions of those assembled in Edinburgh, this was not an anti-establishment rally, but a march for and supported by the establishment. In essence, it was part of a multi-million dollar propaganda campaign on behalf of Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush.

Having gained the official sanction of the Scottish Parliament and Edinburgh City Council, the rally was opened by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh. This was followed with a message from the Pope read by Cardinal Keith O’Brien. The pope “cordially imparts his blessing to all gathered at this rally here today,” O’Brien said, setting the stage for a host of speakers from every religious denomination. These, together with a few trade union bureaucrats and celebrities, and dozens of representatives from NGOs and charities, called on the forthcoming G8 meeting of the world’s richest nations to honour its commitment to increased aid and debt relief.

Even the *Guardian* newspaper felt obliged to draw attention to what they called “a very peculiar protest”: “This is a very strange protest—a mass mobilisation that is essentially in support of government policy to cancel developing world debt and double aid. It is a day of rallies and chanting where the only event people struggled to get tickets for was an address by the chancellor of the exchequer.”

Labour Chancellor Gordon Brown was originally reported to be a speaker at the main event, but instead spoke to an audience of around 900 at a rally organised by Christian Aid and the Church of Scotland. He said it was the “duty” of the world leaders gathering in Gleneagles in four days to answer their call for action. It was thanks to their efforts that rich countries had agreed to write off the debts of 38 nations and to double development aid for

Africa, he said.

Brown used the rally to push Labour’s demand for an end to European Union farm subsidies, portraying this free trade call as being motivated by concern for “fair trade” for Africa. He has called for the US and Europe to agree on a date for this. “Let us set a date for the elimination during this decade of wasteful export subsidies,” he said.

The Edinburgh event was accompanied by a massive media blitz with features broadcast throughout the day on BBC television and radio as several hundred million worldwide watched the series of Live 8 concerts. The *Daily Mirror* and its Scottish sister paper the *Sunday Mail* produced thousands of placards with the “Make Poverty History” slogan. The *Times* and the *Independent* donated full pages of their press to an open letter to G8 leaders from organiser Bob Geldof with the *Independent* running it on the front page.

The park resembled a summer gala far more than a political rally, with substantial numbers enjoying a free outdoor concert interspersed with speeches to which little attention was paid. Many others seemed unaware of the stage at the other end of the huge park, instead taking advantage of the children’s play area and entertainment tents that had been provided.

Tens of thousands of people lined up for several hours to participate in a short circular march around the city centre, billed as a “human chain against poverty”. They were warned in advance that loud hailer or other forms of amplification would not be allowed. Organisations participating included the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, Scottish Socialist Party and dozens of religious groups, including Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and the Salvation Army. The march was supported by Scotland’s First Minister Jack McConnell.

A majority of people saw this as a chance to take a

moral stand against world poverty. While some expressed doubt that events such as these would actually impact on the G8 summit, the attitude was largely uncritical.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed the statement “Live 8: A political fraud on behalf of imperialism” and *World Socialist Web Site* reporters discussed the political points raised with some of those in attendance.

A couple originally from Dublin, Ireland but now living in Scotland, had not participated in any of the mass protests against the Iraq war but had been drawn to this event. “We came because we feel you can make a difference, make our voices heard. I was and am totally antiwar. I didn’t vote for Blair last time, or the time before, but you can’t deny that these are the people making the decisions and this is an opportunity to influence them, even though that didn’t happen with the war... I think they almost definitely have a similar agenda in Africa and the Middle East, but what can you do? Just sit at home and ignore everything?”

A director of the National Trust for Scotland, Peter Burman, said, “I am thrilled to be on the Meadows, feeling the atmosphere and what is happening. All together we could do something, but it is not going to happen just as a result of a weekend’s demonstrations or even a week of demonstrations.”

Among those in attendance there was a more critical, though small, minority.

Celine, from France, is studying in the UK for two months. She didn’t go on the antiwar demonstrations, but opposed government policy in the Middle East and in Africa.

“Bush and Blair don’t have a different policy in Africa than the Middle East. They exploit people, it may not take the same form, but the goal is the same. It’s not possible to put an end to poverty without changing the social system. Cancelling the debt benefits the governments and not the people directly. Nevertheless, it is worse in Africa. At least in France we have a minimum welfare system,” she said.

Teenagers Angie, from Spain, and Alex said they had travelled from London to participate in the events surrounding the G8 summit. They had previously attended the big antiwar march when over two million people took to the street in London’s Hyde Park in February 2003. Alex told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

“Demonstrations are clearly not an effective way of exercising control over our political leaders because the problem is that democracy is itself a fake.”

Angie added: “What is the point of demonstrating if the same people you are demonstrating against get re-elected? Everyone is antiwar if you ask them. If you say to people, do you support war, then of course they don’t. But a lot of people marched against the war on the basis of conscience. Demonstrations don’t get to the root of the problem.”

Alex said they “don’t get to the root of the problem because the problem is capitalism. Poverty can never be history under capitalism.”

Angie said she thought the demonstration in Edinburgh was actually counter productive. “It makes people think they are doing something. They just talk about wearing white armbands but don’t address the root problem.” She added that she thought Live 8 was a “marketing thing for Brown and Blair to achieve their own ends. There was that stupid photograph with Geldof with his head on Blair’s shoulder. I wouldn’t be surprised if the whole campaign turned out to be financed by the government.”

Alex said the government was using the Live 8 and “Make Poverty History”, “to improve their image after taking over the EU presidency, as well as to distance themselves from the mess in Iraq. The G8 will make some sort of token move towards debt cancellation or aid, but they will be taking it out of money already in their aid budget so it won’t make much difference. The only reason they give these countries anything is to liberalise their economies.”

Angie added: “Capitalism now needs the resources from these countries. Capitalism is about the accumulation of capital and they go into the impoverished countries in order to do just that, carry through privatisations and open the way for multinationals.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact