

## **De-legitimise G8, strengthen social movements and try out alternative ways of living!**

What we expect of the G8 process – a discussion paper

A large number of network and campaign meetings have already taken place, the planning for camps and actions is already under way. More than a year before the summit of the “Group of 8” in Heiligendamm in Mecklenburg/Vorpommern, East-Germany, various NGOs, networks such as Attac and groups from the radical left have started to focus on the G8, which seems to have an enormous mobilising potential within different parts of the left movement. There is a tremendous need for protesting and organising. As in Seattle 1999, in Genoa 2001 and in other places, the debates and actions taking place in the context of the G 8 summit, may turn into a dynamic “moment of crystallisation” for emancipatory movements.

This is an immense opportunity, but several questions need also be raised:

- In which way can the G8 summit be criticised without subscribing to a questionable view of “the evil 8 against the rest of the world”, that assumes a narrow focus on what seems to be the centre of power, thereby neglecting global relationships and systems of domination?
- How can protests take place without becoming part of or even contributing to strengthening the G 8 spectacle?
- How can the mobilisation contribute to creating structures that are capable of action on a permanent basis instead of being a short-lived, single issue rallying of forces? How can the mobilisation around the G8 be best used to provide and construct alternatives?

This text is part of the discussion process of the BUKO Working Group on World Economy. It's objective is to contribute to a substantiated criticism of the G8, which we conceive as being a part and an expression of global relationships of domination. Equally, it is, in our view, important that the protest will proceed beyond the Heiligendamm event, both with regard to its contents and the way it is organised.

### **1. The current situation**

The neo-liberal project is heading towards a legitimacy crisis. The promise that everyone would be happy and prosperous, if only market forces and competition are allowed to rule without restriction, reveals its flaws day after day. Even the crumbs from the table of the rich, that are supposed to make their way down to those at the bottom provided that there is sufficient economic growth – the people in power like to call this the trickle-down effect – have a taste of exploitation and misery, war and militarisation, environmental destruction, racism and patriarchal social systems, of mass lay-offs with increasing corporate profits, of magnified risk for the sick and the old because of the “reform” of social security systems. The neo-liberal imperial project is decorated with slogans telling us to “keep it up”, and is driven by force and violence, but also by blunt cynicism. The “invisible hand of the market” must increasingly rely on the “fist” of the state and the military.

There is a growing number of people who say “ya basta – enough.” There is mounting criticism of liberal democracies and the capitalist world market, of the repressive ways in which the ruling classes provide their answers and the increasing degree of marginalisation of people. The search for alternatives is well under way. In Germany it has so far been less dynamic than in other societies where it can be observed quite clearly. The searching process is disunited and full of contradictions. In times of economic crises that occur more unpredictably and with greater frequency, the ruling classes fear their interests might be threatened. The establishment is fighting for a re-orientation of the neo-liberal imperial model in order to make global capitalism more efficient and to re-establish its legitimacy. Even though its legitimacy is dwindling, the neo-liberal imperial model has not yet suffered a fatal crisis to its functioning, but continues to dominate politics, not only in the capitalist centres. Society in its current form is – albeit grudgingly - accepted and people contribute to it. The confidence in those taking the political and economic decisions has not yet been fundamentally shaken. Rather than being well-organised and emancipatory, criticism in Germany is of a diffuse character and supports an authoritarian form of the social welfare state. In the worst case, the criticism even arises as right-wing extremism. What we are facing is, on the one hand, a “gap between the extreme acceleration of transformation and, on the other hand, social movements that are only just starting to emerge.” (Martin Diekmann, ak 498).

The meetings of the politically and economically most powerful heads of government as well as the protests must be understood against this backdrop. Fundamentally differing concepts of how societies should be clash at these meetings. It is one of the objectives of the protests to make these differences of opinion clear, to weaken dominant concepts and to strengthen emancipatory ones.

## **2. G8 as a part of the global relations of domination**

The G 8 should be seen as being a nodal point in the net of global hegemony, whereby dominating relationships acquire solidity and enter into new configurations, rather than as a centre of power. Our entire society is pervaded with this global hegemony net of dividing lines and power relationships which cannot be simply described as a division between “top” and “bottom”.

A review of the history of the Group of 8 shows that governments are driven by internal and external factors and contradictions, as well as being the driving forces behind neo-liberal economic politics. The G8 in its present form was created in Rambouillet/France in 1978. The intention of the six governments involved was to reach an agreement – in an informal setting - on how to react to the drastic increase in oil prices, the economical recession and the monetary upheavals that resulted from the dollar being no longer backed by gold and the conversion to free-floating currency exchange rates. For the first time, the further integration of the countries of the south into the world market and the liberalisation of capital markets emerged as explicit demands during the debt crisis of 1982/83. The G8 was transformed into an active advocate for a monetary system organised according to free market principles at the beginning of the 80s, at the latest. Later on, the Group actively supported structural adjustment measures of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and was one of the driving forces behind the World Trade Organisation.

The G8 has constantly broadened its agenda since it came into existence and adapted it to new “exigencies”. The “fight against terrorism” which had already been discussed at the end of the 70s, once again turns into a topic for discussion at G8 proceedings. The governments have been reacting to the criticism that has been raised against their one-sided neo-liberal economic orientation since the 1998 Birmingham summit by debating the issues of debt cancellation and financing of development. The eternal topic of “energy security” will once again take centre stage during the meeting in St. Petersburg in 2006.

It is wrong, however, to overestimate the importance of the final declarations of the G8 meetings. The annual gatherings of the heads of governments which receive broad media coverage are only part of the G8 mechanisms. Besides the summits, a large number of other informal meetings take place, such as between the ministers of foreign affairs and finance, or between the ministers of environment and development. The ministers of finance, for example, meet during the spring and autumn conferences of the IMF and the World Bank. Therefore, the world economic summits are predominantly big PR events. Basically, there is a constant flow of communication at several levels between the G8 countries.

The Group of 8 performs various functions.

Firstly, the G8 has no formal decision-making power and does not even possess a basic charter. But the powerful governments feed their agreements into other political forums (such as World Bank, IMF, WTO, OECD) or implement them as policies at the national level. Final declarations often announce initiatives or request that initiatives be instigated in other international organisations. Additionally, by issuing “recommendations” or specified demands, the G8 puts pressure on other governments. Its diverse mechanisms give the G8 a great degree of flexibility, enabling it to take action without the need to legitimise its decisions through democratic processes.

Secondly, the G8 provides a framework for working through different positions and removing contradictions between states with a dominant political or economic position at the global level. Common interests of the member states are identified, co-ordinated and then presented to others. The G8 has been a central area for developing strategies of crisis management at the time of the debt crises in the 1980s, the currency crises in the 90s and, currently, with regard to implementing “global security” strategies. The G8 crisis management strategies have always been aimed at stabilising world economy, which is, by its nature, prone to crises, by providing it with the

necessary political framework. This is meant to give “macro-economic stability”, but also perpetuate the existing power relationships. The potential of G8 states for settling differences between themselves, is, however, not unlimited, as is manifested by their conflicting positions on the war in Iraq or environmental and trade issues.

Thirdly, the meetings of the heads of government have a significant impact at the symbolic level: “Look, we are doing something about the world’s problems, we are the bosses!”. In addition to directly influencing policies, the G8 thus serves the function of manufacturing support for itself and broadening the scope for its policies in this way.. The symbolic demonstration of domination and legitimacy exemplifies and stabilises the present conditions, because summits at these levels even influence the minds and emotions of the “subjects”. Because of increasing criticism, topics such as debt cancellation and development aid are presented to the public, in the form of a mass media event, rather than with regard to the more fundamental issues of economic policies. In the context of such campaigns, even government officials from non-member states (as, for example, Africa) or representatives of international organisations such as the UN Secretary General are invited. These campaigns build on a general feeling of discontent and the demands put forward by that part of civil society where consensus is likely to exist. In this way, they are transformed into seemingly undisputed measures which are ultimately aimed at re-establishing the legitimacy of the G8. For this purpose the G8 can then draw on a common-sense approach to politics, according to which it is natural to delegate decision-making to governments. Such an approach has a de-politicising effect and, together with the allegedly neutral emphasis on “problem-solving” and the ideology of efficiency, serves to obscure existing relationships of domination.

### 3. De-legitimising G8 and beyond

In our view, the main demand of an internationalist left can only be: to *de-legitimise* the G8. In addition, we suggest that, in the course of the G8 process, the various parts of the emancipatory left should find their place within the process and at the same time should look for different specific *focuses* that can be presented to a larger public. The protest should not wear itself out with theoretical analysis, but should offer space for developing *alternatives* and also for living them. Finally, we have to find ways of dealing with the strategies of governments and the mainstream media that frequently try to create divisions by dividing the protests into “good ones” and “bad ones”.

#### a) De-legitimise

The G8 lacks legitimacy in two respects: with respect to the disastrous results of its politics and with the recognition of the blatant mismatch between those involved in and those affected by the G8 decisions. The G8 does not even live up to its self-imposed standards for liberal democracies with respect to this mismatch. Eight governments take decisions whose symbolical and material effects are felt globally. The heads of governments of the G8 may claim formal democratic legitimacy at the national level, but in fact they act through a system structured by power relationships which only permit those social interests to have an influence which are compatible with the definition provided by those in power as to what the problems are. In addition, in the case of Putin, even the existence of formal democratic legitimacy is questionable. Also within the so-called Western democracies political rule is gradually losing its liberal-democratic cover. This rule assumes an increasingly authoritarian character and thus creates its own legitimacy problem when judged by its own standards of legitimacy.

The forms of conflict and mobilisation that emerged during the Argentinian crisis show that de-legitimise! can be a powerful demand. The slogan “que se vayan todos!” (All of them go home!) was the concentrate of a de-legitimation strategy, crystallising this strategy into a useful and reasonable demand that had significant mobilising effects.

De-legitimation contains three basic elements: Firstly, it denies those in power the right to take decisions in the form and with the content currently experienced, because those who have to face the music had no part in composing it (element one: you do not have the right to do this!). Secondly, such a strategy makes it clear at the social level that it is possible to lead a life in human dignity without being forced to perform senseless work. It also clearly shows that these possibilities

are not used as powerful interests but instead are negated (element two: there is enough for every one!). Thirdly, de-legitimisation points to alternatives for a life with solidarity and self-determination that have already been put into practice or exist in theory. This emphasizes that they can be generalised (Element three: We can do it better!).

One of the challenges consists in applying this criticism not only to the G8, but to social conflicts in various contexts and in presenting radical democratic alternatives. It is not only the G8 that must be criticised as an expression of global relations of domination. The underlying shape and definition of politics, the decision-making and social structures must also be criticised. Changes of an emancipatory kind must take a clear position not only against the capitalist and patriarchal state and international institutions, against political mainstream ideas and the nature of social relations, but also against prevalent hierarchies based on origin, gender and class and the dominant concepts of normality.

#### b) Dramatising and unveiling

The G 8 process can also be used by emancipatory forces for strengthening the cross-references between various components of the leftist movement and in the search for common perspectives for action: groups active in social politics, unemployed initiatives, the left within trade unions, autonomous migrants, anti-racist and anti-fascist groups, the environmental movement, students, the anti-war movement and the movement for a different kind of globalisation.

Various struggles in diverse areas follow different kinds of logic: the resistance to repressive immigration policies works in a different way from building a countervailing force in the work place, fighting nazi structures is different again from protesting against social security reforms such as Hartz IV in Germany, and so on. The mobilisation for Heiligendamm requires an open attitude towards differences and contradictions, and can be an experiment in dealing with different focuses of politics.

The following points might, however, provide the substance for a broader consensus:

We demand the abolition of the Group of 8 and not its extension through the incorporation of new countries.

We refuse to hold a dialogue with the governments that coordinate the dominant interests at the global level. In this way, we avoid the risk of legitimising the whole process through "constructive criticism".

We do acknowledge that many people residing in the centre of politics either accept the existing circumstances in a passive and resigned kind of way or even actively support them – a simple "them at the top, us at the bottom" does not work. We need convincing arguments and we must be open to dialogue with interested individuals and the media. The difficult part is to present a radical form of criticism and radical demands, but at the same time to reach out beyond the circle of those already convinced.

Our criticism is justified, even though we cannot present a comprehensive counter-concept. We do not have any, and we do not want any. A different world cannot be planned and implemented in an authoritarian way, but it must emerge from learning processes, on the basis of an exchange of experiences and the participation of everybody.

In addition, the objective of supporting the politically invisible, those without a voice and those who are marginalised in this country and at the international level to become visible and heard and to be able to formulate their criticisms and their alternatives must be a part of the protests. This requires working on some issues in a systematic way and receiving the support of a larger audience for them. Examples are the issues of migration and the living conditions of people who come to Western Europe from other countries, the situation of those marginalised, those without a voice or a face or the living conditions in the so-called peripheral societies.

These issues should be related to the policies implemented by the G8, to debt and world

market competition, but also to our ways of production and consumption here.

Finally: perhaps it will be possible to find a terminology that condenses the present struggles and concerns and gives them a common perspective. The Zapatista slogans “ya basta” and “A different world is possible!” perform this very function.

#### c) Lived alternatives

Global protest must not stop at theoretical criticism, but must be transformed into a creative process. This is about progressing towards making resistance part of our daily lives, towards building and living alternatives while at the same time still asking questions. The G8 mobilisation must see itself as being part of different forms of an established social protest, with all the contradictions that entails. To gain awareness of these contradictions by looking critically at our own movements might open up perspectives leading beyond these contradictions by the conscious implementation of alternative ways of organisation and life. From the very beginning, the process must be directed towards crossing over thematic, social and national borders. In some respects the “Dissent!” groups may constitute an example of this: prior to the summit in Scotland in 2005 it was possible to mobilise people all over Europe. The direction of and the structures created by this mobilisation might now serve as a foundation for the protests against the summits in Russia and Germany.

#### d) Preventing splits

We must be prepared for three developments.

Firstly, the ruling elite will make an attempt to de-legitimise the protests. The directors of the states present themselves as being the morally enlightened realpolitik people, and confine us to the area of the “loony left”.

Secondly – and this is what previous protest movements have taught us – attempts will be made to divide the movement. During different summits over the course of recent years the attempt was made to silence critical voices by using a strategy of co-optation. Events such as the “Live Aid” and “make poverty history” campaigns, which accompanied the G8 summit in Gleneagles, have succeeded in channelling protests and thus presented the G8 as a legitimate addressee for demands for a “more equitable globalisation”. The critics of globalisation who are ready for dialogue are listened to or are even - as in Davos – given an open forum for presenting their concerns. The rest is demonised as “violent”. The success the mobilisation against the 2007 summit will depend, among other things, on whether it will be possible to react to this kind of takeover not by splits and turf claims, but by building on the criticisms voiced and by radicalising.

Thirdly, and related to this, it is likely that repression will be used against the protests or at least certain ways of protesting. It is therefore important that campaigns against repression start today already and that the local population is brought on to our side.

In order to counter these strategies, we need discussions that take place in a spirit of solidarity. As discussions require time, we should not object to clarifications and constructive controversy. This often happens within in the movement-oriented left when time is pressing for action. Instead of this, we should use the time to reflect on the dynamics of protest, to learn from them and thus be more capable of acting effectively.

### **Outlook**

The Bundeskoordination Internationalismus (The Federal Internationalism Coordination, BUKO), a network of internationalist groups in Germany, would like to support this process of clarification and networking and offer a forum for discussing the issues with the necessary depth and plurality of views. The next two congresses offer this opportunity.

The success or failure of the protests depends on whether we manage to reach beyond the summit, not only with regard to the topics discussed, but also with regard to the structures of

protest. A wide range of experience has been gathered during similar mobilisations in the past. We have to build on these in a critical and reflected way, instead of starting every counter-summit mobilisation from scratch. Our objective must be to build coherent, long-term structures that connect the local to the global struggles, that cross-link and strengthen social protest. At the same time, we should not prepare a "master-plan", but conceive mobilisation as an open process where alternatives might be lived already.

The mobilisation against the G8 summit has already achieved a lot.

If

- the existing circumstances are criticised and de-legitimised in an intelligent and creative way, i.e. if the different actions and events against the summit have an infectious effect on many
- fundamentally emancipatory perspectives, i.e. anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, feminist and radically ecological positions can be strengthened among and beyond those participating in the protest
- rightist voices are not given a chance to make their "criticism" heard
- more and more people are willing to act against liberal economic and repressive patterns in numerous ways in their daily lives
- existing forms of living our lives together at the political, social, cultural and economic level in solidarity are strengthened and new ones are created
- an emancipatory left gains in momentum and diverse parts which have different perspectives and experiences nevertheless relate to each other in a critical way and at the same time in solidarity

then it will be possible to create societies which are just and free, peaceful and sustainable.

Working Group on World Economy of the Bundeskoordination Internationalismus (BUKO) - ASWW

The ASWW has written this text as an invitation to further discussion. We can be contacted at [asww@buko.info](mailto:asww@buko.info). A workshop will take place at our 29<sup>th</sup> congress, the BUKO 29, which will be an opportunity for discussing this paper. All those interested are cordially invited!

Comments:

- 1) An analysis of the movement and a more in-depth discussion of the G8 will be part of the forthcoming booklet by the ASWW.
- 2) The US, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan; Canada joined in 1976, and the EU Commission joined in 1977. The Russian government has been taking part in the meeting since 1994 and has been a formal member since 1998 (although the membership did not cover all areas until 2006).
- 3) The 29th federal congress "re:control. respond. reject. regain" will take place from May 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2006 in Berlin. One of the major issues will be the G 8, more information is available at [www.buko.info](http://www.buko.info).