

# Germany: The Current State of the G 8 Process

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## **Information from the Coordinating Committee of Attac Germany on the preparations for protest at the G 8 in Heiligendamm 2007**

The G 8 2007 will be held from 8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> of June in the seaside resort Heiligendamm near Rostock by the the Baltic Sea. This year the G8 takes for the first time place in Russia (15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> of July in St. Petersburg).

At the same time, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) will own the EU presidency in the first half of 2007.

For approximately half-a-year the preparations for alternative and counter activities started in various political panels.

### **1. Greater dynamic than formerly**

It has become evident that there is significant greater vitality compared to the prior summits on German territory (Cologne 1999, Munich 1992, Bonn 1985). This is a reflection on the changes in the general political situation during the last years:

a. the effects of neo-liberal globalisation have now reached the Federal Republic with increasingly naked brutality. Hartz IV, increasing poverty, precariousness extending into the middle class, the dismantling of the social system and democratic rights, social polarisation, the lifting of the taboo against war, etc. have produced an altered Republic;

b. The acceptance for this form of Capitalism has declined, not only worldwide (s. Seattle, Genoa, Social Forum movement, the leftist developments in Latin America, rejection of the EU constitution, etc.), but also clearly in the FRG;

c. Attac emerges as a new and significant participant in the emancipated camp. In Cologne in 1999 the Jubilee Debt Campaign, strongly shaped by the churches, still dominated. The coordinates within the emancipatory spectrum have shifted;

d. the summits which took place in Europe after Cologne were accompanied by remarkable protests ranging from strong to extreme: Genoa 2001, Evian 2003, Gleneagles 2005.

## **2. The state of affairs in the various sectors**

Up until now, the following groups prepare for the G 8 Summit, initially independently of each other, but increasingly in networks:

**a. The task force G8 of Attac**, which since January held two meetings and a two-day workshop. 15 to 20 Attacies are currently engaged, among them several Council and Coordinating Committee members. Until now the focus has been on work on the national level in various groups and on preparation for the first conference in Rostock. There is consensus on the following positions as a basis:

- the G8 is illegitimate, but nevertheless a real participant, and therefore it can be the target of concrete demands;
- Our activities centre on the themes "global democracy", "global social rights", "poverty and wealth",
- We do not want thematic restriction to merely one single point, and in addition to current demands we also want to make the utopian spillover visible.

From mid-April onward Kay Oliver-Schulze (national bureau) coordinates the preparations within Attac. The goal is to support educational and public relations work locally, and to form action groups.

**b. The development-policy NGO scene**, with participants such as *Brot für die Welt*, *Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst*, *VENRO*, *medico international* and networks such as *Deine Stimme gegen Armut*, *Erlassjahrkampagne*, *Gerechtigkeit Jetzt!*, *Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung* and smaller NGOs (*FIAN*, *WEED*, *Germanwatch* etc.). The *BUND* is also part of this connection.

A part of these participants was strongly active under the umbrella of the *Jubilee Debt Campaign* in 1999 in Cologne. In 2005 the British scene corresponding to this type of participant took a significant part in the Gleneagles process under the title "Make Poverty History." *Deine Stimme gegen Armut* - the German part of the "Global Call for Action Against Poverty" (GCAP) - was the supporting political organisation on the German side of the world wide pop concert of Geldorf, Bono, and others and its branch in Berlin.

In addition the *Bundeskoordination Internationalismus - BUKO* took part in meetings of this scene.

At *Forum Umwelt & Entwicklung* a staff position for the preparations for the G 8 was set up.

Attac also works cooperatively within this connection: The scene has met twice up to now, in response to a joint invitation from *Forum Umwelt & Entwicklung* and Attac. There is a willingness to cooperate that transcends the narrower NGO spectrum. Additionally, during the process of preparation in the

second half of 2006, discussion events that span the spectra and themes should be organised, among other things around the themes energy, world trade and global democracy. Attac will probably participate in these projects.

The results from this circle in the way of concrete joint activities at the summit can't be envisioned at this time. It is conceivable that relevant subsets of this panel will participate in an alternative or counter-congress and a large demo. Individual organisations such as *Erlassjahr (Jubilee)* and *Gerechtigkeit Jetzt! (Justice Now!)* will conduct independent actions on their themes.

Something of large political significance could occur if a concert with pop stars such as Bono is arranged out of this spectrum. *VENRO/Deine Stimme gegen Armut* have contact with Grönemeyer, as well as the organisations of Bono and Geldorf, but for the time being these are of a preliminary nature. No results are to be expected at the moment.

c. In recent times **the environmental movement** has been participating with varying degrees of intensity in alternative and counter-activities to the G8.

Because environmental themes are presently taking on significance in the official political agenda (energy security, future of atomic energy, follow-up to Kyoto), and the Summit in 06 placed the theme "energy security" explicitly in the centre, these are also good points of departure for the environmental movement. Besides this, with the end of the participation of the Greens in government, a stronger turning to extra-parliamentary action on the part of the environmental movement can be observed. *McPlanet III*, in which *Greenpeace*, *BUND* the *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* and *Attac* will participate, is already planned as part of the process at Heiligendamm for early 2007. In addition *Greenpeace* and several other environmental organisations are considering whether they should do something in the street at the summit.

d. The **German trade unions** have never - except for the *DGB / IG Metall* youth - participated in alternative activities to the G8. It is possible that this will change in 2007. The *DGB Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* already has the event on its screen and plans to integrate a traditional "job parade" into the G8 process. There are also deliberations at the working level in the *DGB* about perhaps participating in a congress project on the theme "Work with Dignity." However, no definite decision can be expected before the general meetings of the *DGB*, *Verdi* and *IG Metall* in May, 2006. The meetings of *IG Metall* and *Verdi* are planned for mid 2007.

#### **e. Rostock Action Conference**

Attac, together with Social Forum, the peace movement, *medico international* and the local Rostock alliance, issued an invitation to an open action conference in March 25<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup>. Participation was very good, with 300 people attending, and emphasises the vitality of the process once again. Among others there were representatives from *DGB-Jugend*, *Gerechtigkeit Jetzt!*, *Interventionistische Linke*, *Flüchtlingsorganisationen*, *DGB Rostock*, *Kein Mensch ist Illegal*, *X-Tausend-Mal-Quer*, *Euromärsche* and ecumenical grass roots groups, as well as the local Rostocker *Bündnis* (s. below) and numerous unorganised people.

The Conference was explicit in making no claim to being the centre of activities. There was consensus that there are better chances for a broad mobilisation than formerly. The Action Conference understood itself as a part of the process toward this.

The discussions were marked by a political culture of listening, respect and the search for common ground.

The Conference received considerable notice in the regional media. The *CDU* had already, in advance, attacked the *Linkspartei*, saying that by supporting activities critical of the summit it would damage "the reputation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern". The *Bildzeitung* had provided public covering fire with the headlines "Here's where the chaos team meets".

However, the course of the conference was such that most of the media reports were between fair and positive.

Concrete Results:

- a follow-up conference with international participation shall take place in the second half of 06
- Alternatives / Counter-Summit task group
- Demo task group
- Cultural Event(s) task group
- Camp task group
- Task group on actions of civil disobedience

All task groups are open for other participants who wish to join during the further process.

#### **f. Rostock local alliance**

A local alliance has constituted itself in Rostock, which extends from the *DGB* Rostock to the *Eine-Welt-Netzwerk* to parts of the Autonomous spectrum. This structure is significant not only for practical reasons. It is even more important that a political climate arises locally in which the protests are met with understanding and possibly even sympathy.

**g The sector that considers itself left of Attac** consists of three main currents: the *Bundeskoordination Internationalismus - BUKO*, the **Interventionistische Linke** and the *Dissent-Netzwerk*. The *BUKO* has connections to the NGO spectrum, but also cooperates with other spectra. Its national congress in May is supposed to discuss the G8 as one of the main themes. The *Interventionistische Linke* (IL) is a relatively new, loose association of people and groups from the autonomous or formerly autonomous spectrum and other sectors that define themselves as radical Leftists. Politically and in terms of personnel there is some overlapping between the *BUKO* and parts of Attac.

The IL considers the summit process as a stage towards a strategic new formation of the Left and strives for a broad front that includes the development-policy NGOs, the unions and the environmental movement. The *Dissent-Netzwerk* consists essentially of groups such as *Peoples Global Action*, those working with refugees and parts of the Autonomous scene. It has

established an independent organisation and discussion frame. At the national level this panel is relatively distant from the other spectra.

### **3. The role of Attac**

It is very obvious that for Attac the G8 is a topic par excellence. Furthermore - against the background of the whole political configuration within the Federal Republic, Attac possesses the potential to function as a bridge into the individual spectra, to facilitate co-operation and to attempt to achieve the biggest possible linkage of the different connected issues.

The G8 therefore will be **the** centre of gravity of our work for the next 14 to 15 months.

Until now we focussed on developing the dialogue with different panels and assessing the perspectives of political alliances within the process. This is not yet finished. But it can now already be seen that we do not have just a co-existence without communications or even an against-each-other of the different spectra. This is new compared to summits taking place on German soil in the nineties. This insofar is one achievement of our efforts.

It is also a part of this strategy not to create facts, to establish structures and to plan concrete actions too early. This would lead certainly to an attempt to claim leadership as long as the perspectives of political alliance are open.

But this does not mean that even if we like to do as much as possible with partners, that we are going to melt completely within alliances. Of course it is very important to develop your own profile and deliver your own contributions to the whole process.

The project group's unpolished concept still requires a lot of working out of concrete points and supporting. The project group is open for all members of Attac, who would like to cooperate with commitment. Currently the planned work encompasses among other things publications (basis text, flyer...), a home-page of our own and events like speakers-tours etc.

### **4. Unsolved political problems and controversies**

In spite of the- on the whole - pleasant development until now there are some risks, controversies and unsolved problems, which are not to be underestimated. Among them are:

#### **a. Bundling by Topics?**

Whether the summit will achieve recognition beyond the circle of those already convinced depends to a very high degree on the successful formulation of a political message with an impact. During the Gleneagles-process this was achieved relatively well by using the slogan "Make Poverty History".

But this was promoted very well because on the side of the government Blair himself with his *Year of Africa* and other development friendly rhetoric had placed the topic on his agenda. Despite the fact that it was a window-dressing

hoax, it enabled the protest movement to link onto it and to develop a common political push in the same direction.

Until now it looks more difficult at Heiligendamm. On the one hand there is no indication that the federal government itself has any intention of setting a theme, and if so, which one. A possible candidate could be energy. But it cannot be dismissed that there will be an unexpected main topic, maybe due to an escalation of the conflict surrounding Iran.

On the part of the movements and NGOs there is a prevailing attitude for each to emphasise their own topic. If this becomes the main trend then there will be the whole wide range of topics ranking from Aids to Immigration - to put it polemically: "the usual market mix".

Therefore it will be a central challenge during the continued process to have a discussion about such a common joint message and possibly to achieve a result by the end of this year. A first idea was the link "Global democracy - social and ecological rights for all worldwide".

### **b. Position related to EU-presidency**

There is the question whether the German EU-presidency during the first half of the year 2007 will be beneficial or damaging for the mobilisation for the G8. Trade unions and some NGOs assume that during that period they could get their way more easily within the EU. The opposite position argues that the country holding the presidency can promote its own topics the least since as a moderator it has to concentrate foremost on the interests of the EU as a whole. Moreover the topics currently dominating the EU (expansion towards the East, Turkey, constitutional crisis etc.) lend themselves only in very limited way as useful focal points for a G8 mobilisation anyway.

The Cologne summit in 1999 was also during a German council presidency. There the assessment of those who were sceptical about linking it with G8 was confirmed. In spite of frequent attempts towards such linking they in fact failed. However there was also a special situation, as during that time the EU was preparing for war in Kosovo and even started it in April. The war made all planning obsolete anyway.

### **c. Relations between political parties and civic society**

The parliamentary group of the Linkspartei (German Left Party) the party's board and the different party groupings based at the location intend to engage themselves intensively on the side of the summit critics.

It is not a new thing that political parties behave like that. During the Bonn G7 in 1985 the Grünen (Green Party) played a similar role. And in Genua a large share of the mobilisation was thanks to strong engagement by the Rifundazione Comunista.

If the topic environment/energy is going to play a major role then it cannot be dismissed that the Greens or parts of them will become part of the process. It is of course good if political parties behave critically about the G8 and use their influence accordingly. However a situation where criticism and protests

by civil society become part of party politics must definitely be avoided. Their credibility and long-term impact depends on respecting this principle. To the extent that political parties like to see strong emancipatory powers in the space outside of the parliament they themselves ought to have an interest towards the G8 protest being independent of party politics.

Beyond that: ignoring autonomy from party politics would immediately cause the political alliance to explode. Since the hidden preferences and connections are distributed among many different parties. Attac is therefore well advised to remain neutral in party politics and has an interest in the visibility of representatives of different political parties during G8 activities.

#### **d. Pop stars**

Some activities, especially those of Bob Geldof, did lead to serious problems in the Gleneagle process. Geldof operated fully autonomously, without being willing to cooperate with civil society, and has heavily damaged the political message of the protest through his meeting with Bush and his statement following it ("We have achieved 95 % of our targets. Stop criticising Bush.") All political forces should be interested in avoiding a repetition of this. Other pop stars, who could possibly play a role could be Bono, Manu Chao or Herbert Grönemeyer. But here things are at a very early stage and a concept of how to handle this has not yet been discussed in detail.

#### **e. The question of violence**

As has already been mentioned the mood set by the Bildzeitung (German right-leaning tabloid) during the Action-Conference in Rostock proved that there are already attempts to escalate the debate about violence to criminalise the movement and provoke splits. The intention is evident: as soon as there is talk about broken windows the political contents will not be mentioned anymore.

At the same time the topic of violence is of course useful to make new alliances impossible. Here too there is considerable internal need for discussion within Attac.

On the G8 workshop there was agreement that Attac will energetically support massive civic disobedience, but will participate only in activities which are not violent.

#### **f. Right wing extremism**

The right margin of the political spectre requires observation. Almost traditional are the attempts by Nazis to occupy nationalistic topics during the G8 (Dictatorship of the international capital). In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state elections are to be held and the NPD is confident of a good chance to utilise the parliament for their propaganda.

For that reason the First of May in Rostock is especially important where a wide alliance is mobilising against the central demonstration by the NPD, to which several thousands of Neo-Nazis are expected.

### **g. Making the G8 illegitimate and demands towards the participating governments**

Within Attac there is a wide agreement that G8 is not a legitimate forum of international democracy. Therefore it should be abolished. At the same time important questions of globalisation are negotiated during the summit and in the on going G8 process. It is therefore legitimate to address concrete demands towards the governments participating in the G8 process, like writing-off debts, closure of tax-havens, a just world trade or international taxes. With such demands even towards an illegitimate process the G8 critics are in the good company of many social movements, who time and again demand better living and working conditions in the present, and this from the participants whom, at the same time, they wish would go to hell.

### **h. Internationalisation**

The internationalisation of the summit process is in itself undisputed, but still in its early stages as far as practical implementation is concerned..

During the ESF in Athens a first bigger step was taken, namely by having an assembly about the G8 with English, German and Russian participation.

The G8 summit in St. Petersburg should also be utilised to achieve attention.

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### **P.S.**

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