

G8 on track for 5 million deaths

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Two years ago we were assaulted with the spectacle of Bono and Bob Geldof promising to help “make poverty history”. The two pop stars, both well past their use-by date, played leading roles in organising the 2005 anti-poverty Live 8 concerts and as a result scored a much-reported invite to address the July 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles, Scotland. That summit adopted a debt-relief and aid plan for Africa hailed by Bono as a “little piece of history”. Geldof declared the summit a “qualified triumph” for the world’s poor. The issue of global warming also featured at the Gleneagles meeting, with the G8 resolving to “act with resolve and urgency” to tackle climate change.

Even at the time, the hard facts about the Bono-blessed debt-relief plan were spelled out in a statement issued by Africa Jubilee South, which said that while the cancellation of some of the multilateral debts of some of the world’s poorest nations was “long overdue”, there were conditions attached including the “implementation of stringent free market reforms such as budget cuts, financial and trade liberalisation, privatisation and other reforms that ensure the elimination of impediments to private investment, both domestic and foreign”.

Similarly, the promises on tackling climate change were largely hot air. Tony Juniper, the vice-chair of Friends of the Earth International, argued that the G8 “delivered nothing new here and the text conveys no sense of the scale or urgency of the challenge”.

Two years later, a report issued in May by Oxfam titled *The World is Still Waiting* explained that while there have been some positive steps forward — for example the cancellation of most of the debts owed by 22 countries to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — things have actually gone backwards since Gleneagles.

For example, in the first time in almost a decade, G8 aid to poor countries fell in 2006. At Gleneagles, rich countries promised to increase annual aid to Africa by US\$50 billion over the course of half a decade, however Oxfam calculated that based on the trend since the summit the target would be missed by \$30 billion. The report states that “Oxfam has calculated that if this money were available for vital health interventions for mothers, children, and those suffering from HIV and AIDS, it could save at least five million lives”.

On the global warming front, the report notes, “Instead of providing the billions of dollars poor countries need to adapt to the impact of climate change, [the rich countries] are providing just a few million and diverting even these small amounts from existing aid budgets”.

Two years on from Gleneagles, the 33rd summit of the G8 (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States) was held from June 6 to 8 in Heiligendamm, Germany. German Chancellor Angela Merkel presided over a meeting that again delivered largely only rhetoric about fighting global poverty and taking action on climate change.

The record of the G8 isn’t just one of criminal inaction, but of helping maintain a global economic system that dooms billions to poverty and, increasingly, to suffer the effects of the world’s environmental crisis — the G8’s member-nations together are responsible for some 63% of the world’s GDP and, in 2005, for 45% of global emissions of greenhouse gases, while having just 13% of

the world's population.

Given this, it is little wonder that the group's summits are targets for protests. The German summit was no exception. Despite threats of fierce state repression, which included "pre-emptive" raids on protest organisers in May, some 80,000 people protested against the G8 in the city of Rostock, near Heiligendamm, on June 2.

A June 5 report in the British Socialist Worker by Chris Nineham reported: "Demonstrators streamed from two meeting points in the suburbs to the old harbour near the city centre.

"There were pensioners groups, climate change campaigners, anti-war groups and impressive trade union delegations.

"Local families mingled with student groups from all over the country marching alongside mobile sound systems. There were large groups of young anarchists, many dressed in black."

"The atmosphere was relaxed, like a huge political festival", Nineham reported. However, "scuffling broke out ... between groups of anarchists and some riot police. Within seconds hundreds of paramilitary police in green uniforms poured into the area from three directions.

"A stick, one or two stones and a flare were thrown and the police started baton charging the anarchist groups mercilessly. Other protesters were pushed over and trampled. One man was thrown out of a wheelchair and beaten by a group of about 15 police officers. A young woman held by her mother fled past us with blood pouring across her face."

Hundreds of people were reportedly injured, the majority of them protesters. Police claimed that large numbers of officers were seriously injured, however these claims later turned out to be massively inflated.

Throughout the evening protesters suffered brutal sporadic attacks by police. "The police seemed to be trying to give the impression that Rostock was under military occupation. But the protesters were defiant, 30,000 or so stayed in the harbour to hear the speeches and dance at a concert."

According to Socialist Worker, Focus of the Global South's Walden Bello told the final rally: "This protest is more in the spirit of Genoa [in 2001] than Gleneagles. We are not asking the G8 to help. We are telling them to get out of the way."

P.S.

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