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'IT'S THE POLITICS, STUPID'

HOW NEOLIBERAL POLITICIANS, NGOS AND
ROCK STARS HIJACKED THE GLOBAL JUSTICE
MOVEMENT AT GLENEAGLES... AND HOW WE
LET THEM

Paul Hewson

Thanks to Bob, Bono and Make Poverty History's efforts, a more informed debate is happening. ... Bob and Bono are ... making these issues massive and mainstream so power must come to the people, not the other way round.

Jamie Drummond, DATA (Debt, Aids, Trade, Africa), June 2005¹

What we have been trying to do is put pressure on the leaders of the G8 summit to make a real change in the world, but I don't even know what these people want. ... We are already getting movement from the G8 group on these issues. Anyone who wants to cause trouble on the streets should go home.

Midge Ure, Live Aid veteran, July 2005²

Shortly after Bob Geldof called for a million people to converge in Edinburgh for the opening day of the G8 summit, Midge Ure, the co-organiser of Live8, was asked if he was worried about the events being hijacked by anarchists. His response was that Live8 was, in fact, hijacking the anarchists' event.

Kay Summer and Adam Jones, The Guardian³

Now that the horse shit has been cleared off the streets of Edinburgh, the travelling anarchist circus has left town and the G8's annual recycled lies already forgotten for another year, it's time for the Dissent! network to face up to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, we blew it. Not the train or the campsites or the legal support; not the convergence and Indymedia centres or the activist trauma

support; not even the blockades, which might have been unwelcoming for a mass action but caused far more disruption than first thought. No, where we let ourselves down was actually in relation to the most important aspect of all – the G8 itself.

Despite two years of counter-G8 preparations and a decade of undermining the G8 governments' assumed right to impose their collective will on the rest of the planet, the Gleneagles summit was the most politically legitimised, ideologically uncontested gathering in its grubby little history. One statistic tells it all: in 2001, 300,000 people hit the streets of Genoa to protest against the G8; in 2005, the same number came out in Edinburgh to *welcome* Blair, Bush, Berlusconi and co. to Scotland. As far as most of the people who get their news and views from the mass media were concerned, the G8 summit was a high-level inter-governmental summit at which world leaders in the North were taking historic decisions to help eradicate poverty and needless deaths in Africa. These bastards left Scotland with their reputations enhanced, boosted by a chorus of cheers from everyone from international statesmen and newspaper editorials to those meddling rock stars whose vanity project drowned out the dismay of even Make Poverty History (MPH). In the real world – not the activist ghetto – there was no 'dissent'.

This might sound a bit harsh. After all, the G8 is an illegitimate, undemocratic forum of global governance and taking on the politics of this year's summit would in some ways have simply lent this gang of thugs a credibility and legitimacy they don't really have. The media, the clever co-optation of UK global justice campaigners by New Labour, Oxfam and Geldof, the unfair disparity in the resources available to those NGOs and corporate interests behind the G8 agenda, and, of course, the destructive role of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in summit mobilisations, all made our job a lot harder. But ultimately, having good excuses doesn't change the fact that we lost. It doesn't change the fact that because we failed to make any significant inroads into popular opinion, the G8's neocolonial plan for Africa and the rest of the global South will continue unabated and the very neoliberal and authoritarian policies we oppose in the core capitalist countries will also remain largely unchallenged.

The irony and thus tragedy is that it didn't have to be this way. The Gleneagles G8 represented our best opportunity in years to put new momentum into anti-capitalism in the UK and land some telling blows on our enemies. It was also a chance to work out more clearly who we are, take our ideas to a mainstream audience and attract more people into our movement. As Dissent! begins to plan the next big 'action', I believe that now is the time for a sincere discussion within the anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical wing of the anti-capitalist movement about who we are and what we are trying to achieve. This means learning from our mistakes – and also the strategies of others. This essay is meant as a personal contribution to that self-reflection. It is deliberately provocative – no offence intended, honest!

(ESF) was in its failure to allow a meaningful dialogue to take place across a wide spectrum of actors on how to approach the G8.

Another major factor against us was the press. The corporate and state-owned media machine was always going to be a lost cause, but media complicity with the G8 was at an all-time high in terms of its sophisticated ‘good protester/bad protester’ strategy. Beginning more than a year away from the summit, rarely would a couple of weeks go by without a series of articles promoting the ominous spectre of potentially ‘violent anarchists’ planning to disrupt progress on Africa as part of their ‘extremist agenda’. Undercover reporters would magically infiltrate open public meetings of Dissent!, lacing their sensationalist reportage with military-style language to describe the use of fairly innocuous protest props. Contrast this with the deification of those celebrities and NGOs ‘responsibly’ lobbying the G8 on Africa and their commitment to the hungry, needy and helpless. As the summit approached, these black and white stories would become a daily phenomenon. The de-mobilising ideological effect of this kind of media bombardment cannot be underestimated.

Arguably the biggest obstacle of all, however, came from some of the very campaigning organisations and groups that are often – and wrongly – seen as either members or allies of the ‘global justice movement’. In contrast to almost all previous G8 summits (except, interestingly, the 1998 Birmingham summit), the major civil society mobilisation for the G8 – MPH – comprising the major trade unions, development NGOs and faith groups with ‘political celebrities’, shamelessly organised *in favour* of the summit! And what a breathtakingly effective mass disinformation campaign it proved to be. MPH’s white wristband mania and star-studded PR succeeded in simultaneously capturing millions of ordinary people’s imagination about global poverty and, with the added last-minute support of the Live8 concerts, leading them as far away from the authors of that poverty as possible.

By turning the spectacle of summit-stopping on its head, MPH-Live8 served to grant the G8 and their multi-national corporations a legitimacy they have never previously enjoyed and went a long way to ensuring that Dissent! and G8Alternatives stood little chance of ideologically contesting the summit. But were we really just innocent victims of a cleverly orchestrated hijack? It would be convenient to think so. In reality, however, we played right into the hands of the G8-MPH-Live8 scam.

MAKING POVERTY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS HISTORY

There’s no doubt that the rise and rise of global anti-capitalism in the decade or so since the Zapatistas declared war on neoliberalism from the Lacandón jungle of Chiapas has been nothing short of remarkable. Over the past 12 years, millions of us worldwide have been radicalised into political struggle and direct action against an economic system geared to the interests of capital and its ruling class.

We have achieved some great symbolic victories and concrete gains along the way, and at arguably the height of our 'counter-power' between 2001 and 2002, marked by the Genoa G8 and the Argentina popular uprisings, we were challenging almost every assumption, outcome and institution of neoliberal capitalism and corporate globalisation.

Most powerful of all has been the phenomenon of summit-stopping: wherever and whenever the global capitalist institutions meet – the WTO, IMF, World Bank, G8, NATO – we have almost always followed them, bringing chaos to the streets, disruption to the meetings and occasionally succeeding in shutting them down *à la* Seattle and Prague. As throughout history, power has quickly learnt from these experiences by geographically shifting most summits out of major Western cities and into remote mountain ranges or police states. However, for this year's summit, the G8 had limited options to hide away in the UK, and however difficult Gleneagles was to penetrate it still offered the possibility for a more successful repeat of the Evian blockades. If only the huge anti-war feeling in Europe over Iraq could be mobilised to Scotland, the potential for the UK's presidency of the G8 summit to become a political disaster was very real.

Disrupting the G8 would not have simply been a diplomatic embarrassment to the British state. This year's G8 was an absolutely crucial summit for rich countries to get their act together amid the continuing slowdown in the world economy, rising oil prices and dwindling reserves, and the new-found solidarity among Third World countries which have been blocking further liberalisation in the WTO since the 2001 Doha Ministerial. The G8 needed to work together with their business elites to get consensus on how to kick-start the neoliberal globalisation agenda in their interests, as well as try to overcome differences on international terrorism and the future course for Iraq. A protest movement capable of bringing media and public attention to the real nature of the G8 summit and the implications of their agenda for all of us would have been a major victory with powerful repercussions for an anti-capitalist resurgence.

Faced with this scenario, the UK government knew it needed a plan to avoid the battle scenes of previous summits, and a set of powerful and influential allies to carry it off. The first stage was to ensure that the official agenda for the G8 summit took the moral high ground away from the protesters. A summit publicly focused on Iran, nuclear power or free trade – which were all actually discussed at length in Gleneagles – would have been a sitting target for activists and lefty journalists. In the 20th anniversary year of Live Aid, what better *cause célèbre* than Africa. The 'forgotten continent' had long been the centre-piece of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's 'moral crusade', the cornerstone of their 'liberal internationalism'. They had seen how successful it was as a diversion the last time the G8 had met in the UK when the government and the Jubilee 2000 campaign worked together to make debt cancellation the big public concern of the Birmingham summit and then pull the wool over everyone's eyes afterwards – the



'historic promises' on debt were betrayed within weeks of the summit.

Africa was also one of those issues that would see journalists lose any remaining critical faculties and suddenly be unable to write anything bad about politicians. After all, who could be against a rhetorical agenda apparently aimed at saving dying babies, feeding the poor and malnourished, building new hospitals and schools, allowing poor countries to trade with us on a fairer basis, cancelling debts and promising new drugs to kids with AIDS? In a country where most people's understanding of Africa's history and problems has come from Bob 'give us your fookin' money' Geldof, saving Africa *again* was a perfect instrument to divert public attention away from the disaster in Iraq.

The Africa focus made sense for another, more crucial reason. What we often forget when drowned in what Rotimi Sankore calls the 'pornographic images of poverty in Africa' is that Africa is unimaginably rich.⁴ Rich in the natural and human resources capitalism feeds on. Precious stones and metals, energy sources and cheap labour are in abundance with one prize increasingly valued above all others – oil. With the rise of Chavez in oil-rich Venezuela, the instability in Iraq and future uncertainty of Saudi supplies, getting hold of African oil has become a major priority for the G8 powers, not least because China is massively stepping up its presence on the continent and threatening the status quo. The US alone hopes to be importing 25 per cent of its oil from the African Gulf of Guinea region within the next ten years. European powers have of course been stealing

and destroying these resources from Africa over the past five centuries, killing more than 100 million Africans in the process. Despite this, the continent remains a largely untapped reserve of profit hence the launch, at the 2002 G8 in Kananaskis, Canada, of the infamous NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) initiative, which locks African states into a progressive liberalisation of their economies under the tutelage of their former colonial masters.

NEPAD's slow progress and widespread illegitimacy among African civil society gave Blair and Brown the perfect opportunity to give the initiative fresh impetus for Gleneagles. So in February 2004, the government set up the Commission for Africa, fronted by Bob Geldof, to help create the political process of consensus-building between G8 governments, their corporations and Africa's core of neoliberal politicians. It was also a clever PR stunt: by having a majority of Africans on the Commission, its recommendations could be spun as being literally 'out of Africa'. In reality, the African Commissioners had been hand-picked by Blair and Brown, and formed a 'web of bankers, industrialists and political leaders with connections to the IMF and the World Bank, all committed to spreading the gospel of free market capitalism'.⁵ Following strong input from Western oil and mining corporations, the Commission's 454-page report was ghost written by Geldof's biographer – Paul Vallely of *The Independent* – under the close supervision of the Department for International Development (DfID) and former World Bank chief economist, Sir Nicholas Stern.⁶ Unsurprisingly, the report's recommendations for more aid, debt cancellation and fairer trade rules came with a rather large catch: African governments had to spend any new resources on turning their continent into a single capitalist market economy fit for foreign investment.

The next stage was to ensure that the major development NGOs were onside, a task made easier by the strong funding relationship between DfID and most NGOs working on international development issues. In 2003, a series of meetings are rumoured to have taken place between government officials and the leadership of Oxfam, which exposés by both *New Statesman* and *Red Pepper* have shown has particularly strong links to New Labour.⁷ Bringing Oxfam into the G8 inner core was a clever move by the government given its hegemonic role within the global development scene. This power is partly due to its size and wealth. In 2004, Oxfam UK's annual income surpassed £180m, three times more than agencies like Christian Aid. It is also the preferred aid agency of most foreign governments and other public bodies, receiving huge amounts of state funding for its work in developing countries.

The government also developed a strong relationship with a host of mainstream development NGOs, like Comic Relief, CAFOD, World Vision and DATA (Bono and Bill Gates' charity). Comic Relief's support for Blair and Brown's agenda was beneficial given that a large number of smaller, more politically radical NGOs and groups depend on the charity for funding, and its founder, comedy writer

turned film director, Richard Curtis, had incredible influence in the entertainment industry. Getting stars of stage and screen behind the government's G8 agenda would be an immense coup.

For their part, Oxfam and Comic Relief's willingness to be the government's junior partners was largely due to their desire to help undermine the growing interest of grassroots campaigners and movements in the global justice movement associated with the World Social Forum process. It is no secret that the reformist bloc of Northern development NGOs led by Oxfam had found itself increasingly marginalised as the poor and exploited of the global South suddenly emerged to represent and speak for themselves and not through the medium of the professional aid worker. And when the poor spoke, they read from a very different script to the Oxfams of this world, talking about 'self-organisation' and 'struggle from below' and the need to mobilise and organise independently of state, capital, party and trade union bureaucracies. This represented an enormous challenge to the traditional interest groups exerting leadership over civil society and left NGOs like Oxfam needing to be re-legitimised as the 'official' representatives of the poor. Working so closely with the government would enable Oxfam to have the means to do this and put social movements back in their box.

To ensure that the UK's 2005 presidency of the G8 was a mutually beneficial political success, New Labour, Oxfam and their celebrity friends hatched the perfect plan. Oxfam would initiate a feel-good, media-oriented NGO campaign for a mainstream audience with a simple concept: that 2005 really could be the year in which this generation could come together and make history by 'making poverty history'. Led by an international cast of stars from the worlds of music and film, the campaign would combine the best of corporate marketing, the obsession with celebrity culture and the enthusiasm of global justice to propel a straightforward message to a global audience: that the problems of the developing world, particularly Africa, could be solved by the richest countries making tiny sacrifices to increase aid, cancel debts and make trade fairer. Britain's presidency of the G8 and EU would increase the chances of this happening given Blair and Brown's 'undoubted commitment to Africa'.

It would be so politically uncontentious that everyone, from Rupert Murdoch to Nelson Mandela to the UK government, could support it. All the public would be asked to do was show its support for the UK government's stance by signing up to the campaign, sending the occasional email to world leaders to remind them of their moral duty to help the poor and wearing a special white wristband. To encourage as many NGOs and charities as possible to get involved, they would be allowed to sell these white wristbands and keep the money for their organisations, an arrangement that turned out to be a lucrative money-spinner for many. Once safely co-opted into the campaign, those NGOs who identified themselves with grassroots movements in the global South, like War on Want, the World Development Movement (WDM) and Friends of the Earth would be



powerless to act as a clever celebrity-fronted spin-machine began to heap praise after praise on Blair and Brown for being ahead of other world leaders on trade, aid and debt.

These two leading neoliberal politicians would in turn be so comfortable with the MPH campaign that both could be publicly identified with its slogans and symbols, wearing the white wristband on the UK election campaign trail. While Iraq would no doubt still play badly on the doorsteps, Blair's promise to 'save Africa' would play well with his own party and help woo back much of middle England. Those critical on the outside would be pushed to the political fringes as the anti-poverty agenda gave no reason to protest against the G8. Anyone who took to the streets intent on causing trouble would just be violent anarchists intent on property damage and not serious about solving world problems. Those who spoke out would be labelled as 'cynics', or 'purists', who put idealistic visions of mass movements before the *realpolitik* of long-term, gradual social change. The idea was brilliant, all it needed was a name. Finally it came to them: they'd call it 'Make Poverty History'.

The success of the strategy was embodied in the July 2 Make Poverty History rally. The UK government had cleverly scheduled the G8 for mid-week to ensure that as few people as possible could turn up, and had got agreement from MPH that the main civil society mobilisation would be held on the Saturday before the mid-week opening of the summit. This was obviously to ensure that the large



numbers of people expected could not be drawn into the counter-summit protests planned by Dissent! and G8Alternatives. In return, MPH had the full cooperation of Edinburgh City Council, the Scottish Executive and the local police. To make sure that the ‘wrong people’ didn’t attend, the Stop the War Coalition’s efforts to mobilise a big anti-war presence on the day were thwarted amid a furious spin strategy by MPH press officers to portray their event as a nice day out for middle-class families: ‘[It is] not a march in the sense of a demonstration, but more of a walk. The emphasis is on fun in the sun. The intention is to welcome the G8 leaders to Scotland and ask them to deliver trade justice, debt cancellation and increased aid to developing countries.’⁸

MPH worked with the Scottish Tourist Board to get cut-price weekend break transport, accommodation and tourist excursion deals for those planning to attend the ‘welcome walk for the G8’. MPH’s website and literature made absolutely no reference to the planned mid-week protests, counter-summits or blockades, or to the other mobilisations. Everything was geared for people to stay the weekend before the summit and then leave the city. In short, MPH succeeded in simultaneously mobilising hundreds of thousands of people to Scotland but away from the G8. The *coup de grace* came when MPH finally abandoned any semblance of not being run by the Treasury with the announcement that Gordon Brown had been invited to the July 2 rally. And just in case the pressure of MPH’s moderate lobbying threatened to embarrass the G8’s predictable inability to

deliver, Geldof's decision to stage the Live8 concerts diverted all media attention away from the July 2 and 6 demonstrations.

As we now know, the MPH-Live8 axis was almost completely successful. By cleverly focusing the Gleneagles G8 on the issues of Africa and global poverty through the Commission for Africa, the MPH campaign and the Live8 concerts, the G8 set the political agenda of the summit and the media coverage of it. While we will never know what would have happened if the London bombs hadn't turned the G8 summit into an irrelevant sideshow, it is obvious that the end of summit communiqué, which fell far short of even MPH's conservative demands, would still have been euphorically welcomed by Bono and Geldof at the post-summit press conference, ensuring that the next day's media coverage was dominated by heroic praise for Tony Blair and the G8. It therefore seems difficult to pinpoint how we could have really challenged the system in this way. After all, they had the money, the media, the human resources, the celebrities, the issues and the momentum. And they had the music (I'm joking). But surely we could and should have tried harder to resist the hijacking of the global justice movement and the co-optation of progressive forces. The big question is: why didn't we?

DISSENT!'S POLITICAL VACUUM

The G8's bogus agenda, and those civil society forces supporting it, demanded a principled opposition by the anti-capitalist movement. The deliberate silencing of African people, both those on the continent and the *diaspora* living alongside us in Europe, demanded the same solidarity we have shown to the indigenous movement of Chiapas, the landless workers of Rio Grande do Sul, the *piqueteros* of Buenos Aires, the militant trade unionists of Seoul, the Dalits of Mumbai and the Palestinians of Rafah. Sadly, none was forthcoming. Instead, we were complicit in that silence. Where was our solidarity with African people? Where were our booklets and handouts on the history of colonialism and slavery, the debt system, the 'new scramble for Africa'? Where were our critiques of the Commission for Africa and the G8 debt deal? Where were our public meetings about what the G8 was really all about? Where were our attempts to build new networks of struggle with African resistance movements?

To our eternal shame, the only real dissenting voices came not from us but from G8Alternatives – yes, the bloody SWP and fellow travellers! Only they took up the challenge of politics by hosting a genuine counter-summit and helping to produce an alternative Africa Commission report from African social movements themselves. For Dissent!, the fact that the G8 was focusing on Africa appeared irrelevant. For a movement that is so brilliant at bringing the struggles of Latin America and Asia, and the people of those struggles, to a Northern audience, why did we treat Africa so differently? As unpalatable as it may be, are we too suffering from our own form of 'institutional racism'?

Our refusal to confront MPH was also a major mistake. Most of us in Dissent! believed MPH to be a bunch of naïve NGOs whose campaign had been ‘co-opted’ by the UK government. In hindsight, this was just plain wrong: MPH was in fact the *creation* of the government and there was more than enough evidence around at the time to make this obvious. Instead of treating the NGOs in MPH as misguided allies, we should have taken them on directly. Instead of encouraging people to go and hold hands on their apolitical demonstration, we should have mobilised to cleverly hijack it. For instance, before the G8, there were calls within Dissent! for a multi-colour T-shirt bloc on July 2 with slogans subverting the ‘Make Poverty History’ brand. Imagine if we had taken a little time to promote this idea, to put out leaflets and stickers, to contact sympathetic groups in MPH and build up a little momentum. Imagine if the 10,000 anti-capitalists in Edinburgh for that rally had formed a giant bloc on the demonstration with a very different message to the white T-shirts of MPH. Instead, we had the rather pathetic spectacle of 300 black-clad activists locked down in an Edinburgh side street.

In my view, Dissent! was simply not able to organise strategically against the politics of the G8 for three main reasons. Firstly, we were constrained by our own dogma and ideology. Our core belief that the G8 is an illegitimate institution and represents a corrupt and undemocratic set of governments led to the logical conclusion that by taking on the G8’s agenda we would have been effectively legitimising it and thus selling out. This view was pervasive. Alas, while such a principled stand may warm our hearts, in the context of this year’s G8, it was ultimately self-defeating. Rightly rejecting the G8’s popular mandate and its suitability for solving the world’s problems did not stop us from using the Africa and climate change agenda to make that position more intelligible to a mainstream audience. This is precisely what MPH and Live8 were doing, as the quotation from DATA’s Jamie Drummond at the beginning of this piece reveals. Friends who have never shown any prior interest in global justice issues could reel off the slogans ‘more aid, trade justice, drop the debt’ instantly, some even explaining why the aid was needed, the trade-distorting role of the Common Agricultural Policy and how much money was wasted on debt servicing. The fact that MPH’s analyses and solutions were plain wrong gave us a great opportunity to engage a wider public in the kind of debates that can so often get more people on our side and involved in our movement. But Dissent! didn’t have a view on these things, apart from in the most general of terms. It was in this vacuum we helped to create that the G8 agenda was legitimised by MPH and the media.

Secondly, in order to create the Dissent! mobilising network, we effectively suspended the issue-based elements of our anti-capitalism. The PGA hallmarks began as the ideological basis for our cooperation and the means by which we could exclude other anti-G8 forces with very different motivations and methods, such as vanguardist Leninist-Trotskyist parties. Yet our politics went no further



than that. Perhaps for this G8 no other path was possible and no one can deny that Dissent! proved essential to the sharing of practical organising information and tasks that enabled the mobilisation to happen. Nor can the difficulties involved in getting Dissent! off the ground be underestimated. But we need to recognise that the PGA hallmarks told people almost nothing about where we stood on the issues of the day or how our broad principles related to the British political context. This led to an over-simplification of our politics and gave too much ground to soundbites and slogans in place of deep and extended debate. For the G8, we needed to go beyond our own rhetoric and make anti-capitalism and horizontality accessible to the people 'out there'. Yet the very politics we were fighting for and the very identities of the different local groups and individuals in the network were suppressed in order to work together. This meant the opportunity for a more fruitful and ongoing dialogue with each other about what we were for, why were mobilising against the G8, where we stood on the G8 agenda, how we could resist it and how we could expand our movement, was lost.

Thirdly, our antipathy towards representative politics and the media led to a rejection of any attempt by groups and individuals within Dissent! to represent our politics to a wider audience. I believe we could have worked out a strategy to enable the network to contest the ideological discourse of the G8 without compromising the network idea and the principle that 'no one can speak on behalf of Dissent!'. This strategy would not have meant having official spokes-

people or putting ourselves at the mercy of corporate news reporting that sees every word twisted and deliberately misinterpreted. Nor would it have meant wasting months playing the media game when there were more important things to be done. Instead, we should have worked much more seriously on creating our own propaganda and media – in addition to and beyond Indymedia – to both communicate directly with ‘ordinary people’ and engage in counter-spinning against the G8. The mainstream media can be useful and thus used in this regard. Don’t get me wrong: engaging with the media won’t alter 99 per cent of the coverage and always runs risks of backfiring as we are anti-capitalists and the corporate interests behind the media want to destroy us. But journalists are also political players who always want information that will shaft the government, embarrass the local council or pour scorn on the police because, at the end of the day, it’s a story and a career made. Taking some time to write a few letters, bombarding journalists with press releases, posting comments on a newspaper or magazine’s website or even getting the odd useful news story in the mainstream press through an old friend or contact, can have benefits and at the moment is the only way of directly communicating with a mass audience.

In the same vein, Dissent!’s autonomous groups ought to have done more to actively politicise people through organising events, talks, lectures, stunts, producing literature and flyers with useful information on. The fact that this didn’t happen wasn’t just due to there being so few of us. Deep down, our ideological rejection of vanguardism and top-down, expert-led politics means that we shudder at the very thought of being an elite grouping, of organising mass meetings with speakers, of trying to get people to think like us – of recruiting! Yet this can go too far the other way and stop us working out innovative ways to have political meetings with people we don’t know, who don’t necessarily share our way of thinking and speaking without compromising our politics. Another related factor is a profound lack of confidence in our own politics and knowledge. Horizontality has become something to hide behind instead of having an opinion on the state of the world and what to do about it in case we’re wrong. As in any movement, some of us are well-read and have formed political opinions and analyses over a long period; others are only just discovering the literature and the legacy of this movement and are unsure of not just what they believe in but the best way to express themselves. Yet it seems that we are all afraid of intellectual confrontation, of talking outside of our own circles. It was pretty clear that during the build-up to the G8, most of us knew very little about Africa and thus didn’t feel confident about engaging with the issues, leaving them to the NGOs.

WHERE TO NOW?

It is clear that the Dissent! network proved an incredible success in bringing together like-minded groups, networks and individual activists to mobilise collectively against the G8 summit in Scotland. Let us not undervalue our collective

achievements nor waste this opportunity to renew and reinvigorate the network for the struggles that lie ahead. At the same time, we need to realise that the politics of contestation do not start and end in blockades. It is not enough to simply take direct action against summits or, at a wider scale, corporations, governments and the Far Right. We have to explain why we are doing this to people who are not in 'our movement'. Nor is it enough to be just against power and authority. We have to take much more seriously promoting what we are for in ways that do not alienate, or provide our enemies with easy pickings. Otherwise, we will continue to talk to ourselves, engaging in a form of 'radical suicide'.⁹ Finally it is not enough to simply see Dissent! as a network to mobilise actions. Actions do not exist in a political vacuum. We can only work out which actions are needed in the context of discussing what our priorities are as a movement. This means thinking and acting strategically, not just spontaneously or emotionally. Now is the time for us to use the opportunity provided by this communication space to discuss how we collectively move forward as a movement. A gathering of UK-based anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian forces is planned for early in 2006 to do precisely that. Let's not waste it.

- 1 'Bob, Bono and Africa', letter to The Guardian, June 27 2005. DATA is Bono's charity.
- 2 'Ure urges anarchists to "go home"', Edinburgh Evening News, July 5 2005.
- 3 'The first embedded protest', The Guardian, June 18 2005.
- 4 Rotimi Sankore, 'What are the NGOs doing?', New African, August/September no. 443, 2005, p. 15
- 5 Paul Cammack, 'Blair's commissioners', Red Pepper 132, July 2005, p.25
- 6 Commission for Africa, Our Common Interest, 2005. For evidence of corporate involvement in the G8 and the Commission for Africa, see www.corporatewatch.org.uk
- 7 See Stuart Hodgkinson, 'Inside the murky world of Make Poverty History', Focus on Trade (Focus on the Global South/Bangkok), 2005; Katherine Quarmby, 'Why Oxfam is failing Africa', New Statesman, May 30 2005.
- 8 Bruce Whitehead, spokesperson for Make Poverty History, January 28 2005
- 9 Rapina Tore and Paglio Ccio, All and nothing: for radical suicide. Towards some notes and confusion on 'You can't rent your way out of a social relationship: a critique of rented social centres'... and to continue the dialogue (2005). At <http://www.56a.org.uk/rent.html>.