

What happened in Genoa?



An interview with an Irish anarchist who was in Genoa and took part in one of the 'Black Blocks'.

"Genoa 21-23rd July 2001 saw the G8 Annual meeting collide with what Tony Blair has called "the anarchist travelling circus". Just for the record the travelling circus of the leaders of the 8 richest countries produced little beyond a few watery statements on climate change, the slow down in world economic growth and a face saving move on debt. A commitment of £200 million yet since 1996 the 41 most indebted countries have paid over \$35 billion in debt. Well I just thought you'd like to know!

So what was it like from the perspective of one of the 300,000 or so demonstrators? Well in the short space here all I can do is offer a few personal memories and opinions. Skipping over travelling there and back, a night sleeping on a table and a morning looking for a bed I'll start with the Irish campsite at Albora.

The Irish group consisted mainly of Globalise Resistance (a wide umbrella group of anti globalisation organisations) and Gluaiseacht (an environmental group with strong roots in democracy and non violent direct action). I found the atmosphere remarkably good and was most impressed with the way in which things were organised. Every day there were large meetings. These then split into smaller affinity groups. An affinity group is a group of eight or so people. Each of these groups made it's own choice as to which protests it wished to join (though most people marched together for the marches on Thursday and Friday).

Thursday's march formed up at about 3 pm and moved along very slowly. This was a march of solidarity with immigrants. I saw only 2 immigrants in my time in Genoa as Berlusconi had cleared all 'illegals' (no one is illegal) out of the city for the duration of the conference. The march was huge, about 60,000 strong, according to the cops.

Friday was the day reserved for groups committed to shutting down the G8 conference. The G8 were meeting in a palace near the centre of the city. The entire area had been cordoned off into an infamous

red zone with a 14 foot high mesh fence embedded in a concrete foundation and guarded by about 18,000 cops and Carabinieri.

Various groups had come up with different schemes to get in. The Tutte Bianches (white overalls) - post modern communists including the Ya Basta group - proposed to use 'non violent' direct action with heavily padded activists and cutting gear. The socialists of the red block proposed to use force of numbers to push through and the colourful pink block wanted to dance wearing skimpy costumes into the red zone, 'tactical frivolity' as they put it.

I formed up with the infamous black bloc. The black bloc of autonomists and anarchists proposed to mask up, pad up and take the police on directly. Our black bloc set off about 2000 strong and succeeded in meeting up with about another 4000 activists from Cobos. COBAS is an Italian rank and file trade union group who in the past has organised a 100,000



Carlo Giuliani, the 23 year old anarchist murdered by police in Genoa

strong strike against the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia amongst other things. Unfortunately this large and fairly well organised crowd was separated into different groups well before the red zone.

Our black bloc wandered for 4 hours before eventually coming close to the red zone but didn't break in. Over that time

Debt relief & Democracy

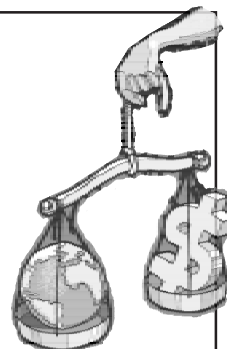
Tony Blair claims the G8 leaders should be allowed to meet because they, unlike the protesters, are 'democratically elected'. But the issue of debt relief shows that it is capitalism rather than the wishes of the people that he and the other G8 leaders implement.

Polls show huge majorities in favour of debt cancellation. In Britain for instance 69% of the public would have liked to see the government celebrate the Millennium by cancelling Third World debts. In Ireland hundreds of thousands signed a Jubilee 2000 petition for debt cancellation.

While the G8 summit, for PR reasons, talks of poverty relief the reality is that even the limited debt cancellation programs agreed to date have been farcical. The report *From Debt to Poverty Eradication* revealed that "The total reduction in debt repayments delivered for all 41 countries since the adoption of the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) programme

in 1996 amounted to only US\$1.1 billion. In that time, the 41 HIPC countries paid a total of US\$35 billion towards their outstanding debts".

This is the reality of the G8. This is why over 150,000 demonstrated in Genoa last weekend. But it is also the reality of capitalism. All the G8 countries claim to be democracies, their rulers claim to represent the interests of the population. In reality they represent the big companies based there. These are the companies which not only pay their election bills (George Bush got seventy five million dollars from oil companies towards his election expenses) but who own the mass media. This same media tells you that the Genoa protesters are a combination of mindless hooligans and misguided innocents.



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we were tear gassed 4 times, banks were attacked, as was a prison and other property. I have to admit that it sure beat negotiating with the cops to march round in circles on O'Connell street! On the other hand much of the property destruction especially that of cars, bus shelters and traffic lights was foolish and really had no effect on the G8. While these things happen where there are young and frustrated people I think better organisation and more local knowledge could have lead to us directing our energy more usefully at the police and red zone.

The death of Carlo Giuliani, the widespread police violence, and the destruction of swathes of the city, bought fear that night but anger by morning. The main Drop the Debt march on a bright sunny Sunday was huge. It took about 2 hours to go by and I would agree with media estimates of 2-300,000. At the head of the march fighting had begun once more as rioters threw themselves towards the lines of bright bluebottle-like police. This violence was much more spontaneous and participatory then the day before with anarchists joined by Tutte Blanches, Refoundation Communists and others, mainly Italian, incensed at Giuliani's death.

Overall the media, as ever, have focused on the violence. I would point more at the massive numbers who came to Genoa and the spread of REAL anarchist ideas especially those of direct democracy (with affinity groups and delegates controlling most of the protesting blocks) and direct action (both violent and non violent). Direct action gets the goods and, indeed, we got a result with the Canadian prime minister promising a smaller, informal G8 in the Rockies next time.

The day of travelling political circuses where batteries of journalists pay homage to the tiniest gesture and spin of the crooked politicians and bureaucrats are over. The ordinary people of the world are taking centre stage and saying that they will no longer tolerate a world where someone dies of hunger every 3.6 seconds, where Russia and America between them hold 20,000 nuclear warheads and lecture us about violence! We can between us build a better world then these 8. We are many they are few."

One of the black squirrels



What's wrong with the G8

In Genoa, as elsewhere two incompatible visions of the world collided. On the one side are the G8, the most powerful governments of the planet. They are Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Great Britain, Italy, Russia and the United States. On the other are tens of thousands of ordinary people, many of them citizens of these countries.

The G8 summits effectively decide what sort of world you and your children will live in. Behind closed doors decisions are made that mean our environment is sacrificed to profit, our health service is run down and privatised and millions of people continue to die for want of clean water and basic medicine.

The G8 summit plan directives to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which impose cuts in education and healthcare through "Structural Adjustment Programmes". According to Trocaire "Sub Saharan Africa still pays US\$37 million each day in debt repayments while seven million children die annually as a direct result of the loss of resources through debt repayments". These are the results of the neo liberal (or free market) dictatorship that the G8 is imposing on the planet.

In 1998, that 20 percent of the world's people living in the highest-income countries accounted for 86 percent of total private consumption expenditures while the poorest 20 percent accounted for only 1.3 percent. And things are getting worse, not better, three decades ago the poorest 20% accounted for 2.3 percent.

But this is not simply a case of the people of the rich western countries screw-

ing the people of the third world. The figures demonstrate this also. The United States is the most powerful economic power on Earth. In 1999 Bill Gates had more wealth than the bottom 45 percent of American households. As of 1995 the wealth of the top one percent of Americans was greater than that of the bottom 95 percent. And there also things are getting worse. In 1999 Business Week revealed that top executives earned 419 times the average wage of a blue-collar worker, up from 326:1 in 1998. In 1980, the ratio was 42:1

There were thousands of anarchists taking part in the demonstrations in Genoa (the majority outside of the Black Block). We say the G8 is at the top of a system of exploitation and human misery, a system whose role it is to preserve. We are not pleading with them to be reasonable. We are saying their world must come to an end! The world's people need an economy based on filling their needs, not on making profits. We need a political system without professional politicians; a federation of self managed communities and workplaces. This is not a demand we make of the G8 - the world we need cannot come from above but must be won through the struggle of all of us below.

What is anarchism?

For more information on anarchism (including a free book catalogue) and the Workers Solidarity Movement write to us at
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