

NO G8: Heiligendamm Report Back

Anti-Capitalist Movement This year's meeting of the Group of 8 (or G8, the 7 richest nations in the world: Great Britain, United States, Germany, France, Japan, Italy, and Canada, plus Russia) was held in the resort of Heiligendamm, Germany from June 6-8th. At the meeting 13% of the world's population was "represented" while policies were decided that will have tremendous effect for the other 87%.

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June 10, 2007

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In response tens of thousands of demonstrators arrived in the area in an effort to shut down the summit. The reasons for such a confrontation include the G8's policies on aid to Africa, the propagation of neoliberal economic globalization, the neglect of the fight against AIDS, and the inherent and rabid undemocratic nature of the G8 itself, among many others.

What follows is a brief report back from the front lines of the fight to shut down the G8. For more information check out de.indymedia.org/en.

Repression

On May 9th state repression of anti-G8 organizing exploded with the raid of 40 sites including private homes, social centers, and the alternative web provider SO36.net. The locations of what were to be convergence centers in Hamburg and Berlin were searched by police. The reason given for these provocations was that they were needed in order to stop leftist groups who were allegedly forming "terrorist organizations." However, after the police admitted they had made no arrests and found absolutely no evidence of a terrorist plot or any illicit materials, it became quite obvious that the real reason behind the raids was simply to smash the infrastructure that had formed to counter the G8 summit. But the plans of the German police seemed to have failed as following the raids thousands spontaneously took to the streets in cities across Germany to denounce the raids and public support for the G8 opposition grew tremendously.

Around the actual site of the summit in Heiligendamm a **12 km security fence was built at the cost of \$17 million** in order to protect the grounds from protests, and a no-go zone was created to keep people from getting anywhere near the fence. During May most of the planned demonstrations were banned by the Kavala (special police) despite having already received permits. After lawsuits were filed for reasons of unconstitutionality many were then re-permitted, only to be banned once again days before the G8 began.

Another measure the German state took to repress the anti-G8 movement was the use of travel bans and the closure of relatively open borders within the European Union. This same tactic was used to defend the G8 in Genoa in 2001, where activists were turned away at the French border and prevented from entering Italy.

This power that was granted under a supposed "State of Emergency" was in actuality used less than many people thought it would be. But there is one case worth mentioning where a group of Polish anarchists were stopped on a train while attempting to enter Germany. The group was told that if they entered the country they would be immediately arrested and in response they occupied their train car, hanging banners out the windows, and after awhile were joined by five Germans. After hours of threats the group left the train once the German border patrol said that an anti-terror unit would board the car if they remained.

Hamburg and the ASEM Conference-

The international demonstrations began on May 28th in Hamburg, the first day of the 7th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). ASEM is an inter-regional forum consisting of the European

Commission and the 27 members of the EU and the 14 members of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Plus Three regional grouping. The "Three Pillars" of the ASEM conference are political dialogue, security and economy, and education and culture. At least 5,000 people--several thousand in the black bloc alone--marched from the St. Pauli neighborhood of Hamburg. **The original route of the march was changed last minute by the police, despite the demonstration organizers having secured proper permits. Thousands of riot police (almost outnumbering protesters) lined the march, completely surrounding it, and numerous police vans, water cannons, and armored tank-like vehicles used for clearing barricades followed closely behind.** The spirit was lively as the black bloc led the march through the city streets, followed by a diverse crowd including marching bands, dancers, and various leftist groups and parties.

As the march neared its destination--the Hamburg city hall where the conference was taking place--riot police cut off the demonstration. Some of the black bloc ended up on the other side of the police line and watched quietly while riot cops kept back the rest of the march. Soon scuffles broke out between demonstrators and riot police, as the latter began to forcefully end the march. From that the situation escalated until a small riot broke out. Bottles were thrown at police vans and riot units and snatch squads chased after small groups of black-clad protesters. A molotov cocktail streaked through the sky but missed its target of a police van below. Fireworks were popping off from all directions. And water cannons soon raced through the streets, blasting away as the crowd dispersed.

But close by other groups from the black bloc had successfully made their way to the city hall and small street battles began with the police at the security fence. At one point a riot cop--who had taken off his helmet and armor--was caught alone outside his van as the riots drew close. And in a moment reminiscent of Genoa and the death of Carlo Giuliani, the officer drew his gun. But just as he raised his gun in the air the back window of his van exploded from behind him by some flying object and he retreated to cover. As demonstrators dispersed many headed back to Rote Flora--the huge squatted theater serving as a social center and convergence point for the G8 demonstrations, which had been a main target of the police raids on May 9th. As people relaxed, ate food from the kitchen, drank Astra (the local beer, held in very high esteem), an army formed blocks away.

Thousands of riot police flanked water cannons, vans, and armored vehicles as they advanced towards Rote Flora. As they arrived they were showered with glass from beer bottles. Water cannons tried to disperse the angry crowd, most likely to allow police to enter Rote Flora, but they were held back by a defensive bloc at the door. Small running street battles continued for several hours as blockades were formed and subsequently dismantled by police. Finally they withdrew, but only after taking 86 prisoners throughout the day. Back at Rote Flora there was an excited atmosphere as the militant march had largely been able to hold its ground against the repressive police measures, and people anxiously discussed their journeys to Rostock, where the anti-G8 movement would be based.

Rostock Convergence Center

Many months before anybody came to Rostock for the G8, German activists moved there in order to prepare the necessary infrastructure needed to oppose such a summit. Rostock lies roughly 30 km from Heiligendamm and served as the main point from which the protests were to be centered. Amazingly the city, slightly disgruntled at the enormous costs of having such a summit nearby, donated a school building for use as a convergence center.

The Elm-Welk School was a four-story building with three wings, covered ground to roof in revolutionary murals, banners, and graffiti. Inside was housed a large Indymedia Center, equipped with computers and video editing stations, as well as a radio station broadcasting over three continents. There were also two press groups operating, sending press releases to thousands of media outlets in over 35 countries. Numerous rooms were set aside for

sleeping, a large kitchen, a bar, a cafe, art room, and outdoor bike workshop, among other facilities. Despite threats of Nazi attacks and police raids, the convergence center functioned throughout the summit and was a valuable asset for the demonstrations.

Many times a tense atmosphere hung over the school during periods where police or Nazi raids seemed a serious risk. Only on June 7th was there any serious confrontation, however. A large group of local Nazis, numbering from 50-70, gathered at the Convergence Center. Soon organized anti-fascist groups from the surrounding camps arrived at the school to form a counter-presence. Police then arrived and surrounded the Nazi group and acted as a buffer. Although pledging not to raid the school, the police did set up a checkpoint for anyone entering or leaving the building and were conducting mandatory searches, allegedly looking for "weapons."

Camp Rostock

Camp Rostock was located within the city on a piece of land overlooking a lake and a Soviet-built nuclear power plant. A few thousand people, mostly from the groups involved with the Block G8 campaign, as well as other large organizations such as Attac, were located there, among many others. Because of its proximity to the city center it was the scene of much police repression following large actions such as the one in Rostock on June 2nd and after days of blockades, both of which will be mentioned later. Police checkpoints, searches, ID checks were all commonplace.

On the night following the first blockades up to 1,000 riot police and two water cannons surrounded the camp and sealed it off for several hours. They apparently wanted to enter the camp but their request for a search warrant was denied and they slowly withdrew and resumed the operation of checkpoints. For the remainder of the G8 Camp Rostock was without serious threat of a raid.

Camp Reddelich

Camp Reddelich was a half hour train ride from Rostock Main Station. One of the action camps, it was the closest camp to the security fence and the so-called "Red Zone." Several thousand made this their home during the summit. The camp was equipped with an Indymedia Center, several kitchens, a bar, playground, outdoor projection screen for watching documentaries and G8TV, a stage where concerts were held each night, and watch towers to spot possible police attacks.

Police presence was a defining characteristic of the camp. The train station, the main entry and exit point from Reddelich, was constantly occupied by several police vans and riot cops, sometimes conducting searches and ID checks. Police vans drove up and down the road in front of the camp and were occasionally stationed at the entrance.

Raids were a constant worry at the camp and defensive measures were prepared in case of attack. Barricades were built from scrap wood and metal, trenches were dug to stop police vehicles, and bottles and rocks were gathered for defense of the camp.

The alarms were sounded twice at Reddelich. The first time was on June 6th at 3:30 AM when six vans pulled up to the front entrance and police in riot gear stepped out. The night watch rang the alarm and the camp quickly awoke and mobilized. Within three minutes a large black bloc had formed at the front gate and all around people were standing ready and prepared. The vans left as quickly as they arrived, however, and the camp settled and returned to sleep.

But the next day, at 5:30 AM the alarm sounded again. An hour earlier there had been an attempt by a black bloc to leave the camp and head towards the West Gate to Heiligendamm. Nicknamed the "Suicide March" (in reference to the much more successful breakout from an encircled camp at the 2005 G8 in Gleneagles, Scotland), a group of about

300 conducted a desperate attempt to attack the summit gates after other attempts at coordinating militant marches had failed, but were met by riot police after leaving the back entrance of the camp. A fight with the police began and after some arrests the "Suicidals" retreated back into the camp.

Most likely as a result of this confrontation riot cops amassed at the front gate. The alarm went off again and the camp mobilized. After a half hour of a tense and confused waiting game, police backed off and the camp relaxed again. This was the last serious threat to the camp for the remainder of the G8 summit.

Independent Media

An impressive network of independent media was set up to cover the G8 protests. There were two Indymedia Centers set up within the city of Rostock--one at the Convergence Center and another at a school in the city center--one each in Camp Rostock and Camp Reddelich, and another mobile van that followed the action.

An up-to-the-minute account of the events was kept on the Indymedia website and was sent out via text message to anyone who signed up for the service. The "ticker" was kept alert through phone calls from participants of the actions and proved to be a valuable service. (To see archives of the ticker go to de.indymedia.org/ticker/en.) Photographers, writers, filmmakers, and techies from Indymedia collectives from around the world took part in producing the news for the main German Indymedia site as well as relayed info back home.

A radio group called Jetsam broadcasted from the Convergence Center in Rostock and through networks with free-radio collectives around the world was able to be heard in several countries across several continents. With live broadcast Jetsam relayed the news in German and English as it happened, and also had specific times to hear a summary of the days' events in multiple other languages.

G8TV was a video group that formed from a coalition of many different video-activist groups and individuals. A large group of camera-operators were present during actions capturing remarkable footage. Individual clips would then be posted online and also a newshour was produced everyday compiling clips and interviews from the days' actions, in-studio interviews with organizers, and other such information. These were then posted online and available for free download. Each night at the camps G8TV would be projected on large screens so the camp could have a solid summary of the days' events. (Archives can be viewed at g8-tv.org.)

The Bombodrom is Settled

At around 4 PM on June 1st 700 anti-war activists occupied the bombing range in the Bombodrom area for use as an additional camp. The former command tower was painted an anti-militaristic color of pink in a reference to the German anti-nuclear demonstrations of the past. In past occupations military facilities would be painted pink because the military detested the color so much that it would destroy the buildings instead of leaving them pink.

The camp was left alone because civil police have no jurisdiction on military bases, and it is believed the military police were busy providing security at the military airport at Rostock-Laage that would serve as the arrival point of G8 delegates.

June 2nd

Make Capitalism History: The Riots in Rostock

June 2nd marked the first day of action against the G8 with the Make Capitalism History march bringing together a very diverse crowd of tens of thousands from NGOs, trade unions, Communist groups, various leftist organizations, a 5,000-person black bloc, and

13,000 German police.

Initially the police presence along the march route was rather minimal. However, as the march grew closer to the harbor, where the concluding rally and concert were to take place, riot police arrived en masse, especially surrounding the black bloc. Once the bloc had entered the harbor something provoked scuffles between police and protesters. Several stories have circulated as to the catalyst of the following events, mostly involving police aggression such as snatch squads and false arrests, or attempts to divide the black bloc in two using force, but it remains unclear.

But the reaction was quite the opposite, as has been extensively presented for view by the international media. The riot police attempting to control the demonstrations were pelted with bottles and rocks as cobble stones were torn up from the street for additional ammo. Running battles began, going on and off for hours. Police would charge and be forced to retreat under a barrage of stones, chased after by hundreds from the black bloc. Then the situation would quickly switch, and the demonstrators would run again from a police charge. Cars were flipped and one set alight for use as barricades, as well as dumpsters and other objects. One police van was destroyed after being caught on the wrong side of the street fighting.

Police had been using pepperspray to keep back anyone who got too close, including nonviolent activists and even the large numbers of press present with cameras. As things progressed water cannons were brought in and tear gas was used. By the end of the day over 125 protesters had been arrested in Rostock, and according mainstream press accounts over 500 injured, 433 of them police officers. (This last figure is widely believed to be extremely exaggerated by police and media. But it is certain that many more injuries than reported were sustained by demonstrators as they were typically treated by the medical collectives who do not cooperate with the authorities, or simply not treated at all. It is also fairly safe to assume that the protesters' injuries were far more serious than those of the police for lack of protective armor and helmets, and weapons to inflict damage.)

Schwerin: Anti-Fascist Demonstration

But that's not all that happened on June 2nd. Rostock lies in the German province of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, a region that is known for having its fair share of Nazis and sympathizers. In the region's capitol, Schwerin, the super-right nationalist National Democratic Party (NPD) was planning to have its own anti-capitalist march--but in the name of racism, antisemitism, and fascism, not self-determination and participatory democracy. In response anti-fascist groups had been organizing to counter the Nazi march, however in the days leading up to the 2nd, both demonstrations were officially banned from the city. The reason given was that the police didn't have enough available forces to protect the Nazis.

On the morning of the 2nd anti-fascists traveled from Rostock to Schwerin to confront the Nazis which had pledged to march despite the ban. After leaving the train station over 150 anti-fascists were immediately surrounded and detained by the police. Others never left the train station and immediately returned to Rostock because of the massive repression. Schwerin, however, was fairly deserted as the Nazi demonstration instead had been discreetly moved to Berlin, where around 140 were present, and other smaller cities.

June 4th

Japanese Anarchists Confront the Japanese Delegation

A small group of Japanese anarchists travelled to Rostock for the demonstrations. On the morning of the 4th they entered the hotel where the Japanese delegation was staying, unfurled banners, and declared their opposition to the G8 summit. Next year's summit will be held in a spa resort at Lake Toya in Northern Japan. Check out

<http://a.sanpal.co.jp/no-g8/> for more info.

Make Borders History: International Day of Action on Migration

Early on the morning of the 4th around 2,000 people gathered at the immigration offices in Werftstraße. Although the department was conveniently closed, supposedly due to a "sudden software breakdown," the rally continued with street theater, a samba band, and a general lively atmosphere.

A few hours later people moved to the Sonnenblumen House in Lichtenhaben where there was to be a protest in memory of an incident in 1992 called the "Three Days in August" where Nazis attacked a refugee center and hostel for Vietnamese workers for days with rocks and firebombs killing several inside, while police refused to respond. Awhile after the protest had begun snatch squads of riot police rush the crowd and dragged out three protesters dressed all in black. One protester, a refugee from Cameroon, had his nose broken by police when they charged into arrest the three mentioned above, and a journalist was injured after police shoved his video camera into his face.

Demonstrators coming by train from Camp Reddelich to the main rally and march of the day located at an immigrant detention center were repressed through searches, ID checks, and detentions. Most were able to make it to the main march just outside of Rostock, but more problems followed.

When the march attempted to leave, police stopped it and the sides were lined with riot cops, with water cannons and armored vehicles on every side. They said the reason was that 500 "violent demonstrators" (i.e.- dressed in black) were present. Despite the demonstration expressing repeatedly that it was explicitly nonviolent due to the precarious immigration status of many of its participants, police pledged to arrest anyone wearing a combination of a black hoodie and sunglasses, or a mask, or holding a bottle.

Finally the march was able to proceed but was frequently stopped for unknown reasons. Eventually it reached the outskirts of the city of Rostock and was again stopped by police. They said it could not proceed to its original destination of the harbor because the permit was only allowed for 2,000 people and 10,000 were present. In a rare moment the police actually exaggerated the numbers, as there weren't more than 5,000 present, but the claim successfully ended the march.

The organizers of the protest urged participants to disperse and congregate in the harbor. Within an hour or so, despite massive police checkpoints, thousands gathered in the harbor to continue the protest.

June 5th

Vigil Canceled

A vigil planned by the Occupation 40 Coalition at the security fence was called off at the last minute. The purpose of the protest was to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Six Day War and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, and protest the construction of the apartheid wall. Organizers decided to cancel after refusing to be escorted by police and denounced the police declaration that the action had to be limited to 15 people.

Many who were to go to the canceled vigil then joined the anti-Catterpillar action at the company's headquarters. Over 350 people protested against the company's manufacture of bulldozers used by the Israeli army to demolish Palestinian houses and land.

Blockades Begin

The first attempts to blockade the G8 began on the 5th with arrival of some delegates and most notably President Bush. Around 4,000 people marched to Gate 2 leading into the fenced off area and around 2,000 attempted to block the entrance. There were several arrests but a fairly limited police presence. However 12 police helicopters circled above monitoring the situation, many carrying rapid-deployment teams of riot police.

Close to the Rostock-Laage military airport, the main arrival point for foreign delegates, around one thousand people gathered. There was much worry about arrests as the permit that was attained for the protest was issued only for 50 people, although the number requested by organizers was 1,500. At main transportation points that lead to the airport buses and trains that normally run were skipping stops where protesters were waiting. Several buses were stopped and searched, ID's were checked, and video was taken for identification purposes. Many planning on attending the demonstration were never able to make it close to the airport.

Bush was flown in and boarded a helicopter around 7 PM to be taken to Heiligendamm. Chants such as "George Bush--terrorist!" grew louder and louder, but his trip was uninterrupted.

Later on several blockades took place along the main road to the airport. Police made up of units from Berlin made some brutal arrests and snatch squads were quite active. Late at night, as all bus services were stopped, several hundred protesters walked back to the main train station to return to their camps, surrounded by police.

June 6th

On the morning of June 6th people began to leave the camps to head towards different blockade points as part of the coordinated Block G8 effort. Police attempted to stop the different convergences but with so much space it proved impossible as protesters dispersed throughout the fields. By the time the first main group reached the no-go zone they numbered 5,000. Police helicopters hovered overhead but generally did not engage the demonstrators below.

Surprisingly many of those trying to reach blockade points were not hassled as much as was expected by police. Some buses were searched and some were detained but the massive repression that had been expected, and was foreshadowed by previous events during the week, was not carried out.

Later however, as about 2,000 people trekked through fields towards the security fences they were chased by police and water cannons and tear gas was used. Helicopters occasionally landed teams of riot units to control the demonstrations but direct confrontations were rare. Overall by the afternoon the blockades were deemed to generally be a success as over 10,000 people were participating. 5,000 were blocking Gate 2 alone after skirting police lines, and most of the roads into Heiligendamm were blocked either by protesters or police. Around 2:30 PM about 500 participated in the dismantling of part of a NATO-constructed security fence.

Several of the smaller autonomous blockades were crushed by riot police later in the afternoon. Dozens were arrested, often brutally, while defending their positions. The West Gate was officially cleared by police later in the afternoon after a snatch squad encircled a group of clowns who were then told to leave or be arrested. By 5 PM the gate was deserted.

The large blockade at Gate 2, however, was still present by nightfall around 9 PM, as well as some other smaller, but still mass blockades on other roads. Attempts had been made to

bring in food and blankets but the police wouldn't let it reach the blockades. The group at Gate 2 numbered at around 1,000 when they decided to stay overnight at 10 PM. By this time around 200 arrests were made during the day, about 60 of which were in a parking lot near the Rostock-Laage airport.

June 7th

Small blockades were attempted along main roads in the area surrounding Heiligendamm on the morning of the 7th but many of the participants were penned in by police in the surrounding woods. All together 80 were arrested from this action and taken to a detention center. Two journalists who happened to be nearby were also arrested, their press passes confiscated and stamped "invalid."

The 7th was supposed to be the date of the Star March, where demonstrators would leave from five different points and converge on a single target at Heiligendamm. After initially being banned in mid-May the courts overruled the decision and the march was to be allowed. However, just days before it was again banned. From this a meeting was planned for the morning of the 7th at Camp Reddelich to decide whether to march anyways, without a permit. At 9:30 the group decided to leave the camp and over 2,000 people began their walk north towards the fence.

Meanwhile the blockade at Gate 2 was still active. Supporters arrived with food and supplies early in the morning. The police presence was strong but at around 11 AM twenty police vans and a tank left the gate presumably to head towards the abandoned Gate 1 where the march from Reddelich was expected to arrive.

At around Noon water cannons arrived at Gate 1 just in time to meet the Reddelich march as they emerged from the woods and scattered into the fields. About 200 protesters were at the gate and surrounded by police and the first order to disperse is given. By 1 PM almost 3,000 people were present at Gate 1. The police attempted to push two groups together in order to clear the road and scuffles broke out as police used water cannons, tear gas, and batons to push the crowd while the demonstrators pushed back using banners to try and regain the road.

Thousands of protesters spread themselves out along the fence throughout the afternoon in an effort to disperse police. The cops were unable to control the entire crowd due to the area covered and so were unable to forcefully disperse the demonstrators.

Meanwhile at Gate 2 water cannons had stood by as the blockade continued. Cars with G8 delegates were delayed extensively and some eventually had to turn back. Eventually at around 5:30 PM the water cannons were used to attempt to disperse the crowd. The same begins at Gate 1 where the police violently attacked the blockade with water cannons and batons. Several injuries were reported, one of which was extremely serious forcing the street medics to ask for help from the police medics to transport the victim to the hospital. Throughout the night water cannons and police attack protesters as they try and hold the blockades. By Midnight five people were injured badly enough to have to be hospitalized, mostly as a result from the water cannons. As the night turns into morning the blockades are eventually completely cleared by police.

Berlin – Plan B

On June 8th the G8 officially wrapped up and most began to leave the greater Rostock area. As the summit closed there was a move to bring things back to Berlin and continue the spirit of resistance.

A "Reclaim the Streets" (RTS) was organized in central Berlin for 9 PM. Around 300 people showed up, a smaller number than most expected. About an hour later as the march began

police immediately flanked the crowd. The march started to run down the street and a few car windows were smashed as well as the window of a building. At the first large intersection police were able to successfully cut off the crowd.

A small group tried to escape back the way they had come to continue the RTS but appeared to get cut off as well. As the crowd lingered in the intersection the mood was tense as riot police surrounded the area. Snatch squads repeatedly ran into the crowd and dragged people out, creating small scuffles. As the police had completely surrounded the intersection the crowd slowly dispersed and eventually the police, too. Several other small actions in the Berlin area had been rumored to be planned but nothing was reported to have occurred. And thus was the end of the resistance to this year's G8.

Conclusion

The blockades seemed to have been the most effective aspect of the week, which was surprising for many who had opted out of participating in favor of conducting more militant actions that never really manifested. And it will no doubt be used by strict pacifists as an example of successful nonviolent direct action. But it is important to look at the diversity of tactics and how they compliment each other. During the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle the small black bloc was generally thought of as a success by the more confrontational wing of the radical movement and that was possible because the massive nonviolent blockades detracted most of the police attention. Here the situation was exactly the opposite. The massive nonviolent blockades were largely successful because of autonomous blockades and the employment of more confrontational tactics that took police presence away from the main gates. But time will tell how these events are analyzed and lessons are learned.

All in all over 700 people were arrested during the protests against the G8 summit. Many had already faced their "fast-track" trials by the time the conference ended and had been sentenced to long prison terms--up to ten months without probation in a number of cases--for crimes such as throwing rocks at the police. The repression against the anti-G8 movement was extreme to say the least, and will most likely continue for a long while following the conference.

And it should be unnecessary to state this, but nevertheless: As this summit has drawn to a close we must remember to take the fight back home and keep up the militancy generally exhibited in the streets and camps surrounding Heiligendamm. What we saw in Germany was a week of intense action, but what we didn't see was the massive organizing effort and sustained resistance to repression that made the counter actions possible. We must always be working against the G8 and the system they represent.

[<http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20070612082401642>]