



The G-7 summit: No anti-capitalism without anti-imperialism!

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When Angela Merkel chose the venue for this year's G-7 summit, she had in mind the symbolism of the place. The castle at Elmau was built at the beginning of the 20th century by the Protestant theologian, writer and philosopher Johannes Muller as a "cultural meeting place". The imaginary splendour of the bygone age of the feudal nobility, together with the magnificence of the early imperialist age served as the backdrop to a place for "spiritual reflection" in the midst of the First World War.

Always elitist to the marrow of their bones, the lords of the castle provided a luxurious refuge and cultural centre for the "free spirits" of their time, while millions died as cannon fodder in the trenches. Now, with globalisation, the castle has been given a new contemporary role. It is now a Spa, rebuilt and extended as a luxury resort, a five-star flophouse for the ruling classes of all countries. In the run-up to the G-7 summit, Merkel, Obama and the other five were presented as if they were straight out of a picture book of Bavarian tradition with wheat beer, pretzels and lederhosen. Unintentionally, Elmau symbolised the parasitism and cultural decline of the ruling class in the imperialist epoch.

Elmau stands for the exclusivity of the ruling elite. By choosing it, Merkel wanted to locate her summit in the reflective tradition of German imperialism in order to give her pursuit of her class interests the appearance of humanitarian reflection, global responsibility etc and in the same way to give the imperialist politics of this world rulers club the appearance of a civilising mission.

Eco-summit?

In terms of its content, the summit brought little that was new. Indeed, it would have been a naive idea to think that the seven most powerful heads of state and government would really come to Elmau in order to reinvent their politics. Of course, there was no lack of big promises, as in previous years. Ambitious climate goals were set. Merkel presented herself as the pioneer of the post-carbon age.

The G-7 states promised to do everything in their power to support the poor countries and to ensure that they could cope with the consequences of climate change. Whole energy sectors would be fundamentally rebuilt by 2050.

What is perhaps new in all this is that the promises were somewhat grander than in the past. Of course, the climate goals did not include any specific commitments, although this did not stop petty bourgeois ecologists such as the environmental organisation Germanwatch describing the results as practically sensational. Some people will believe anything.

How seriously these goals will really be taken can be seen from the press in other countries, such as Britain, where this sensation was barely mentioned.

For them, the centre of attention was the raising of the pressure on Russia, the demand on Merkel, Steinmeier and company not to relax sanctions against Russia or the pace of arms deliveries to Kiev.

Obviously, Merkel preferred to present non-binding climate goals, the struggle against poverty and disease, in short

everything that could be called humanitarian, as the centre of her concerns to German and world public opinion.

Common ground

At the same time, the real points of agreement between the G-7 states were presented more or less skilfully. Since the pro-Western revolution in Ukraine, it has been clear who are the 'new enemies' of the G-7: Putin's Russia is currently at the top of the list. In the Pacific, the rivalry between China and Japan and, above all, the USA is steadily becoming sharper. In the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa there will be constant tinkering with the 'New World Order' in order to try to save the predominance of the USA and its closest allies.

They do this in a period in which the capitalist system itself has been shaken. While the consequences of the economic crisis are far from over, more importantly, its causes have not been eliminated. On the contrary. The policies of the great powers have not only led to a gigantic social redistribution, passing the costs of the crisis on to the working class and the countries dominated by imperialism. They have also saved big business, the banks and monopolies and their profits at the expense of society, albeit at the price that overproduction and competition have been exacerbated and that economic and, ultimately, political and military, confrontation to re-divide the world is becoming sharper and must become sharper.

Protests

As with all the other 'major summits' of recent years, the G-7 was also an occasion for counter actions and mobilisations. Here, the state showed its true, repressive side. On the flimsiest of pretexts, the protest camp in Garmisch-Partenkirchen was forbidden. To protect the 7 heads of state and government, tens of thousands of police were mobilised as well as the 'personal' security forces of Obama and the other guests. The US president alone brought 500 security personnel with him.

At the same time, the local population was bombarded with hatred and horror stories about the 'summit stormers' in order to justify constant surveillance and security checkpoints all over the town.

This intimidation and demagoguery undoubtedly had an impact on the scale of the mobilisation. While the ruling class has a media monopoly, the left has only marginal access to publicity.

Nevertheless, compared to the demonstrations against the G8 Summit in 2007, in Heiligendamm, this mobilisation was numerically weaker. On the main demonstration on June 6, there were around 6,000 people while at the counter summit camp there were some 2,000. On June 5, there was a protest demonstration with a symbolic burning of war materials in front of the Marshall Institute and in the evening a demonstration in solidarity with the HDP after a bomb attack in Turkey killed four comrades and injured hundreds more.

In addition, an attempt was made on June 7 to block the roads to Elmau. Three people even managed to evade the security controls and have a picnic in front of the castle, although they were immediately arrested by the police.

Even before the camp, it was clear that, with 6,000 demonstrators against tens of thousands of police there couldn't be any permanent blockade and the protests would obviously have only a symbolic character. From the beginning, it was essential to expose both the lies about the counter-demonstration and the propaganda disguise of the G-7 not to indulge in the illusion that there could be a 'military confrontation' or that 2,000 people could 'outsmart' tens of thousands of police and security staff.

At the same time, it is necessary to stress that the demonstrations and actions were all very lively and militant. The main demonstration on June 6 was anything but 'peaceful' given the massive attack with pepper spray and batons by the police when demonstrators tried to set up a roadblock across the access road to Elmau.

Given the massive superiority of police numbers, evidenced not least by the tight cordon around the main part of the demo, the leadership rightly decided in favour of an orderly withdrawal. Although there was nothing to be won by

direct confrontation in Garmisch, the actions did achieve their purpose of exposing the official lies. Many local people saw the way the camp was repressed and the truth behind the horror stories about the demonstrators. Many visited the camp and offered shelter from the driving rain and thunderstorms. Indeed, the camp area was extended when farmers ignored the pressure from municipal administration.

Even the bourgeois press could not ignore the glaring contradiction between the huge scale of the police operation and the permanent security controls and the complete 'lack of any riots'. Given the continuous state harassment and the police attack on the demonstration on Saturday, the police justification, that it was only their overwhelming superiority in numbers that ensured a 'peaceful' protest, is not only an outright lie, it is clearly also intended as a justification for future interventions and a massive curtailment of democratic rights.

Even Garmisch is not a town in which only the rich, the hoteliers, and the affluent middle classes live, there are also all those who work in the tourist industry, maintain the town, work in local firms or commute to Munich. In Garmisch, too, there is little future for working class youth. The dreariness of official 'tourism culture' is particularly oppressive when it is everywhere around you. The fact that several hundred local people took part in the main demonstration shows that left politics are not automatically rejected even in quite conservative areas but can reach an audience amongst workers and youth. That must be judged an undoubted political success.

The German and Austrian sections of the League and of Revolution mobilised some 100 comrades and intervened actively in all of the activities as well as holding three meetings of their own. These dealt with the EU's policy against Greece, the imperialist intervention in Ukraine, the fight against women's oppression. We also organised, together with RIO a meeting on current workers' struggles in the post and Amazon. We are proud that in this way we were able to make a serious contribution to the mobilisation.

A political balance sheet

Overall, the results of the protests in Garmisch were mixed. As regards the numbers, and the organisations that seriously mobilised, there is much to be learnt. Apart from the League's sections and Revolution, the only groups that undertook a long term mobilisation were from the Triple A Alliance, Perspective Communism, Organised Autonomy, comrades from the anarchist spectrum and from the left motorcycle club Kuhle Wampe. In addition, there were several migrants' organisations and leftists from Turkey and Kurdistan.

On the demonstration itself, groups such as the DKP, SDAJ, MLPD and RIO were more strongly represented. The Left Party and Solide had stalls and a loudspeaker van.

The greater part of the German Left didn't even manage that and were conspicuous by their absence or, at best, limited presence. The majority of the Left Party leadership had opposed postponing the party conference, which would at least have given a signal for mobilisation. Why? Obviously, for the majority of the Left Party, preparation for the co-management of German imperialism is the central political goal, anti-imperialism would only wreck that.

Left trade union groups were also missing. Finally, 'All or Nothing' and the 'Interventionist Left' (with the exception of groups such as 'see red!' and the Dusseldorf Interventionist Left) were not there. Clearly, Marx21 and the RSB /ISL also found the way into the mountains too difficult. The SAV were only represented by some paper sellers at the big demonstration.

There was practically no mobilisation from outside the German-speaking countries. Two main factors were certainly responsible for this. On one side, there were the legal uncertainties about the camp, the setting aside of the Schengen agreement regarding cross-border travel and the imposition of very strict border controls, particularly for those coming from Italy. On the other hand, the European Left Party, the main trade union confederations as well as the larger groupings of the 'radical left' declined to provide the means for establishing and securing an international mobilisation.

Even in Heiligendamm, most of these currents and groupings had mobilised their members. The fact that there were so many fewer in Garmisch, however, cannot be explained primarily by repression, intimidation or even the remoteness of

the castle, after all, Heiligendamm is not exactly in the centre of the country.

The main reason is rather a political one. Most reformist, pseudo-radical and post-autonomous organisations and alliances decided against a mobilisation because, ultimately, they were afraid of a confrontation with imperialism above all with German imperialism. They find it difficult even to say the I-word.

Some months ago, Attac and the reformist organisations separated from the preparatory alliance 'Stop G7' and thereby effectively split it. As an 'Alternative' to the protest in Garmisch, they took themselves off to an arch-reformist 'counter summit' and a demonstration against TTIP.

It is certainly true that mobilising against the treaty is an important political task. However, the organisers behind the Munich demonstration of June 4 regard the treaty as entirely separate from the question of imperialism. The list of speakers therefore included such people as the chairperson of the Greens, Hofreiter, who provides only a completely harmless criticism of the TTIP.

What was really embarrassing at the end of the Munich demonstration was that the police presented the organisers with a trophy for the 'peaceful exercise of the right to demonstrate', and the organisers willingly had themselves photographed with it. Their subservience to their 'own' state and its democracy could not be more clearly shown.

It was certainly a mistake by the radical wing of the preparatory committee to make the location of the main demo, Garmisch or Munich, the main issue because that made it easy for the reformists to split the Alliance, and therefore de facto reject the mobilisation against the G-7. Nonetheless, the blame and the political responsibility for the split obviously lies with the reformists. They did not want to have an anti-imperialist mobilisation. However, at a summit meeting of the leaders of seven of the most important powers in the world (of the main imperialist countries, only China and Russia were missing) issues of global domination and the division of the world are almost automatically central, even if it is held under the cover of discussing 'peacekeeping' and the 'struggle against terrorism'. For the reformists and petty bourgeois forces, therefore, it would not be easy to avoid issues such as policy in Ukraine or the Middle East in a demonstration against the G-7. Therefore, they preferred to restrict themselves to questions that could be more easily separated from such issues.

What was a disgrace was the absence of the Interventionist Left, although it formally supported the mobilisation against the G-7 summit. Here, too, however there is a political explanation for why they chose instead to mobilise against the European Central Bank ECB. Ultimately, they have a similar policy to Attac, the Left Party and NGOs as far as TTIP is concerned. Their criticism of the ECB is separate from their criticism of imperialism which, for them, is defined as a policy of 'violence' but in no way as a stage of development of capitalism.

The supposedly 'communist' alliance 'All or Nothing', various 'value critical' or anti-German sections of the 'radical left' certainly do not want to know anything about imperialism. For them, the G-7 protests were an example of what they call a 'reduced' and 'personalised' critique of capitalism, because they reject the very idea that the class struggle is the driving force of social and political development. In reality, this is just an ideological device to trivialise class antagonisms and to justify rejection of any attack on concrete imperialist institutions, politicians, aggression etc.

Anti-imperialism

Thus, all of these groups want to be 'anti-capitalist' without being anti-imperialist. The petty bourgeois of Attac, the reformists of the Left Party, the post-autonomes of the IL and the pseudo-radicals of All or Nothing have more in common than they would like to think. Their concrete ideological justifications may differ but what they have in common is a retreat in the face of German imperialism and of the imperialist system as a whole.

It is no accident that we face this phenomenon at the present time, even if it seems a paradox at first sight. In recent years, the great powers have very openly shown their true colours. Not surprisingly, the very term 'imperialism' is being used more frequently because people find it appropriate even if they do not have a Marxist and scientific understanding of it.

Conversely, large sections of the petty bourgeois, reformist and even the 'radical' Left increasingly shy away from the term, claiming that it is 'out of date'. In reality, it describes the present period very accurately.

Merkel cleverly used the picturesque appearance of Elmau, as well as the climate change targets, to whitewash her imperialist policies. However, nobody should be in any doubt that behind the fantastic scenery, and the even more fantastic promises, she had not forgotten her real objectives.

The reformist and petty bourgeois radical left has no firm ground on which to stand. Ironically, the shaking of the imperialist world order is shaking precisely the basis of their whole politics. Both with their reformed fantasies and for their abstract 'radicalism' they need to believe in their own illusions.

For us, as revolutionaries, it is necessary not enough to reveal the truth behind the lies of the rulers, we also do not need the illusions of those who want to make their peace with imperialism either by accommodation or by distancing themselves from struggle. What we need is realism and that means: no anti-capitalism without anti-imperialism!

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