Gothenburg

Sat, 01/10/2005 - 17:00

This is what (social) democracy looks like? excerpts from a statement from the Swedish revolutionary group Arbetarmakt in Gothenburg, June 19 2000

The brutal police repression dealt out to demonstrators in Gothenburg, from 14 to 16 June, marks a turning point in the anti-capitalist movement. Any illusions that our movement can develop and move towards realising its goals in a context of playfulness, humour and non-violence were rudely shattered.

Despite the Swedish government?s claim that it would set a ?Gothenburg model? for peaceful protest based on ?negotiations? and ?dialogue? between the police and demonstrators the state forces acted from the outset to suppress democratic rights, break all the agreements they made with the organisers, and used violent repression ? up to an including the shooting of three demonstrators.

Their aim from the outset was plainly to weaken, disorganise and disperse the movement from the very start.

The president of France, the German chancellor and the British prime minister were totally complicit in this resort to brutal repression. Indeed in all likelihood they were its prime instigators when they criticised plans of the Swedish government and called for the strongest measures to ?defend? their summit against unarmed and at the outset entirely peaceful demonstrators.

On the morning of 14 June ? before the start of the 10,000 strong anti-Bush demonstration, riot police laid siege to the convergence centre before ANY action had taken place. Several hundred people were preparing defensive materials there for the march to the congress centre the next day. The raid was clearly designed to stop those best prepared to protect themselves against police violence.

They militantly defended themselves-White Overalls, Swedish AFA and international Black Block anarchists and comrades from the Swedish section of the LFI led several attempted breakouts. These failed because of numbers and the relative scarcity of protective equipment.

Against the strong resistance of the dominating force in the leadership of the anti-Bush demo ? the Swedish Left Party (ex-CP) LRCI comrades , with the support of CWI and IST members won several thousand people to march from the anti-Bush demo to the occupied convergence centre.

By distracting the police the demonstrators allowed between 30 and 40 people to escape. This showed the strength of mass action. Several hundred people from the Black Block who broke away earlier from the demo to face the police at the convergence centre were unable to achieve much beyond trashing a few cars and throwing stones.

However the forces involved were still insufficient to raise the siege and the police stormed the centre and arrested all those who were not able to escape.
Batons, dogs, whips and . . . . . bullets

On 15 June the Swedish police stopped the march against the summit after a few hundred meters. Up to this point not a blow had been struck nor a stone thrown at the police. Suddenly the demonstration was attacked on its flanks by riot police using enraged dogs- which bit and mauled dozens of demonstrators (and some of their own handlers).

Then they charged it with mounted riot cops, lashing out with batons and whips. Despite brave resistance from the demonstrators - armed only with banner poles and stones - the cops split up the demonstration and forced people back into the main street to the assembly point and than into the broad main avenue of central Gothenburg.

Then the so-called riot then followed. In essence it was the formation of barricades against the police advance from the chairs and tables of the street cafés which line the street. Some smashing of shop and bank windows clearly served no defensive function but was understandable as a reaction to the unbridled aggression of the riot police.

Anyone who condemns the ?violence? of the demonstrators, faced with dog bites, batoning and trampling by horses is- leaving aside consistent pacifists willing to suffer brutality in the name of their principles ? a wretched apologist of the state?s ?right? to treat its citizens how it wills. No democrat-let alone a socialist or anarchist ? could condemn such resistance. Self-defence is no offence!

Things clearly got out of hand from the point of view the Swedish police - i.e. they instigated a full-scale riot in a central entertainment and commercial area, it is clear however that they wanted a confrontation with the movement, that they were seeking a pretext for a violent clamp down on all forms of effective protest.

In the afternoon lots of protestors, organisers etc. were arrested in the streets and individuals chased by the cops. These arrests overwhelmingly did not occur during the fighting. In the evening the cops- and some fascist thugs ? provoked the street party into another confrontation which culminated in the shooting of three demonstrator, one of them still in hospital in danger of his life.

This itself is a historic escalation of the violence, especially in Sweden where no similar action by the state has occurred since 1931 and where a long reign of social peace followed the election of a Social Democratic government in the 1930s. Again it is an attempt to intimidate, split and weaken the movement.

This attempt will fail. The inflicting of martyrs on a progressive, militant, advancing movement-as for example the Kent State University students in the USA in 1968 ? will only increase the militancy, scale and determination of our movement. Once the initial media-induced frenzy about destruction of property abates broader and broader masses of young people and workers will see the ugly face of the corporate state, unmasked,

In the evening, they encircled a few hundred strong peaceful protest against the shootings for hours, before arresting dozens of them.

Later that night anti-terrorist squads raided a school where 200 or so people were sleeping armed with machine guns and radar directed pistols. They made the expelled people lie face down, spreadeagled on the rain soaked ground, outside the school, before a number of arrests were made.

During all these raids more than a thousand demonstrators were arrested-detained for six hours-photographed though most were released without charge. Others were deported. Dozens have been
rushed through quick trials for ?breach of the peace?, many without the presence of any lawyer or legal support. Some await trial on more serious charges. A campaign must be waged for their immediate release.

What are they frightened of?

The scale of repression in Gothenburg represents an organised violation of the civil rights of Swedish and European citizens. It shows clearly this is what ?fortress Europe? is becoming. It is not only a fortress against the poor and oppressed of the ?outside world? - the main subject of the demonstrations. It is also becoming a prison house for Europe?s own peoples too-especially when they try to assert their democratic rights.

The social democratic German chancellor Schröder commented: ?There cannot be any dialogue with these desperados?. These infamous words should be burned into the consciousness of the millions of workers who voted for him. This man is a hardened agent of global capital, not any kind of democrat, let alone a socialist. So too are Blair and Persson.

They are now setting out to make the ?Gothenburg model? a permanent feature of European life. They want to organise a continent-wide state of siege whenever people try to assert their democratic rights on an international level.

Genoa will be turned into an enormous prison for its own people from 18 July onwards and the German, Austrian and French borders be closed.

Why has Gothenburg become such a culminating point?

The main reason is clear. For years we have seen the growth of an international anti-capitalist movement. We see mass protests in the semi-colonies, mass strikes, occupations of land. We have seen demonstrations of young anti-capitalists, immigrants, militant trade unionists, anarchists, socialists and communists ? all joining in mass protests against global capitalism and its institutions.

This international movement is an undeniable reality and it is a real threat to the bosses and their governments. That is the reason why they are now starting to criminalise its activists, to try to isolate the most radical parts of it from the broad masses. The imperialists are terrified by this development,

They fear that as it becomes better organised, as it develops links with the working class, open anti-capitalism will come to the fore in workers movement once gain. That is why they want to abort this movement now, why they want to destroy as much as they can now. That is why bourgeois governments are calling for restrictions on or the ?temporary? cancellation of elementary democratic rights, like freedom of assembly, the right to demonstrate and why they will use more and more repression.

This is a declaration of war on the movement. We must organise NOW to repel this attack by all the governments of global capital, irrespective whether they are staffed by ?Socialists?, Liberals, Greens, Conservatives, and whether or not they incorporate the far right- as they now do in Italy and Austria (Fini, Haider).

Gothenburg proves again that every government in a capitalist state is serves the interest of the ruling class ? irrespective whether or not it does so in the name of ?dialogue? or ?confrontation?.

That is why every the whole workers movement, why every student, why all oppressed and exploited must rally for a international campaign to defend and win our right to demonstrate, to organise and our right of free movement.
Gothenburg was a turning point for the anti-capitalist movement because it demonstrated the need for a political step forward. The reformist leaders showed their true face by denouncing the arrested protesters, not the cops. But their biggest service to the corporate capitalists is that through their stranglehold of the labour movements-unions as well as reformist parties they can block the unity of the majority of the working class with the radical young workers and students.

As we have seen in Quebec and Seattle, the protests were most successful, when the anti-capitalists and the unionised workers were united in action. In Europe-because of the historic roots of ?socialist reformism? we have not yet succeeded in making such a breakthrough. In the mobilisations for Genoa we must do so. We need greater numbers and these can only come from mobilising the unions ? from below ? as well as radicalised young people.

Source URL: https://fifthinternational.org/content/gothenburg