

The G8 Summit: A fraud and a circus

The front page of the London Observer on 12 June announced, “55 billion Africa debt deal ‘a victory for millions.’” The “victory for millions” is a quotation of Bob Geldof, who said, “Tomorrow 280 million Africans will wake up for the first time in their lives without owing you or me a penny...”. The nonsense of this would be breathtaking if the reader’s breath had not already been extracted by the unrelenting sophistry of Geldof, Bono, Blair, the Observer et al.

Africa's imperial plunder and tragedy have been turned into a circus for the benefit of the so-called G8 leaders due in Scotland next month and those of us willing to be distracted by the barkers of the circus: the establishment media and its “celebrities”. The illusion of an anti establishment crusade led by pop stars – a cultivated, controlling image of rebellion – serves to dilute a great political movement of anger. In summit after summit, not a single significant “promise” of the G8 has been kept, and the “victory for millions” is no different. It is a fraud – actually a setback to reducing poverty in Africa. Entirely conditional on vicious, discredited economic programmes imposed by the World Bank and the IMF, the “package” will ensure that the “chosen” countries slip deeper into poverty.

Is it any surprise that this is backed by Blair and his treasurer, Gordon Brown, and George Bush; even the White House calls it a “milestone”? For them, it is an important facade, held up by the famous and the naive and the inane. Having effused about Blair, Geldof describes Bush as “passionate and sincere” about ending poverty. Bono has called Blair and Brown “the John and Paul of the global development stage”. Behind this front, rapacious power can “re-order” the lives of millions in favour of totalitarian corporations and their control of the world’s resources.

There is no conspiracy; the goal is no secret. Gordon Brown spells it out in speech after speech, which liberal journalists choose to ignore, preferring the

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Treasury spun version. The G8 communique announcing the “victory for millions” is unequivocal. Under a section headed “G8 proposals for HIPC debt cancellation”, it says that debt relief to poor countries will be granted only if they are shown “adjusting their gross assistance flows by the amount given”: in other words, their aid will be reduced by the same amount as the debt relief. So they gain nothing. Paragraph Two states that “it is essential” that poor countries “boost private sector development” and ensure “the elimination of impediments to private investment, both domestic and foreign”.

The “55 billion” claimed by the Observer comes down, at most, to 1 billion spread over 18 countries. This will almost certainly be halved – providing less than six days’ worth of debt payments – because Blair and Brown want the IMF to pay its share of the “relief” by revaluing its vast stock of gold, and passionate and sincere Bush has said no. The first unmentionable is that the gold was plundered originally from Africa. The second unmentionable is that debt payments are due to rise sharply from next year, more than doubling by 2015. This will mean not “victory for millions”, but death for millions.

At present, for every 1 dollar of “aid” to Africa, 3 dollars are taken out by western banks, institutions and governments, and that does not account for the repatriated profit of transnational corporations. Take the Congo. Thirty-two corporations, all of them based in G8 countries, dominate the exploitation of this deeply impoverished, minerals-rich country, where millions have died in the “cause” of 200 years of imperialism. In the Cote d'Ivoire, three G8 companies control 95 per cent of the processing and export of cocoa: the main resource. The profits of Unilever, a British company long in Africa, are a third larger than Mozambique’s GDP. One American company, Monsanto – of genetic engineering notoriety – controls 52 per cent of the maize seed in South Africa, that country’s staple food.

Blair could not give two flying faeces for the people of Africa. Ian Taylor at the University of St Andrews used the Freedom of Information Act to learn that while Blair was declaiming his desire to “make poverty history”, he was secretly cutting the government’s Africa desk officers and staff. At the same time, his “department for international development” was forcing, by the back door, privatisation of water supply in Ghana for the benefit of British investors. This ministry lives by the dictates of its “Business Partnership Unit”, which is devoted to finding “ways in which DfID can improve the enabling environment for productive investment overseas and... contribute to the operation of the financial sector”.

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Poverty reduction? Of course not. A charade promotes the modern imperial ideology known as neoliberalism, yet it is almost never reported that way and the connections are seldom made. In the issue of the Observer announcing “victory for millions” was a secondary news item that British arms sales to Africa had passed 1 billion. One British arms client is Malawi, which pays out more on the interest on its debt than its entire health budget, despite the fact that 15 per cent of its population has HIV. Gordon Brown likes to use Malawi as example of why “we should make poverty history”, yet Malawi will not receive a penny of the “victory for millions” relief.

The charade is a gift for Blair, who will try anything to persuade the public to “move on” from the third unmentionable: his part in the greatest political scandal of the modern era, his crime in Iraq. Although essentially an opportunist, as his lying demonstrates, he presents himself as a Kiplingesque imperialist. His “vision for Africa” is as patronising and exploitative as a stage full of white pop stars (with black tokens now added). His messianic references to “shaking the kaleidoscope” of societies about which he understands little and “watching the pieces fall” has translated into seven violent interventions abroad, more than any British prime minister for half a century. Bob Geldof, an Irishman at his court, duly knighted, says nothing about this.

The protesters going to the G8 summit at Gleneagles ought not to allow themselves to be distracted by these games. If inspiration is needed, along with evidence that direct action can work, they should look to Latin America’s mighty popular movements against *total locura capitalista* (total capitalist folly). They should look to Bolivia, the poorest country in Latin America, where an indigenous movement has Blair’s and Bush’s corporate friends on the run, and Venezuela, the only country in the world where oil revenue has been diverted for the benefit of the majority, and Uruguay and Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, and Brazil’s great landless people’s movement. Across the continent, ordinary people are standing up to the old Washington-sponsored order. “*Que se vayan todos!*” (Out with them all!) say the crowds in the streets.

Much of the propaganda that passes for news in our own society is given to immobilising and pacifying people and diverting them from the idea that they can confront power. The current babble about Europe, of which no reporter makes sense, is part of this; yet the French and Dutch “no” votes are part of the same movement as in Latin America, returning democracy to its true home: that of power accountable to the people, not to the “free market” or the war policies of rampant bullies. And this is just a beginning.

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