

THE G8 JUNE MEETING IN KANANASKIS: A STRATEGIC MOMENT

By Starhawk

The G8, the heads of the eight most industrialized countries in the world, are preparing to meet in late June 2002 in the isolated wilderness area of Kananaskis, near Calgary, in Alberta, one of the most prosperous and conservative provinces of Canada. Last July, their Genoa summit was met by hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, and protests that at moments became pitched battles. Carlo Giuliani was shot and killed, and many other activists were brutally beaten, imprisoned, and tortured.

But the global justice movement has not been silenced. As we near the time for the June summit, major demonstrations and countersummits are being planned in Calgary and the Kananaskis area.

Is it worth making the trek to Western Canada to engage in yet another summit contest? Would we not better devote our resources to the thousands of local battles that are also the front lines of the global justice struggle?

Both the local and the global struggles are important. But right now, a strong protest in Alberta is vitally necessary.

We fight on a thousand local fronts because we are challenging a larger system that ultimately needs to be dismantled as a whole. The large summits are still the best place to confront the overall system of global corporate capitalism. And this is a strategic moment in that battle.

Local struggles are important. The system of global corporate capitalism has thousands of local impacts. It's Exxon polluting the Nigerian delta, Chevron spewing forth air pollution in a low income community in California. It's an inner city hospital closing, a CocaCola logo on the high school gym, a factory in Canada moving to the Mexican border, a young woman displaced from a village in Chiapas forced to work in that factory for less than a living wage.

Addressing the local face of globalization brings the issues home, roots us back in community, gives activism integrity, and also teaches us some deep lessons. For local issues always face us with complexities. Global issues become human, personal. The opposition is the guy down the block who works at Chevron, the mother at your kids' school who welcomes the windfall from Coke. We have more need and incentive to hear their point of view, to see the issues in their fullness, not in simplistic, black and white terms.

Working locally, we can also see the results of our actions in our daily reality. Every

day, we walk by the school, the medical clinic, the worker owned cooperative. On a local level we can implement solutions, try out programs, make immediate changes that affect real people's lives. And local actions are accessible to everyone, to working people with limited means and time for travel, to parents who have kids to take care of.

Nevertheless, local action is not enough. Some of us have been working locally, often for decades and we understand quite well that no local gains will be sustained in the face of the major policies set by the WTO, the IMF/World Bank, the G8 and all their alphabet-soup brethren. Our hardest won victories can be erased in a moment by a press conference, a new regulation or a stroke of a pen. A local victory, no matter how important, is like nibbling away at the toes of the beast.

The places where we can challenge that system as a whole, where we can strike at its heart, are the summits, those big meetings of the elite that function as rites of entitlement and reinforcers of legitimacy. The strategy of contesting them has served us well since Seattle. Disrupting the meetings has focused a spotlight of public scrutiny on institutions that were functioning in near-secrecy. It has raised debate, called into question their legitimacy, and begun to undermine their power. The protests highlight internal conflicts and support dissenting factions within the institutions. Moreover, the summit protests bring us together, building alliances that can strengthen our work when we go back home.

Educators speak of the teachable moment, that instant in which some urgency cracks the shell of apathy and a previously resistant student opens to learning. Most people, respond to the news somewhat like bored kids in school, knowing there is an overwhelming amount of information being directed at them, but not quite knowing why they should care or what action they should take.

The big summit actions create mass teachable moments. They generate a drama, an excitement, an urgency that draws attention and wakes people up. The public suddenly has a reason to pay attention to institutions it has long ignored, to crave information it has long neglected.

Without a central drama going on somewhere in the world, decentralized protests draw only the faithful and have minimal impact. They still serve an important educational role. But their impact is magnified a thousand times when a large action is taking place at the site of a world summit meeting itself, where media and global attention are concentrating.

A critique has also been raised within the movement that summit protests are not accessible to the very people who are most impacted by global policies--the poor, people of color, immigrants, families--that attending the protests is for the privileged. It's true that travel is hard for those with limited means and pressing life responsibilities. But our response should not be to stay home, but to increase our efforts to raise funds and share resources so that a wider spectrum of people can attend. Because in opposing the G8, we join a struggle led by the people of the global south, by indigenous people fighting for their lands and cultures, by the poor and dispossessed around the world, who have asked for our solidarity. The privilege we might have confers a responsibility to use our resources to carry the struggle into the beasts' lair. When

those who benefit from the system openly reject it, the beast truly begins to tremble.

The G8 summit is also a strategic moment. The beast is gnashing its teeth, spoiling for a new fight, and this is a crucially important opportunity to halt its advance.

The government, media and corporate interests have used the attacks of 9-11 to further their agenda that makes corporate profit the prime value by which every human activity is ordered and every potential resource exploited. These systems represent the everyday terrorism of policies that breed poverty and despair. They kill millions every day, from the children who die of diarrhea because the IMF has forced a government to abandon a program to provide clean water, to the civilians who die in the bombings that clear the way for policies favorable to corporate desires.

The success of the corporate agenda depends on the cooperation of masses of people whose own true interests are not being served. To assure their compliance, the violence inherent in the system must be kept from the public eye. Capitalism is equated with democracy. Those who dissent are labeled 'terrorists' and criminalized. And when the guns and bombs and missiles that back up corporate policy are unleashed, the interests they serve are always disguised by noble rhetoric.

A strong summit protest rips the benevolent mask from the face of corporate globalization, makes the violence visible, and exposes the lie. The authorities are put in a dilemma. They cannot convincingly claim to represent democracy and suppress dissent. Either they allow us to gather and express the enormous public opposition to their policies, or they are forced to openly repress us.

So far, their strategy in Alberta has been one of active discouragement and criminalization. While giving lip service to democracy, they have undermined and blocked efforts of the organizers to secure safe and legal places for marches, gatherings, and encampments. They hope people will be intimidated, and stay home.

The drama in Alberta may well become a contest for public space and freedom of expression, played out on the streets of Calgary as well as the road to the mountains. But the struggle for global justice is a struggle for space: for life-space, for learning spaces free of corporate advertising and influence, for the traditional territories of an indigenous community, for a commons that cannot be sold to the highest bidder. And it is, ultimately, a struggle for freedom: for the freedom of people to cross borders as capital does, for the freedom of communities to control their own resources and destinies, for the freedom to participate in decisions that affect us. The G8 summit is the moment for the global justice movement in North America to return from the setbacks of 9-11 with renewed vigor and creativity. With strong support from the Canadian labour movement and thousands of union members coming to take action, it's an opportunity to reforge and strengthen alliances among broad sectors of the movement, and make the impact of global policies on working people a central focus.

And with new wars on the horizon every day, ongoing violence in the Middle East and the far East, an invasion of Iraq on the Bush agenda, it's a vitally important moment to draw attention to the links between militarism and global corporate capitalism, to pry Canada away from backing the U.S. drive for hegemony, to unite the movement for

global justice with the movement for peace.

To mount strong actions in conservative Alberta, we need numbers. Calgary, Edmonton, Canmore and surrounding communities have been organizing for months, but Kananaskis was cleverly chosen to be far away from major centers of activism. The moment is crucial enough, and the stakes high enough, that it is a worthwhile use of our resources to go there if we possibly can. Of course, not everyone can go to Alberta. Direct actions are also being planned in Ottawa, and a call has gone out for protests in capital cities across the world. The sister actions that will take place around the globe will help spread the impact of the actions. We need to work both locally and globally.

But western Canada is where the beast has gone to ground, and where the central drama needs to take place. Come to Calgary and Kananaskis country if you can, and then bring the struggle back home with renewed energy and new alliances.

The G6B Countersummit will take place in Calgary from June 21-25. The Labour/family march will be June 23rd. Direct actions will be ongoing through the G8 meetings, which will take place in Kananaskis June 26-28. For information on the actions, G6B summit, and ongoing organizing, go to www.g8.activist.ca

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