

A Call For a Global Day of Action

Join the Global Day of Action on July 14th, the day before the 2006 G8 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia

Nuclear Power, Global Energy, Infectious Diseases and Education – The Focuses of This Year’s Summit

When the heads of state of the eight most powerful industrialised nations meet, from 15th-17th July in St. Petersburg, the issues of nuclear power, global energy security, infectious diseases and education will be at the top of the agenda. Even if the content of the discussions – and even some of the agreements to be reached – are clear in advance, we plan to use the summit as a symbolic occasion on which to stand up for free health care, education for all, the shutting down of nuclear power stations and an end to war!

Nuclear Power and Energy Security

The G8 is aiming for a renaissance of the worldwide nuclear (weapons) economy, and the further privatisation of energy and the restructuring of states’ regulatory bodies.

The most recent draft statement by the G8 on energy security demands a 17,000-billion US Dollar investment, primarily in the expansion of fossil fuel and nuclear energy systems, over the next 25 years. The statement calls for: the expansion of oil production and coal mining – with oil wells to speed up extraction and refineries to be built quicker; and for nuclear- and coal-fired power stations to be expanded. In other words: the outdated energy policies of the 20th century are to be continued. Contrary to the claims made in the official “Global Energy Security” document (see: www.reclaimthecommons.net), there is very little consciousness about renewable energy in Russia. 20 years after Chernobyl, we demand the closure of all nuclear power stations worldwide, before the plant outside St. Petersburg (or anywhere else) melts down too!

Education

“In our opinion, the time has come to focus on ways to improve the quality and effectiveness of national education systems and professional training”, reads a statement by the Russian elite ahead of the G8 summit. But what, precisely, do they mean here? Let’s have a look at what’s going on within the education system in Russia.

Russia joined the so-called “Bologna Process”, whereby representatives from around 30 different countries meet to discuss the restructuring of education systems, in 2003. The primary goal of the “Bologna Ideals” was the standardisation of education: the introduction of common examination units; the moving towards a two-tier system of higher education (with Bachelor and Masters degrees); the mutual recognition of degrees awarded by and in all participating countries; and the increased mobility of both students and tutors. The achieving of these goals will be further discussed in St. Petersburg. Amidst the privatisation of education in Russia, a number of other changes have also occurred: employers have been integrated into discussions around educational standards and goals; the budgets for regional technical schools have been greatly reduced; and students are required to pay for participation in Masters degree programmes.

The Russian elite have explained this restructuring as deriving not only from the joining of the Bologna Process, but also the preconditions of World Trade Organisation (WTO) membership. When education is discussed at the summit, it will be done within the limits of the discourse set by the WTO and Bologna Ideals. Translating the language of the G8, then, to “improve the quality” of education, means nothing other than bringing about a supposedly *higher* quality for a *smaller* number of privileged students; and by greater “efficiency”, they mean students having to study faster to both reduce the costs incurred by education and to propel them quicker into the labour market. Support for students from less-privileged family backgrounds, or the consideration of alternative pedagogic practices – oriented towards the needs of students and/or critical thought – are not up for discussion.

The G8's discussions about education in St. Petersburg will set the tone for future discussions within GATS (General Agreement on Trade and Services), the WTO and Bologna Process. Through discussing issues such as education, the G8 hope to show their "humane" face, but we expect little positive to come out of the St. Petersburg summit. We demand education for everybody! And for free!

Infectious Diseases

This year's summit will return to a theme which has been previously discussed, taking into consideration the more recent rulings of the WTO on the topic of infectious diseases. At the end of April 2006, G8 Health Ministers met with representatives from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and NGOs to debate ways of dealing with infectious disease. It is with this topic that the Russian elite are hoping to place population control centre stage.

Approximately 50-million people worldwide are HIV-positive. 90% of infected people live in Africa, with the proportion of the population infected by the disease growing in Asia and Eastern Europe. Similarly to other diseases, AIDS has a disproportionately devastating impact on the population of the global South: medicines cannot be afforded or are difficult to obtain; weakness due to famine is more likely; tougher working conditions, and other injustices, place a higher demand upon bodies.

At the same time, antiretroviral drugs which could combat HIV and AIDS, delaying the onset of symptoms and lengthening life expectancy by years, have been developed alongside important work which has been being carried out by prevention and educational programmes. Despite the existence of this medicine, however, low supply and prohibitively high costs mean that only 1% of infected people in poor countries are able to be treated.

The production of generic equivalents to antiretrovirals could drastically reduce the cost of treatment. But, until 2005, strong patent rights were in place preventing their production in "developing" countries. The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which has recently come into place, has further prohibited the production of cheaper drugs. On top of this, the pharmaceutical industry are showing relatively little interest in developing an anti-AIDS serum, leaving research to be mostly state-funded.

The G8's discussion about infectious disease will do nothing to address the problem of unequal access to medicine and treatment. They are not interested in combating disease through social and structural change. Rather, their discussion will focus on *control* of the disease, which means nothing other than population control and the securing of patent rights by large corporations.

Even if some pharmaceutical companies, such as Sanofi-Aventis based at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, present themselves as different to the rest, the fact remains: this is far from being a charitable organisation and operates in strict accordance with the logic of a market economy. Their goal remains achieving the highest possible turnover and profit. In order to increase companies' share-values, the pharmaceutical industry actively intervenes in countries' health policies.

In opposition to the G8, we plan to act against the selective treatment and distribution of drugs, and the division between those perceived as "deserving" or "un-deserving" of treatment.

Free Health Care and Access to Treatment for All!

Free Education!

End Nuclear Power!

Against War!

No G8 summit in St. Petersburg – or anywhere else, ever!

The G8 summit in St. Petersburg: 15th-17th July 2006 – We will be there!

The St. Petersburg summit will not be forgotten!