Introduction

On 2 July, 2005 around 225,000 people marched through Edinburgh (the city’s largest ever demonstration) to ‘make poverty history’. The march aimed to put pressure on the Group of Eight (G8) world leaders meeting in Scotland to act positively on debt, climate change and Africa. Months of organisation and campaigning meant that the protestors outnumbered the 80,000 who gathered in Birmingham in 1998 for the previous UK-based summit, and far exceeded press and police predictions for the size of the event (the local evening paper, the day before the march, expected ‘around 120,000’ marchers, Evening News 01/07/05).

This paper assesses the Make Poverty History (MPH) march, focusing on the interplay between protestors, police, the media and the public. The rally was particularly intriguing for the marked disparity between prior warnings about the event and its carnival atmosphere. We ask why MPH was not the terrible event that the news media feared; why it differed from previous G8 protests; and what occurred on the day itself. To this end we consider two key issues: Firstly, who marched, why were they there, and how they protested? Secondly, what did the wider (Scottish) public make of the demonstrators? The intent of this dual focus is to understand the protestors and what motivated them, but also how ‘successful’ they were in getting their message across. If social movements are understood as attempts to alter the public culture of a society (Jasper 1997), then how they relate to the non-protesting public is significant.

The Research

The paper draws on a variegated research strategy designed to capture the significance of this demonstration rather than to provide a representative and statistically valid account. We lacked the resources to conduct a properly random survey of protestors and have focused, therefore, on providing a suggestive account that does some justice to opinion about, and experiences of, this event. The research centres around our survey of 524 people on the MPH march itself and two opinion polls of 1,100 Scottish adults – carried out by TNS. This data is complemented by participant observation, interviews with senior police officers and protest participants, conversations with dozens of ‘ordinary’ (and often extraordinary) protestors on the streets, and a review of newspaper coverage. The opinion polls were conducted both before and after the Summit and focussed on people’s perceptions of the demonstrators and anticipation or experience of disruption and violence. Press reports on MPH,
however, began well before the event and, as the media constituted the main conduit between protest organisers, police and the general public, it is worth beginning with a brief consideration of this coverage.

**Media Premonitions**

Given the ‘carnival atmosphere’ of the MPH march it is hard to credit that people genuinely feared for the safety of Edinburgh and its inhabitants. The fulsome media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the rally (see figure 1) suggested broad support for the campaign’s objectives and universal praise for the participants. Yet there had been no shortage of detractors beforehand, with most newspapers (particularly those with a prominent share of the Scottish market), predicting disruption on an unprecedented scale. The day before the march the *Scotsman* warned ‘Scotland battens down the hatches for a G8 storm’, and noted that ‘Court cases have been put off, police leave cancelled and streets cleared of debris to prevent violent protesters using it as missiles’ (01/07/05).

Indeed, much coverage erred on the side of pessimism. In the final days before MPH the *Scotsman* reported the appearance of the ‘the first rogue campsite’ in the city, noting the fears of a ‘packed public meeting’. Yet the reality was buried within the reportage: just ‘two tents had appeared on the Meadows’, a large park in the city centre (29/06/05). Concerned residents voiced the, by now, familiar fears of unruly protestors camping in front gardens and ‘urinating on my doorstep’. That same edition of the *Scotsman*, rather more ominously, reported that ‘extra beds [were] freed-up for head injury patients’ in local hospitals. On the eve of the MPH march, under the headline ‘Street of fear: shopping mecca braced for riots’ the *Daily Record* reported that the city’s Princes Street, ‘was … bracing itself for G8 bedlam’ (01/07/05).

Such gloomy prognoses began as early as April when the *Evening News* noted that road works would have to be postponed due to the protests (12/04/05), and that McDonalds was set to close ‘amid fears of G8 attack’ (19/04/05). This latter tagline sat uncomfortably above a story in which protest organisers promised a ‘family day out’ and police urged Edinburgh to remain ‘as open as possible’. Such reassurances, however, were less readily translated into eye-catching headlines than fearful premonitions. On the eve of the MPH march the *Scotsman* reported ‘that some of the protesters preparing for tomorrow’s Make Poverty History march in Edinburgh might be planning to use the occasion for violence’. It observed that ‘utility companies and building firms were trying to limit the amount of material available to the protesters’ by removing scaffolding and securing work-in-progress. The press also reported the removal of ‘To Let’

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**Figure 1: Selected post ‘MPH’ headlines (all 03/07/05)**

- ‘Tide of Hope for Poor’, *Daily Star Sunday*
- ‘Carnival mood of people’s protest’, *Mail on Sunday*
- ‘Chancellor hails Make Poverty History march as real ‘beacon of hope”, *Sunday Express*
- ‘One World: 225,000 march on streets of Edinburgh’, *Sunday Mail*
- ‘The day we made history’, *Sunday Herald*
signs from city properties ‘for fear it may advertise an empty house for protesters to squat’ (Scotsman 01/07/05; cf. Daily Record 01/07/05). The Evening News reported that ‘an army of joiners [had] descended on the city centre to start boarding up shops, including the Body Shop and Ann Summers in Princes Street, to protect against potential attacks’ (01/07/05).

The anarchist World Cup

The G8 media coverage assigned a central role to violent activists expected to infiltrate ‘legitimate’ protests such as MPH. A columnist in the Daily Record (Scotland’s most popular newspaper) succinctly summarised fears: ‘There are plenty hoping to use the [G8 protest] jamboree as an excuse to create as much bloody mayhem as they can. The G8 is the anarchists’ World Cup, their dream date’ (03/06/05). In the months preceding the demonstration Edinburgh’s free paper (distributed to most city households), the Herald & Post, oscillated between two extremes. In April it reported that Shell would close all its service stations as a security precaution, raising ‘fears that the city will grind to a standstill … with businesses across Edinburgh shut’. Despite reassurances from protest organisers, the paper chose to emphasise that ‘protest leaders have admitted there is likely to be a “rogue element” of anarchists’ (28/04/05). A fortnight later, a more optimistic piece urged businesses to stay open and make the most of protestors. MPH was described as an ‘opportunity’, but readers were reminded that whilst ‘billed as an anti-poverty protest, there are fears it may attract anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation extremists’ (12/05/05). The following week the ‘G8 Summit [was] “unlikely to lead to trouble” and police sources were quoted to this effect. Nevertheless, the article predicted that local businesses would pull ‘the shutters down rather than risk violent clashes’ (19/05/05). With such views – repeatedly emphasising the likelihood of trouble - coming through the door of almost every city home, many awaited the summit with trepidation.

Key to Edinburgh (and wider Scottish) opinion are the two Scotsman Group titles (the Scotsman and Evening News), and these anticipated chaos in a ‘World Heritage’ city. The tone was frequently sensationalist although the story often belied the gloomy headlines. In keeping with this approach, the Evening News only presented antithetical voices for its regular ‘Your Say’ column some months prior to the events. One reader feared that ‘It will be hellish for residents in Edinburgh’, whilst another insisted: ‘I won’t be going anywhere near the city centre during the protests. I don’t want to be trampled by a baying mob’ (19/04/05). Recurrent accounts of previous G8-related violence in Genoa and Seattle inculcated something approaching a siege mentality. In sharp contrast there were insistent reassurances from both protest organisers and the police about the peaceful nature of MPH. The Lothian and Borders Police website carried a link to MPH, and a letter of welcome to protestors from Edinburgh’s Lord Provost.

Anarchists, however, are good copy. Immediately prior to the march the Herald & Post reported: ‘G8 rally fears as anarchists gather in city’ (30/06/05). The paper warned that the Dissent network of ‘anarchist groups’ were planning to
“radicalise” the march, informing its readers that Dissent was ‘a notorious anarchist group responsible for much of the violence during London’s May Day riots’. Yet within the article, none of the quoted radicals mentioned violence, and both council and police spokespeople intimated that the march would be peaceful. Abutting the story an NHS public information notice was markedly more upbeat; ‘preparing for a Gr8 occasion!’ Our prize, however, for unsubstantiated scare-mongering goes to the *Times*’ lead story on Saturday 16th April which “revealed”: ‘Militant’s Secret Plan to Paralyse Scotland’. The *Times* claimed to have ‘infiltrated’ a gathering of ‘hardcore protestors’ in Lanarkshire ‘despite the group’s obsessive secrecy’. Beneath pictures of past summit violence the *Times* opined that the ‘setting up of a trauma group’ indicated how the ‘G8 anarchists’ were preparing for violence. Quotes in the article, however, made it apparent that those in attendance feared police aggression. Such trauma groups are commonplace amongst peaceful demonstrators and the inference drawn by the journalist was designed to scare.

The *Times* story was taken up by the *Evening News* under the headline ‘Extremists in “war summit” to plot G8 protest violence’ (16/04/05). This prompted an attendee to write in, pointing out that: The camp was in no way secret. It was advertised on the website and in thousands of leaflets we distributed in Glasgow and Edinburgh ... I know of no one on the site who was there to “plot G8 protest violence” (Evening News 19/04/05). Indeed, as we can attest, anyone following the prospective G8 protests with any diligence would have been aware of the Lanarkshire meeting. As one senior Tayside police officer told us, the ‘press have been ... grossly irresponsible’ in their coverage of the anticipated G8 protests, often drawing ‘illogical conclusions based on fantasy’ because producing ‘good stories’ outweighed verification of facts (interview with CI Ross, 05/06/05).

Whatever the reality, the media’s projection of violent disruption fed into the representation of a petrified city. On July 1st the *Daily Record* reported Edinburgh businesses braced for chaos, and quoted one local as saying: There will be trouble. I have no doubt about that’, whilst:

One sharp-suited Bank of Scotland employee, who asked not to be named, said the marches and demos would attract troublemakers from all over Europe. He added: “Eighty per cent of them will be intent on causing problems, in my opinion. It’s a worthy cause but I fear Edinburgh will get trashed”.

**Positive vibrations**

Positive voices were not actually hard to find, but were submerged beneath salacious headlines. The difficulties posed by the constant stream of sensationalist coverage led a Tayside policeman to insist that: ‘the press are actively seeking negative comments. They don’t take on board my concerns about negativity. There are plenty of more positive accounts, with no fears or negativity, but the press are not interested in this’ (Interview with PC White 21/06/05). Throughout our interviews, police frustration with sections of the
print media was abundantly apparent. One noted that with each new ‘exclusive’:

You feel like: Here we go again! And you have to start the day and address that again and repeat the same assurances that people have heard countless times before, but with each new story people seek more detail and guarantees and it does make my job that much more difficult (ibid.).

The police wished that more attention was paid to the opportunities that the summit offered and the manner in which it placed Scotland on the world stage. Other bodies shared this view. Travel Scotland, for example, launched ‘the official accommodation, tours and travel booking site for the Make Poverty History (Edinburgh) rally’. They urged early booking and offered tours to enable visitors to see the city and Scotland before joining the protest1. Other commentators welcomed the march simply on its own terms rejecting the materialistic injunctions to profit from the ‘opportunity’. Iain Macwhirter of the Glasgow-based Sunday Herald, advocated a moral stance:

[T]he capital should be about more than just milking tourists. It should be telling the world that it is open for anyone who wants to come here to make a stand against injustice; that it supports the cause and wants to do all it can to make this a great world event (05/06/05).

Away from the limelight many Edinburghers reflected this position and looked forward to the march. Churches across the city, and indeed the UK, fully supported and mobilised for MPH. In Edinburgh’s St Martin of Tours Episcopalian Church, for example, the sermon on the preceding Sunday was given over to an MPH spokesperson, and the newsletter urged people to join the event. Episcopalians were invited to attend a Eucharist at the Cathedral before marching towards the Meadows. The Newsletter reminded people that ‘this is an event for all the family’ (St Martin of Tours 2005). Letters pages and comment sites showed that this line of reasoning resonated with many Edinburgh residents, but more prominence was accorded to those who feared the worst.

**Opinion Poll evidence**

Given the systematic privileging of negative voices it is hard to derive a sense of popular perceptions from the media. The questions carried on our behalf by the TNS Scottish Omnibus survey (a monthly poll of Scottish public opinion), however, allow us to gauge how representative these opinions were. The first survey, carried out in late June, provides an insight into public perceptions of the impending events. Interestingly, a majority (55%) of those questioned agreed (either ‘strongly’ or ‘a little’) that hosting the G8 summit would be a ‘good thing for Scotland’. However, opinion proved more negative

| Strongly agree | 5 |
| Agree a little | 26 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 22 |
| Disagree a little | 25 |
| Strongly disagree | 19 |
| Don’t know | 4 |

Table 1: The protests surrounding the G8 summit will change our world for the better
regarding the planned demonstrations. When asked whether the protests surrounding the Summit would ‘change our world for the better’ few were optimistic (See Table 1). Whilst under one third (31%) agreed that the protests would have a positive impact, over two-fifths (44%) felt they would not. Considerably more people *strongly disagreed* with the view that the protests would produce positive change than *strongly agreed* (19% as compared to just 5%).

**Table 1:** The protests surrounding the G8 summit will change our world for the better

| Strongly agree | 5 |
| Agree a little | 26 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 22 |
| Disagree a little | 25 |
| Strongly disagree | 19 |
| Don’t know | 4 |

The media, as we have seen, foretold severe disruption in Edinburgh, Auchterarder (the village next to the Gleneagles Hotel, venue for the actual Summit), and beyond. It was also suggested that residents were apprehensive about the imminent events. We, therefore, asked respondents whether they thought that protests would cause ‘major disruption’ and whether they were ‘likely to be violent’ (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2:** The protests will cause major disruption

| Strongly agree | 38 |
| Agree a little | 36 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 10 |
| Disagree a little | 10 |
| Strongly disagree | 4 |
| Don’t know | 2 |

**Table 3:** The protests are likely to be violent

| Strongly agree | 10 |
| Agree a little | 34 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 17 |
| Disagree a little | 25 |
| Strongly disagree | 10 |
| Don’t know | 4 |

There was considerable belief that the G8 protests would cause major disruption, with almost three-quarters of our respondents (74%) agreeing that
they would. However, the question of likely violence elicited a more divided response, with two fifths (44%) agreeing that the protests were likely to be violent compared to around one third (35%) disagreeing.

**On the March**

Beforehand, therefore, MPH was perceived as a potential tinderbox in which the just moral cause of the protestors might be undermined by outbreaks of trouble. As such MPH was presented as a critical test of policing: 'Lothian and Borders [Police]' [LBP], as a senior Tayside police official put it, ‘have a huge responsibility in setting the tone’ for the rest of the Summit (interview 05/06/05). The LBP website, regularly updated throughout the week, concurred with this assessment and captured the ambiguity of the occasion, notting the global significance of the event whilst alluding to the unspoken fear of violence and ‘all the wrong reasons’:

The police, council and residents of this fine city are hosting an event that will be of significant interest to the world and will set the tone for the G8 summit the following week. Let’s ensure that it goes well and puts Edinburgh on the map for all the right reasons.2

Given all that had preceded it, one might have expected that the MPH march would have been accompanied by a tense atmosphere, serried ranks of police in protective equipment and rows of shuttered shops. Instead, the Meadows – the park where the march began and ended – proved a sea of stages, marquees and fast food outlets. There was a festive air as people milled around, added messages to a giant frame spelling out ‘Make Poverty History’, or lazed in the sunshine (see Photo 1). Numbers far exceeded initial expectations and it soon became clear that people would have to queue for some considerable time to actually march. Regular announcements urged patience, provided updates on protest numbers, and co-ordinated symbolic gestures such as a minute’s silence.

Demonstrations inevitably entail symbolic rituals that highlight the cohesion of protestors and communicate their objectives. Certain gestures and signs function as condensing symbols (Turner 1967: 29) replete with meaning, which capture and convey the intentions of protestors. MPH rested on a number of heavily symbolic acts. White wristbands emblazoned with the MPH message had financed the organisation of the rally and raised money for poverty stricken people in Africa. Participants were asked to wear white clothing to produce a
human echo of these bands when the marchers ringed the city centre. Some
marchers wore red or black to signal their political affiliations, or simply
disregarded the dress code, but most complied. Finally, there was a minute’s
silence to remember those dying in poverty. Innumerable balloons were
released, in what several respondents likened to a poignant evocation of the
voices of the voiceless (Personal communication, St. Martin’s Edinburgh
03/07/05).

If demonstrations stand in for elections in terms of social movement popularity
(Della Porta & Diani 1999), then the results represented a clear victory for MPH
organisers. Several hundred thousand people took part. Many, tired of waiting
for several hours, forewent the march itself and enjoyed the live music and
giant screens broadcasting the ‘Live8’ concerts from around the world. Despite
the larger than anticipated numbers, policing was friendly, polite and helpful.
Officers lined the march route in ordinary uniforms, devoid of the (intimidatory)
protective equipment that dominated photos of past events in the pre-march
media coverage (see Photo 2). Subsequent press reports of the day were
laudatory (see Fig. 1). The Sunday Herald devoted 15 pages to MPH and ‘Live8’.
A banner headline proclaimed: ‘225,000 March to Say One Thing: We Care’. The
hitherto pessimistic Evening News carried a 12 page supplement on
‘Edinburgh’s historic weekend’ and filled the front page of its Monday edition
with a picture of the march entitled: ‘Voting with their feet’. The leader called
MPH a ‘major success’ and described it as a ‘text-book case of how to manage a
peaceful protest’ (Evening News: 04/07/05).

Not all media attention
was so celebratory,
however, and even the
Evening News was not
uniformly upbeat. Pages 2
and 3 of the above edition
had already transferred
fears to ‘anarchist’
demonstrations to come.
The Police, we were told,
were ready for ‘anything
from bank sit-ins to a
blockade of burning
trucks’ (04/07/05) in the
following few days. The
Sunday Mail went one
better, describing one
incident during MPH as ‘Anarchy in Action’, reporting thugs ‘from mainland
Europe’ attacking police, and claiming that ‘hundreds of innocent passers-by
were caught up in frightening scenes of violence’. Within the story, however,
LBP are quoted as responding to “a minor incident” and continued: ‘we are not
aware of any arrests and we have to praise in general protestors for their good
nature’ (03/07/05). It emerged that sixty “Black Bloc anarchists” were briefly
surrounded on the peripheries of the march, but otherwise there was no
trouble. Almost one quarter of a million people marched, yet there were no protest-related arrests. As the LBP Assistant Chief Constable Dickinson observed:

The biggest public demonstration ever seen in Scotland has just ended with tens of thousands of people expressing their views about world poverty and demanding action. It was a largely peaceful event which took place safely with a mood of camaraderie and a sympathy for the deprived people of the world (Dickinson 02/07/05).

The many shops which remained open conducted business as usual (many with supportive banners in their windows). In the streets leading away from the march people spilled out of cafes, pubs and shops.

The sunshine, picnics, stages and live music meant that the rally resembled a pop concert as much as a protest. This disparity between projected and actual outcomes raises several questions of sociological interest. One line of inquiry obviously pertains to the media and its coverage, but there are also questions about the march itself: Who were the marchers, what did they want, why were police/protestor relations so cordial, and what did the protest achieve? Thorough answers to these questions are beyond the remit of this study, but our survey data, observations and interviews offer some insight. The survey conducted on the march itself explored pre-march claims that there would be an ‘influx’ of protestors into Edinburgh. We asked, therefore: Where protestors came from; what they were protesting for (or against); whether they were affiliated to particular organisations; and which protests they intended to participate in.

Table 4: Where protestors came from:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lothian &amp; Fife</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North/Highlands</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Scotland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern England</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid England</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern England</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our findings from the 524 surveys offer a suggestive ‘snap shot’ of people and their opinions. We had little difficulty in finding local people. Over a third of our respondents (37%) lived in Edinburgh itself, with another fifth (20%) living elsewhere in lowland Scotland. Overall, the majority of our respondents (65%) lived in Scotland. Most of the rest lived in England, notably northern England and London. We were struck by the number of groups who had travelled from
Carlisle, Durham, Derby and elsewhere specifically for MPH. Many of these groups left directly afterwards.

What, though, were they demonstrating for? Several broad patterns of responses emerged: First, many respondents found it difficult to articulate their reasons. Many simply said ‘to make poverty history’ and references to poverty made up around one-third (34%) of responses. Other issues specifically mentioned were fair trade (15%) and third-world debt (12%). Rather surprisingly, given its prominence on the G8 agenda, only 4% of respondents mentioned climate change or ‘the environment’ as motivating their protest. This reflects the MPH campaign focus on the three core issues of debt relief, fairer trade rules and more and better aid, rather than campaigning against the G8 summit as such.

The diversity of demonstrators, however, is revealed by the fact that we did not simply get a parroted version of the MPH manifesto. Many individuals had their own reasons for marching and some had more sophisticated political analyses than others. This diversity was captured in a live weblog posted at 10.15 on the Saturday morning:

At the moment the figure stands at 120,000 marchers and rising ... and it would seem that every person has their own reason for being here. Socialist workers, National Union of Teachers, Christians, Muslims. I even spotted a politician - namely Robin Cook! All here for one reason, to make their voices heard calling to Make Poverty History (Gaunt/Pressureworks).

The march, in other words, was a catch-all affair appealing to people across the board, but there was a pervasive sense of ‘being part of history’ and of ‘making a difference’ (See Photo 3).

The moral imperative was by no means the dominant motif, however, with many respondents marching out of curiosity or excitement. One Edinburgh man in his 50s told us that he had been initially ‘wary of the atmosphere but got caught up in mood and stayed all day’. Other locals insisted that such an event in their city was ‘simply too big to miss’. Despite the concerted efforts that went into organising the rally and the sea of organisational banners and placards represented on it, relatively few of our respondents (34%) claimed to be a member, supporter of, or affiliated (however loosely) to, a campaigning or protest organisation. The range of organisations that were named was exceedingly broad: from the Dissent Network to the Woodcraft Folk, from the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army to ‘sponsoring a child’. Relatively few respondents (about 6%) named membership of (or support for) a political party, whilst rather more (11%)
claimed some kind of Christian affiliation, mirroring the ubiquity of banners from Christian organisations and parishes.

Finally, we asked respondents which (if any) of the other G8-related protests they intended to attend. The intention was to gain an insight into their wider commitment to anti-G8 activism. Most respondents, particularly those living outside Edinburgh, had little knowledge about other protests, and we sometimes found ourselves explaining the nature of the non-MPH events. Overall, three quarters of our sample (73%) intended to attend only MPH. Given that 225,000 attended that protest compared to the 5,000 who demonstrated later at Gleneagles and the smaller attendances at the other protests it might be thought that our survey rather underestimates the proportion only attending MPH.

**Discussion:**

Having provided some background to the march, the protestors and the media coverage, the question is: How should we understand a political event which raised critical issues in the public domain, galvanised thousands of supporters, brought people of all political hues together and conducted a huge and peaceful rally? In this final section we draw on the insights of social movement theory to provide an analysis of MPH. The first thing to note is a striking sense of *déjà vu*. Reading Mayo’s (2005) account of the Jubilee 2000 protests in Birmingham (1998) the similarities are abundant. Given that MPH grew out of the former event the resemblances are unsurprising. Furthermore, MPH’s main constituent groups are those who formed the core of Jubilee 2000, the demands are alike and the *modus operandi* – right down to encircling the capital – have remained the same. The 1998 coalition Director insisted that ‘the world will never be the same again … because of Jubilee 2000’ (Mayo 2005: 172), but MPH resembles nothing more than an inflated version of that campaign. It echoes many of the successes of that movement but all the attendant difficulties as well.

Despite the optimism accompanying both campaigns, the abiding sense of a replay compels a less sanguine analysis. First, though, we should consider MPH’s achievements. The most apparent triumph was the mobilisation of vast numbers of people. Diverse individual affiliations have been accommodated by the adoption of what Della Porta (2005) terms ‘tolerant identities’, stressing unity in diversity in the pursuit of common goals. A significant aspect of any social movement is its impact on wider society (Rao 1987: 235) and MPH galvanised many who would not normally protest. As our survey data – and the disparity in numbers – amply indicate, most marchers had no intention of joining other G8 protests and some had not specifically intended to attend MPH either.

Despite negative coverage the campaign skilfully used media and internet outlets to reach a far wider audience than most protest groups. These modes of communication, as Kolb (2005) observes, are pivotal to increasing turnout and recruiting participants. Coverage is most helpful where journalists sympathise with the goals of a movement. In adopting broad and uncontroversial aims, the
campaign gained the backing of large sections of the media and thus reached a wider audience. This was partly accomplished by reinforcing a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ protestors. MPH spokespeople differentiated between their event and ‘rogue anarchist elements’. As members of a radical G8 mailing list noted beforehand: ‘Already the media is casting “Make Poverty History” as the “good protestors” and Dissent as the “bad”’ (Nightwatcher 2005). This enabled reports to focus on common targets. The contested use of celebrity endorsements was also central to media attention as is evident in the star struck nature of much reporting.

The media, however, was not the only means of recruitment. In 1998, as Mayo notes, marketing tools were employed to ‘sell’ the campaign. Such tactics reached their apogee in 2005. A series of short films – featuring celebrities – were distributed. ‘Make Poverty History’ effectively became a globally recognised ‘brand’. Among the most efficacious means of selling the concept were the white wristbands sold to raise money and awareness. Part fashion accessory, part moral statement, the bands were ubiquitous before, on and after the demonstration. Minimally, at least, such measures required active involvement – buying the band, wearing it in innovative ways, signing petitions, e-mailing or writing to politicians, and writing a message for the billboards that were taken to Gleneagles.

To the extent that supporters became active the attempts at ‘conscientization’ (Freire 1972) were reinforced. Whilst little effort is involved in wearing a wristband, the grass-roots efforts of local faith based organisations, political groups, schools and charities, spread the message in a more personalised and accessible manner. Not only did this encourage sustained participation (as seen in post-march exhortations to keep up the pressure on Governments)3 it also increased the turnout by stressing the family nature of the event - deliberately dissociating it from past violence. The success of this direct approach to recruitment echoes Bennett’s (2005: 225) finding that how people hear about a global justice event is important. He suggests that those whose only information is the popular media are less likely to participate.

Active involvement paid dividends as numerous conversations with marchers suggested a degree of understanding about issues of debt, trade and aid. This reinforces the argument that the MPH campaign was a process of community education (cf. Mayo 2005: 188). The true measure of MPH’s success in this regard may not be known for some time, but the manner in which the Jubilee 2000 constituency was not only retained but enlarged, suggests that the process of conscientization has some lasting impact. Those who not only marched but joined organisations are even more likely to sustain their active involvement. The Jubilee 2000 Coalition comprised 110 organisational members (Mayo 2005), whereas MPH encompasses 500 global institutions (some of whom are coalitions themselves4). The continuity in objectives and participants between the 1998 and 2005 G8 Summits is instructive and offers a response to Della Porta’s (2005: 200) question about the sustainability of ‘tolerant identities’. MPH built on the structures put in place by Jubilee 2000 and indicates that broad interests can provide the platform for lasting coalitions. Any movement, as Diani (2003: 1) highlights, consists of
heterogeneous social networks, but coordinating such a multitude of groups constitutes a significant achievement. MPH members hail from across the globe, from all faiths and none, and from student groups to trade unions.

This brings us back to the MPH participants. Mayo (2005: 191) praised the ‘altruism’ of marchers in Birmingham. That MPH attracted three times as many to Edinburgh testifies both to the impact of the campaign and the determination of supporters. Without entering into debates about the redundancy of the rational actor model (cf. Jasper 1997: 23-9) it is clear that the altruistic intentions of Edinburgh marchers were more questionable. Ignoring the argument that acting morally can make activists ‘feel good about themselves’, there was the recurrent assertion that marchers wanted to be ‘part of history’. The free music, celebrity appearances (tantalisingly unnamed ‘special guests’ were billed to appear) and exhaustive media coverage encouraged people to respond to their moral consciences. Our intention here is not to belittle, but to problematise aspects of the campaign.

Simply dismissing the actions of MPH demonstrators would suggest that peaceful marches - that co-operate with police authorities and politicians - are futile. Colin Fox, Scottish Socialist Party convenor, disagrees:

I think everybody who participated in [MPH] will remember it their whole life. You know for lots of reasons: the size, the enormity of it. It was a protest ‘protest’ at the end of the day. It was a plea for consideration of big, big issues that face the world (Interview 03/08/05).

‘After this weekend’, one MPH blogger opined, ‘enough people will be aware of the issues for the G8 leaders to be always under scrutiny’ (Cripps/Pressureworks 2005). Protest movements are certainly central to the dissemination of new perspectives and moral visions (Jasper 1997: 16), but for all MPH’s successes, dissenting voices were not hard to find. It is clear that the manner of protest has important ramifications, and the fact that MPH resembled a pressure group rather than a political uprising arguably influenced the campaign’s outcomes.

### Depoliticising ‘Poverty’

MPH was the latest in a series of protests designed to put pressure on G8 leaders. Hubbard & Miller (2005) locate anti-G8 protest firmly within the parameters of the Global Justice Movement. The worldwide protests have led to talk of ‘Global Citizens’ and an emerging global civil society (e.g. Mayo 2005). The planetary distribution of MPH’s members – from the Gambian Horse & Donkey Trust to the Latin American Bureau to the Nepal Leprosy Trust – demonstrates the global networks from which protestors emerge. The limited nature of these ties, however, is demonstrated in the fact that whilst MPH marchers may have been thoroughly global in outlook, most were affiliated to, or mobilised by, British organisations and came from (or lived in) Britain. The absence of Southern voices explicitly raised in relation to ‘Live8’, was also true
of MPH in Edinburgh. Most activists, as Tarrow & MacAdam (2005: 123) found, are not ‘rootless cosmopolitans’, but embedded social actors.

The timing and tenor of the campaign lend credence to this finding. It is no surprise that the closest echo of Jubilee 2000 came with the G8’s UK return. MPH, in many ways, was a quintessentially ‘British’ occasion, devoid of the more ‘radically politicised’ aspects of recent protests elsewhere, and meticulously co-ordinated with police and other authorities. Road signs on routes into the capital carried the council’s endorsement for this epitome of consensus politics. This aspect of the day was not lost on participants either:

A more polite crowd of demonstrators could not be found! Hundreds of thousands of people are standing in line patiently for hours waiting for their chance to move forward into the streets of Edinburgh to complete the march. Chants, drums, protest songs all happening in a terribly British queue - complete with cups of tea and plates of chips! (Gaunt/Pressureworks).

The nation-state, as Tarrow & MacAdam (2005) note, remains the paramount power in global politics, and the rally was deliberately targeted at the summit hosts. Part of the impetus behind both protests is that key British politicians are seen as sympathetic to movement aims. As the MPH site insisted:

[MPH] brings together a wide range of organisations that share a common belief that urgent action is needed to eliminate world poverty, that the key moment is now, and that the UK government has a crucial role in making this happen (emphasis added) 5

In keeping with this view, Gordon Brown addressed a Christian Aid rally following the march: ‘We are today seeing Britain at its best, united as one for a great cause’6. He promised that protestors would not be disappointed by the summit and deftly associated himself with the MPH bandwagon. This not only reinforces the national dimension of the rally, but raises questions about the diversity of participants.

The broad church (literally and metaphorically), catch-all approach that attracted so many protestors made for strange bedfellows and depoliticised MPH. As Monbiot (2005a) pointed out, it is not simply that some protagonists sit uncomfortable alongside each other, but that their views are intrinsically opposed. That Bob Geldof and Gordon Brown could jointly adorn the Daily Mail’s front page indicates how little of a threat to power MPH and ‘Live8’ posed. This was no anti-establishment demo; rather than pressurising the G8 leaders the rally was almost a cheerleader for them (cf. Monbiot 2005a). Depoliticisation is further seen in that whilst Socialists, Greens and radical organisations turned out in force, the 500 MPH affiliated organisations refused to allow such parties into their coalition. As Colin Fox told us, MPH organisers ‘were at pains to say they did not welcome the involvement of political with a small “p” groups in it’. As a consequence of its attempt to appeal to all, Fox argued, MPH proved politically ‘pretty pathetic: The idea that [saying] “please” to the G8 leaders was
simply going to change the world [...] [was] very naïve, very shallow’ (Interview 03/08/05).

Perusing the MPH manifesto raises difficult questions: the simplicity of the three main aims does make them easier to spread. To paraphrase a Jubilee 2000 spokesperson it makes ‘poverty a non-technical issue. It’s a justice issue’ (in Mayo 2005: 179). By disregarding the technicalities, however, practical issues are sidelined. Precisely how poverty is to be tackled without redistribution is unclear, yet the ‘r’ word remains absent. Despite all the protestations, the focus on aid, debt and trade - rather than equality, redistribution and justice - resembles charity rather than solidarity. Paring away difficult questions risks trivialising the issues. The close relationship between MPH and ‘Live8’ is particularly problematic. Swathes of ‘protestors’ echoed the meaningless catchphrase ‘pants to poverty’ and sported wristbands in an unthinking critique of issues that demanded a more considered and active response. Devoid of a nuanced analysis the moral crusade becomes a mass campaign to be rid of a ‘bad thing’; a unifying concept that brushes uncomfortable questions under the carpet. The protest numbers might seem to justify the means, but it is worth considering how broad the appeal actually was.

We have noted the largely ‘British’ composition of the rally, but to present this, as Brown does, as a united British front, seems unduly optimistic. The sales pitch of the march surely appeals to all (who doesn’t want rid of poverty?), but the manner in which it was spread limited the audience. MPH, the ‘brand’ was not bought into by everyone. As one protestor noted: ‘everything is branded, white banded - even the homeless guys on the street! We’re seeing some of the most ethical tramps in the world here’ (Cripps/Pressureworks 2005). Pressures on NGOs to adapt to the market in an ever more competitive sphere - and the pitfalls associated with this - have been well documented (Jordan & Maloney 1997). The sales pitch of MPH was sophisticated – reaching out to the ‘yoof gener8ion’ as well as older justice, charity and faith groups – but the sales pitch reinforced the social demographic of the march. The patronising allusion to “ethical tramps” ignores the fact that homeless magazine, The Big Issue, was a committed supporter of the rally (including a white band in its pre-march edition). To many wearing white wristbands, it seems, the poverty to be consigned to history was that in far-flung places in the world, not on the streets of Edinburgh and the rest of the UK.

**Star Struck**

Relentless branding was reinforced by celebrity sponsors. Even where MPH encouraged people to become active and ‘be the star of the show’, the appeal to celebrities was explicit:

But it doesn’t stop there, we want YOU to be the celebrity in all of this, so forget Robbie Williams, Travis, Eddie Izzard and Natalie Imbruglia and use your imagination to become the hottest thing in pants since Peter Kay! 9
Whilst the benefits of media coverage explain this approach there are obvious disadvantages. Celebrities may ‘campaign’ to their own advantage and agenda, deflect attention from the issues, and trivialise the movement. Whilst Jubilee 2000 was seen to have reined in the celebrities and kept issues to the fore, the MPH coalition had less control. Although Edinburgh was the scene of the only protest, media coverage of ‘poverty’ on Sunday July 3 focused on the ‘Live8’ concerts. The News of the World, for example, extolled ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’, and highlighted the ‘emotional moment’ when:

Birhan Woldu, the starving mite seen close to death in famine footage shown at the original Live Aid 20 years ago ... clasped hands with a clearly moved Madonna as the superstar launched into her set (03/07/05).

This haemorrhaging of coverage from poverty to celebrity was further exacerbated when Bob Geldof deviated sharply from the MPH line in his analysis of the Summit. Pulling a rather surprising rabbit from his hat he called it ‘without equivocation the greatest G8 summit there has ever been for Africa’ (Red Pepper 2005). To Colin Fox, Geldof’s volte-face underscored the perils of relying on celebrities: ‘in the last analysis pop stars are pop stars’ (Interview 03/08/05). Being pop stars, furthermore, they dominate media coverage meaning that Geldof’s praise for the summit has overshadowed MPH critiques of the G8 communiqué (cf. Monbiot 2005b). Mayo (2005: 187) argues that some stars (e.g. Geldof) demonstrate long term commitment and have proved effective advocates. Geldof’s misplaced optimism (and subsequent silence) in 2005, raise questions as to whether even ‘committed stars’ are prepared – or equipped - to put issues above self-image. As one MPH insider argued:

Our real demands on trade, aid and debt, and our criticisms of UK government policy in developing countries have been consistently swallowed up by white bands, celebrity luvvies and praise upon praise for Blair and Brown (in Hodkinson 2005).

Hathaway and Meyer (1997: 67-8) suggest that grand coalitions thrive on ‘cooperative differentiation’ – the public assertion of solidarity masking internal differentiation. The mixed messages of the campaign, however, meant that the director of (MPH affiliated) War on Want broke ranks and demanded a ‘more radical response’ to the G8. His organisation also affiliated to G8 Alternatives which advocated “democratic alternatives for a better future” (Hilary 2005). Although MPH was mostly a model of co-operative differentiation, Hilary’s comments and actions raise questions about the utility of an overly tolerant identity. It is apparent that if ‘tolerant identities’ are too inclusive they come unstuck. Whilst Geldof does not represent MPH he is indelibly associated with it in the media imagination, and his comments compound the idea that MPH was too accommodating. When common ground is diluted almost beyond recognition and unaccountable celebrity ‘sponsors’ offer divergent perspectives, differences can preclude co-operation. Hilary’s article also cited the ‘week’s protests’ against the G8 in a manner that presented MPH as something different; a carnival or government sponsored rally.
MPH’s cosy relationship with the UK government, its consensual nature, its composition and even its venue - away from where world leaders were actually meeting – arguably lessened its political impact. Between the march and the summit the bonhomie established with police evaporated as ‘anarchist’ demonstrations were met with a more ‘robust’ response. The concerns voiced by Hilary, and the marked difference in policing at the post-MPH demonstrations, beg the question of whether the sort of pressure exerted by MPH constituents could influence G8 leaders. Monbiot (2005b) highlights the startling disparity between Geldof’s approbation of summit outcomes and the rapidity with which G8 leaders have reneged on their promises. In terms of immediate results MPH did not achieve what it had hoped for and, as one Department for International Development consultant noted, those concessions agreed were in the pipeline already (Personal Communication). Whilst Germany and Italy sought to evade their commitments and the US attempted to tear them up, even Gordon Brown conceded that ‘the extra money they [G8 leaders] had promised for aid and the extra money they had promised for debt relief were in fact one and the same’ (Monbiot 2005b) In response to these revelations, MPH constituents are adopting a more ‘robust’ and critical line, but the summit is over and media attention has moved on.

**Conclusion**

MPH attracted protestors who were not the ‘usual suspects’, gained a high media profile and reached a huge audience. It conducted the largest rally in Scotland’s history in a peaceful and cheerful manner that won over media critics rather than alienating observers. In terms of political results, the MPH analysis of the deal on aid encapsulates its position: ‘While this … is a step forward, it is far from the historic deal that millions around the world have been demanding’.\(^\text{10}\) The faith vested in the UK government has not been repaid and the issues that gave rise to the campaign are still pressing - as graphically illustrated by the famine in Niger. Mobilising a symbolic show of force failed to highlight one of the most fatal consequences of poverty. The lack of progress made at Gleneagles highlighted further fractures in the umbrella alliance as Southern activists, such as Jubilee South, adopted a harder line:

> The multilateral debt cancellation being proposed is still clearly tied to compliance with conditionalities which exacerbate poverty, open our countries further for exploitation and plunder, and perpetuate the domination of the South.\(^\text{11}\)

The fragile unity of the coalition has started to fissure, despite the positives. Social movements are not just about tangible political results; they are attempts to place issues on the agenda, enable the deprived to demonstrate their power, and contest hegemonic ways of seeing the world by propounding an alternate interpretation of social reality (Oommen 1990: 30). MPH is to be applauded for its mobilisation of the previously un-mobilised (although whether this can be sustained remains to be seen), the forcing of issues onto the agenda and the pressure applied on politicians. Social Movements fuel radical politics, as
Giddens notes ‘not just because of what they achieve, but because they dramatise what might otherwise go largely unnoticed’ (1994: 250). Debt, aid and trade cannot, now, be neglected, but if the sum result is that each summit pays lip service to the issues before reneging on any commitments at a later date, then a different *modus operandi* is called for. As Caroline Sande Mukulira, from ActionAid’s Southern Africa programme put it: ‘What Africa needed from the G8 was a giant leap forward, all it got was tiny steps’12. The compromise oriented, consensus based nature of the largest G8 related protest has not paid dividends: making poverty history must be more than just a walk in the park.

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**Notes:**

1  [http://mph.travelscotworld.co.uk/home/homepage.jsp](http://mph.travelscotworld.co.uk/home/homepage.jsp)
3  *Christian Aid News*: Autumn 2005: Issue 29
6  [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4642053.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4642053.stm)
7  [http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/docs/manifesto.doc](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/docs/manifesto.doc)
8  [http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/gener8ion/index.shtml](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/gener8ion/index.shtml)
9  [http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/gener8ion/index.shtml](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/gener8ion/index.shtml)
10  [http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/response.shtml](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/response.shtml)

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