

# G8 RESEARCH PROJECT

This document represents an interim report of our G8 Research project. At this early stage we have decided to produce this necessarily exploratory document for two reasons. First, we want to 'feed back' some of our initial findings to some of the very many kind people who spent time talking to us and sharing their views and opinions. Just as importantly we hope that this document will prompt some of these people to reflect upon their experiences and let us know what they think in retrospect. With this in mind we have set up an e-mail address - [g8research@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:g8research@yahoo.co.uk) - and we would gratefully welcome any comments, personal stories, corrections or criticism! We'll also periodically update our web page at: [http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/research/G8\\_research.htm](http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/research/G8_research.htm)



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## G8 – the background

The G8 ('Group of Eight') began with a meeting near Paris in 1975, where the leaders of France, Japan, the USA, Germany, the UK, and Italy came together to discuss the world recession. They have met annually ever since. The G6 became the G7 when Canada joined these states in 1976 and the G8 with Russia's membership from 1998. G8 Summits have proved the focus of protest, although the violent scenes at Genoa (2001) or Evian (2003) are better remembered than the vibrant and peaceful protests of other recent summits.



### Useful G8 related resources:

- ❑ The University of Toronto's G8 Information Centre maintains a huge resource of material related to the agenda and decisions of the G8 [www.g8.utoronto.ca](http://www.g8.utoronto.ca)
- ❑ On the 2005 summit see the G8 Gleneagles 2005 site [www.g8.gov.uk](http://www.g8.gov.uk)

## G8 – background to the protests

A number of protests were planned to coincide with the G8's Gleneagles summit. These included the culmination of the broad-based campaign to 'Make Poverty History' and a march through Edinburgh on the weekend before the Summit. 'Make



Poverty History' (MPH) was made up of organisations as diverse as the Salvation Army and the British Humanist Association, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Mothers' Union.

"G8 Summits are hugely important if we are to **manage the effects of globalisation**, a task more relevant today than ever before. The G8 is able to help secure political commitment to action on key global issues. It involves the Heads of Government of the major economic powers and their decisions can make a real impact. **The G8 is unique** in bringing together the key like-minded players from Asia, Europe and North America. This small, informal grouping is still capable of setting the agenda thanks to the economic and political weight of its members and their shared commitment to global security and prosperity."  
G8 Gleneagles 2005 *website*

A number of other events were planned in Edinburgh, including an ‘alternative’ summit (bringing together activists groups, NGOs, etc) organised by the G8 Alternatives organisation, a Stop the War movement ceremony naming those killed in the Iraq conflict, and an anti-capitalist ‘carnival’ aimed at disrupting Edinburgh’s financial district.



Other protests outside Edinburgh included a blockade of Faslane nuclear submarine base; a demonstration at Dungavel Detention Centre (where failed asylum seekers, including children, are held pending deportation); and protests at the Gleneagles venue itself.

In addition to these protests ‘Live8’ organised concerts in all G8 member countries as well as South Africa on the weekend before the summit, and a ‘Final Push’ concert at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh as the summit opened. The leading figure in Live8, Sir Bob Geldof, called on a million people to descend on Edinburgh (a city with a population of 430,000) on the opening day of the Summit (Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July), organising a number of publicity stunts to promote this.

Useful protest related resources:

- ❑ Make Poverty History has a large website with links to its member organisations at [www.makepovertyhistory.org/](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/)
- ❑ G8 Alternatives organised an Alternative Summit in Edinburgh and the only ‘official’ protest at Gleneagles itself, Their website is [www.g8alternatives.org.uk/](http://www.g8alternatives.org.uk/)
- ❑ The Dissent! Network was formed in 2003 “to provide a networking tool to co-ordinate radical resistance to the Summit”. Their website is [www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk)
- ❑ See also Indymedia. <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/actions/2005/g8/>



**Our research**

With funding from the University of Edinburgh Development Trust and Development Trust Research Fund we aimed to carry out a small research project looking specifically at the protests surrounding the G8. Our key questions were:

- ❑ How did the Scottish public view the G8 Summit and the attendant protests?
- ❑ What kinds of people chose to protest, and were different kinds of people attending different kinds of protest events?
- ❑ Did the nature and manner of policing differ according to different kinds of protest?
- ❑ Did the experience of the protests match the media coverage of them?

To answer these questions we commissioned two opinion polls of 1,100 Scottish adults through TNS Social; carried out small-scale survey research at the Make Poverty History march (and, to a lesser extent, at subsequent protests); are interviewing senior and ‘front-line’ police officers; and have spoken with protest organisers as well as dozens of ‘ordinary’ (and often extraordinary) protestors on the streets.

**Public opinion**

A central part of our research was a series of questions carried by the TNS Scottish Omnibus survey, a monthly poll of Scottish public opinion. The first of these was carried out in late June before the Summit began.

Our first question asked whether hosting the G8 summit would be a “good thing for Scotland”. By and large people were fairly positive, with over half (57%) agreeing (either ‘strongly’ or ‘a little’) that the summit was a ‘good thing’ for Scotland. Around one-quarter (24%) disagreed.

<b>Overall, having the G8 summit in Gleneagles is a good thing for Scotland</b>	
Strongly agree	<b>24</b>
Agree a little	<b>33</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>16</b>
Disagree a little	<b>12</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>12</b>
Don’t know	<b>3</b>

**The decisions that the world leaders will make at the summit in Gleneagles will change our world for the better**

Strongly agree	<b>6</b>
Agree a little	<b>34</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>21</b>
Disagree a little	<b>21</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>15</b>
Don’t know	<b>3</b>

We also wanted to know whether people felt that the summit would make a difference to the global situation, and our next question asked whether the decisions it made would ‘change our world for the better’. Opinion was fairly evenly divided between those who agreed (‘strongly’ or ‘a little’) that it would (40%) and those who disagreed (36%). It might be

noted, though, that more people *disagreed strongly* than *agreed strongly*.

Respondents were also split on whether the protests surrounding the Summit would “change our world for the better”, although on balance people were more likely to take a negative view. 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%).

<b>The protests surrounding the G8 summit will change our world for the better</b>	
Strongly agree	<b>5</b>
Agree a little	<b>26</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>22</b>
Disagree a little	<b>25</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>19</b>
Don’t know	<b>4</b>

Extensive media coverage suggested that large protests surrounding the G8 would cause grave disruption to life in Edinburgh, Auchterarder (the village next to the Gleneagles Hotel), and beyond. We, therefore, asked respondents whether such protests would cause ‘major disruption’ and whether they were ‘likely to be violent’.

<b>The protests will cause major disruption</b>		<b>The protests are likely to be violent</b>	
Strongly agree	<b>38</b>	Strongly agree	<b>10</b>
Agree a little	<b>36</b>	Agree a little	<b>34</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>10</b>	Neither agree nor disagree	<b>17</b>
Disagree a little	<b>10</b>	Disagree a little	<b>25</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>4</b>	Strongly disagree	<b>10</b>
Don't know	<b>2</b>	Don't know	<b>4</b>

There was considerable belief that the G8 protests would cause major disruption, with almost three-quarters of our respondents (74%) believing 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.



Given the media build-up a number of Edinburgh businesses had employed private security firms, had boarded up city centre premises, and had advised employees to ‘dress down’ so as not to attract undue attention to themselves. Princes Street, Edinburgh’s main shopping boulevard and part of the route of the make Poverty History march was divided by substantial barriers which separated protestors off from the shops and businesses on the north side of the street.

In the event some 225,000 people joined the Make Poverty History march through Edinburgh on a day that will be remembered for its carnival atmosphere, exceptionally well-behaved protestors (there were no arrests) and a low-key and helpful police presence.



The police response to G8 related protests in Edinburgh may be found here: <http://www.lbp.police.uk/g8/index.asp>

**Who ‘made poverty history’?**

Another central part of our research was a ‘snap survey’ of those attending the G8 related protests. Given the media reports of an ‘influx’ of protestors into Edinburgh, many of whom were expected to be prepared for radical (indeed violent) confrontation, we wished to investigate:

**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.**

Here we present our findings for 524 surveyed at the Make Poverty History march. We must emphasise that we make no claims for this survey as a *representative* sample, rather it is an indicative and suggestive ‘snap shot’ of the range and variety of people and opinions represented on the march.

We had little difficulty in finding local people on the Make Poverty History march. Over a third of our respondents (37%) lived in Edinburgh itself, with another fifth (20%) living elsewhere in lowland Scotland. Overall, most of our respondents (65%) lived in Scotland. Most of the rest lived in England, notably northern England. We were struck by the number of groups who had travelled by coach, minibus or car from Carlisle, Durham, Derby and elsewhere specifically for the MPH march. Many of these groups left directly after the march having made their protest.

Where do you live?	%
Edinburgh	37
Lothian & Fife	6
Central Scotland	1
North/Highlands	6
Southern Scotland	2
Northern England	1
Mid England	4
Southern England	1
Wales	1
Northern Ireland	1
Other	2

Make Poverty History march,  
**Why are you here today?** Some answers ....

- To participate in a day that will make a difference
- Fun and frolics and obviously world peace!
- To make the world sit up and listen
- To get out of the house
- I do not agree with the gap between rich and poor. It is not a natural feature of society, it can be changed”
- Because one person can make a difference

What, though, were they demonstrating for? Whilst our analysis of this part of the survey is at an early stage we did discern several broad patterns to responses. First, many respondents found it difficult to put their reasons for marching into words. 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 that it featured prominently and contentiously on the G8 agenda, global climate change was not mentioned particularly frequently: only 4% of our respondents mentioned climate change or ‘the environment’ as a motivation for their

protest. To some degree this probably reflects the fact that the Make Poverty History campaign focused on three core issues (debt relief, fairer trade rules and more and better aid), and people were marching in support of these rather than demonstrating *against* the G8 summit.

Many respondents were also marching out of a sense of curiosity or excitement. One Edinburgh man in his 50s told us that he had initially been “wary of the atmosphere but got caught up in mood and stayed all day”. Other



Photo: Jennifer Fleetwood

local people told us that such an event in their own city was “simply too big to miss”.

Scores of organisations were represented by banner and by placard, yet relatively few of our respondents claimed to be a member of, or affiliated to, a campaigning or protest organisation. In our survey almost two thirds of the respondents (61%) said that they belonged to, or were affiliated to, no such organisations.

The range of organisations named by the remainder was very broad indeed. These stretched 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. On the march itself there were scores of banners from Christian organisations and parishes. In some part this may reflect a declining level of political engagement and participation, but it also reflects well upon the organisational energies of religious bodies.

Finally, we asked respondents which (if any) of the other G8-related protests and events they intended to participate in. For most respondents, particularly those who did not live in Edinburgh, there was a lack of knowledge about protests beyond the Make Poverty History march, and we sometimes found ourselves spending some time explaining the nature of the other protests. Overall, three quarters of our sample (73%) intended to attend only the Make Poverty History march. Given that 225,000 attended that protest compared to the 5,000 who demonstrated at Gleneagles and the smaller attendances at the other protests it might be thought that our survey rather underestimates the proportion attending only the MPH event!



Photo: Aurora Menkee

## Further questions

The next stages of our research will investigate why the enjoyable atmosphere of Make Poverty History had dissipated by Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July when Edinburgh descended into “Bloody Chaos” (*Daily Star*); a “Bloody Riot” (*Daily Mail*); when “Violent protests paralyse city centre” (*Guardian*).

The police had dealt effectively with 225,000 people marching through Edinburgh on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July in a 'softly softly' manner. However, two days later several hundred 'anarchists' participating in a well-publicised (but not officially sanctioned) 'Carnival of Full Enjoyment' elicited a quite different police response. In the evening hundreds of riot police cleared the city centre streets and made 100 arrests. On the following Wednesday the potential 'flashpoint' protest at Gleneagles passed off peacefully and in relatively good humour, although some police and protestors came into confrontation in Edinburgh, Stirling, and the roads around Auchterarder.



We are thus continuing to interview both police and protestors to try to answer some of our remaining questions:

- ❑ **Did the nature and manner of policing differ according to different kinds of protest?**
- ❑ **Did the experience of the protests match the media coverage of them?**

## Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank some of the people who have helped us in our research so far. These include David Alexander; Evan Alston; Ellen Asquith; Ross Bond; Emma Davidson; Lou Evans; Eleisha Fahy; Jennifer Fleetwood; Iona Gorringer; Gill Haddow; Fran Hepburn; Ruth Lewis; Aurora Menkee; Lorraine Murray (TNS Social); Robin Naumann; Roddy Ross (Tayside Police); Jo Thompson; John Vine (Tayside Police); Fraser White (Tayside Police) and all the other people we've met along the way. We also thank the hundreds of people who consented to be surveyed at the various protests and rallies.



Photo: [www.indymedia.org.uk](http://www.indymedia.org.uk)