

THE EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

RESISTANCE to the institutions, projects and policies of neo-liberalism is nothing new. As the 1970s drew to a close and the repercussions of the Washington Consensus began to be felt across the world, resistance became the logical response. Riots broke out in Ecuador in 1987 and Algeria in 1988. In response to the implementation of IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), strikes swept across Benin in 1989. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of West Berlin against the 1988 IMF and World Bank Summit, and throughout the 1990s, tens of thousands resisted the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam in India - a World Bank sponsored mega-project. These are but a few examples. Indeed, resistance to neo-liberalism is as old as this most recent strategy of capital is new.

However, over the last decade we've seen the emergence of a qualitatively different form of resistance to neo-liberalism. A form of 'network resistance' to capitalism which, in many ways, is unprecedented.

THE INSPIRATION OF 'ZAPATISMO'

This new network resistance, sometimes referred to as a 'movement of movements', was born on 1st January 1994 - the day on which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was due to pass, unnoticed into effect.

As the sun rose on the new year, 2,000 indigenous people, calling

themselves the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) seized control of seven cities in Chiapas, Mexico. Armed partly with nothing more than rifle-shaped sticks and toy guns, they released prisoners, set fire to police headquarters, appropriated weapons which they found there, occupied town halls, secured major roads and declared war on *neoliberalismo*.

The uprising, motivated primarily by NAFTA's removal of land rights secured in 1917 by the Mexican Revolution, marked the beginning of a new era of global struggle. The language in which the Zapatistas spoke, demanding dignity, democracy and autonomy, was worlds away from the Marxist-Leninist doctrines which had dominated the struggles of previous decades. They were not hoping to seize state power. Nor were they fighting for secession. They weren't anarchists, communists, socialists or national liberationists. The Zapatistas reposed revolution as a question, rather than an answer. "Walking," they say, "we ask questions."

Support for the Zapatista uprising, and the hope which it symbolised, had won the support of Mexican civil society, and of social movements worldwide. Enormous pressure was put upon the Mexican government and after 12 days of fighting, a cease-fire was declared. Keen to find out more about the struggle, and to offer their support, people asked how they could help. The reply came that, for the Zapatistas, solidarity meant people making their own revolutions in ways which were relevant to their own lives. They argued that the fight for a new world, which would embrace the dignity of all, would

need to be plural and diverse. Indeed, it was a fight for a world in which many worlds were possible.

A MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS

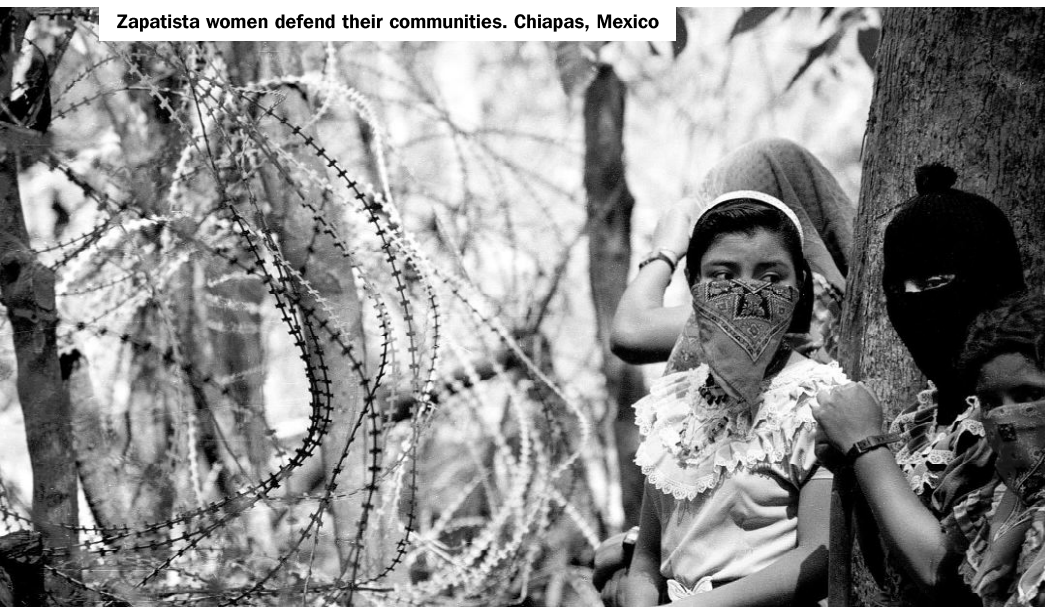
If anyone had doubted the inspirational impact of the uprising, and of *Zapatismo* on the world's social movements, those doubts were shattered in the summer of 1996 as 6,000 people gathered deep in the Lacandón Jungle of Chiapas for the first Intercontinental Encuentro (or, Encounter) for Humanity and Against Neo-Liberalism. Responding to an invitation from the Zapatistas, people from every continent gathered for eight days to discuss politics, economics, society, culture and identity. Ideas, analyses and experiences were swapped inside giant conference centres built by Zapatista communities deep inside the conflict zone.

One year later, in the summer of 1997, thousands converged once more for the second Intercontinental Encuentro, this time spread over four locations within the Spanish State. Much like the first event, the Encuentro was seen as a huge success in providing a forum for much needed dialogue between the world's social movements. Yet those in attendance had already begun to desire more. They wanted this dialogue and exchange of inspiration to continue and - importantly - for this to translate into action which would mutually reinforce day-to-day struggles worldwide.

A three day meeting following the second Encuentro resulted in an invitation being issued for the world's

"We declare: That we will make a collective network of all our particular struggles and resistances. An intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism. An intercontinental network of resistance for humanity..."

Zapatista women defend their communities. Chiapas, Mexico



social movements to attend the founding conference of Peoples' Global Action (PGA) - a network intended to strengthen and develop the tentative links which had been developed through the Encuentros - in Geneva, Switzerland in February 1998. It was here, only a few kilometres from the headquarters of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), that PGA was born. After days of discussion between representatives of the Indian Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS), Movimento Sem Terra - the Brazilian landless peasants' movement, Maori from New Zealand, indigenous movements from South and Central America and activists from Europe, North America and Australia, a basis for co-operation was established in the form of a set of 'hallmarks'. It was agreed that the network would be open to all of those who agreed upon the importance of working in a decentralised and non-hierarchical manner, who recognised the importance of the principles of autonomy, who rejected the principles of 'free' trade (this developed into a more general rejection of capitalism at the second global conference one year later) and who were committed to the use of direct action as a means of achieving social change.

PGA came into being at a time when 'globalisation' was a word on everybody's lips. NAFTA and a number of other regional trade agreements had recently come into effect. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was being discussed, and the fifty year old General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) had just been formalised into an institution, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) - a multilateral body with the power to force the removal of protectionist barriers upon member states and to sanction those which resisted. As such, it appeared

logical that PGA, whilst embracing a wide range of struggles, would focus upon the co-ordination of resistance to the WTO and other bi- and multi-lateral institutions.

THE ACCELERATION OF STRUGGLE IN THE UK

Whilst the Zapatista uprising, the Encuentros and the formation of PGA had been developing global networks, a similar process of consolidation was underway in the UK.

In Britain, a direct action movement had emerged and grown in strength throughout the 1990s. Thousands had become involved with the anti-roads movement, most famously resisting developments such as the road through Twyford Down, the M11 Link Road in East London and the Newbury Bypass. Thousands of others had taken part in Reclaim the Streets (RTS) parties around the country. The practical solidarity which had been offered to the striking Liverpool Dockers and other workers in struggle, along with the direct confrontation with the state experienced by those involved in resisting the road building programme had served to radicalise the movement. By the mid/late-1990s the beginnings of an anti-capitalist movement could begin to be seen.

At around the same time as social movements gathered in Geneva for the founding conference of PGA, an invitation was issued by people who had been involved in the recently disbanded Class War Federation for un-dogmatic,



anti-authoritarian groups and individuals to attend a Reclaim May Day event in Bradford on May 1st 1998. The event, attended by several hundred, was widely regarded as a success and is seen as the first time during which the radical ecological direct action movement and the traditional anarchist movement in the UK really began to co-operate.

Amongst other things, the Conference served as an opportunity to network the actions against the rapidly approaching Birmingham G8 (Group of Eight, most industrialised nations) Summit which were being prepared by a few groups around the UK, including London RTS - who at that time were European Convenors of PGA.

A GLOBAL FIRST

In May 1998, only three months after the founding conference of PGA, actions against the G8 erupted across the globe. Having noted the upsurge of radical resistance in the UK and

Barrio assembly. Buenos Aires, Argentina



“This intercontinental network of resistance, recognising differences and acknowledging similarities, will search to find itself with other resistances around the world...”

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

elsewhere, the Summit was relocated at short notice from its original location in the centre of Birmingham to a more tranquil, countryside location. Nevertheless, whilst tens of thousands under the banner of Jubilee 2000 surrounded what would have been the Conference Centre, demanding an end to the so-called 'Third World's' debt, thousands of others took part in an enormous Reclaim the Streets party in Birmingham's city centre. Hundreds had dressed as clowns, laughing at the absurdity of the G8 and tossing the odd custard pie at cops foolish enough to wander through the middle of the crowd.

As the street party drew to a close, a level of militancy not previously seen amongst those taking part in street parties began to be shown. Barricades began to be built, the lines of riot police forming around the party were pelted with rotting vegetables from a nearby market and a few banks were 'redesigned' as the party-goers were herded out of the city centre.

Meanwhile, street parties were being held in over thirty other countries simultaneously, including the US, Australia, Canada, Israel and Estonia. In Prague, the biggest mobilisation since the Velvet Revolution in 1989 brought thousands onto the street, whilst in Hyderabad, India 200,000 farmers called for the death of the WTO and 50,000 peasants and unemployed workers took to the streets of Brasilia.

The following day, as the Second Ministerial of the WTO met in Geneva, the city's streets exploded. Thousands from across Europe had gathered. Bank windows were smashed, the WTO Director General himself had his car turned over, and Geneva experienced

three days of the heaviest rioting it had ever seen.

Of course, the mobilisations in Birmingham, Geneva and elsewhere were not perfect. Divisions began to emerge within the movement in the UK around the issue of militancy. In Geneva, the levels of repression unleashed by the state exceeded all expectations. Many people were prevented from even entering Switzerland, others were arrested and deported. However, by and large, these first PGA-inspired Global Days of Action were considered a success. For the first time, hundreds of thousands of people across the globe had identified the commonalities of their struggles - and importantly, respected and begun to try to understand the differences - and taken action together. Harry Cleaver, an academic at Austin University in Texas, and active in Zapatista solidarity movements, once wrote, "In a very real sense, the Zapatista movement emerged as a tentative and transitory solution to precisely the problem which confronts us everywhere: how to link up a diverse array of linguistically and culturally distinct peoples and their struggles, despite and beyond those distinctions, how to weave a variety of struggles into one struggle that never loses its multiplicity." By May 1998, this process of weaving a fabric of global struggle had well and truly begun.

It was in this position of strength, with increased communication and co-operation between groups and movements both locally and globally, and the success of the anti-G8 and WTO mobilisations, that discussions began in the UK about a Global Day of Action on June 18th 1999. But that's another story...

*For an inspirational overview of the emergence of the global anti-capitalist movement from 1994-2003 see: *We Are Everywhere* by Notes from Nowhere (Verso, 2003): www.weareeverywhere.org

*For more about the first *encuentro*, see: *Zapatista Encuentro: Documents from the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism* (Seven Stories Press Open Media Series, 1998).

*For an interesting article about the use of new communication technologies by anti-capitalist networks, see: 'Computer-Linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism' by Harry Cleaver (1999).

*For access to a huge range of Zapatista information, including an archive of EZLN communiqués and links to email lists, go to the Chiapas 95 website:

www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/chiapas95.html

Alternatively: www.ezln.org

*For two histories of resistance to neoliberalism see: 'A Brief History of Resistance to Structural Adjustment' by George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici in *Democratizing the Global Economy* by Kevin Danaher (Ed.) (Common Courage Press, 2001). Or *States of Unrest: Resistance to IMF Policies in Poor Countries* by World Development Movement (2000)

*The original RTS Call for the Birmingham action, and a report on the street party can be found at: <http://rts.gn.apc.org/birm2.htm>

*A pamphlet produced by some of the organisers of the Birmingham Street Party, reflecting on the action, can be found via the Dissent! website: www.dissent.org.uk



Peoples' Global Action: We Are Everywhere!

"This intercontinental network of resistance is not an organising structure; it doesn't have a central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who resist"

- Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, closing remarks at the 1996 Encuentro.