



Desire for

Women on the frontline of global resistance

change

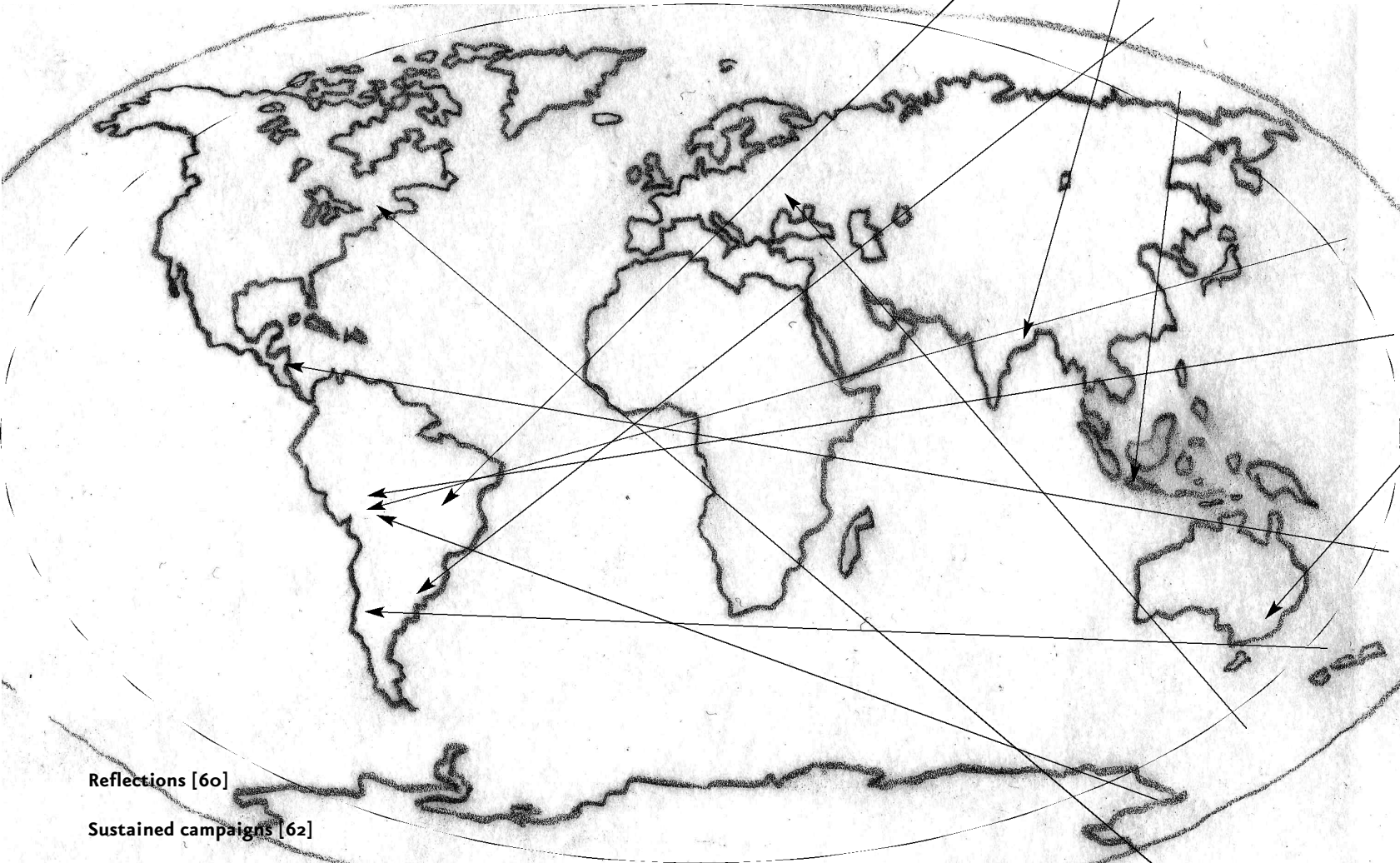


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Editorial

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While economic globalisation affects us all, the manifestations of it are different, as are the responses to it. We believe that the first step towards building a movement that's as transnational as capital is finding common ground.

This collection of interviews with women was recorded in Cochabamba, Bolivia at the 3rd international conference of the People's Global Action (PGA) network in September 2001. It covers women's involvement in a broad range of struggles: from culture-jamming in Australia, to coca-growing trade unions in Bolivia, from autonomous land settlers in Brazil, to radical environmentalists from the Ukraine. Political influences range from liberation theology to radical ecology, Marxism to anarchism, feminism to syndicalism and back again.

The main themes include leadership versus horizontal organising; the role of women in revolutionary struggle; the personal road to radicalisation; the potentials and pitfalls of the PGA network; resistance to "savage capitalism"; and visions of a better world.

We chose to do 12 interviews, solely with women for a number of reasons. Firstly, we are women activists

ourselves, based in the UK, and we wanted to find out more about the experiences of other women engaged in political struggle around the world.

Secondly, following on from the first European PGA conference in Milan, and the gender conference in Panama in 2001, we knew that gender would be a central theme in Cochabamba. Despite a valiant attempt to integrate the gender perspective into the inner workings of PGA, men have dominated the conferences, gender continues to be an add-on, and in the past there have been instances of sexual harassment. Although there was a genuine effort to translate the idea of gender equality into practice in Cochabamba, women were once again silenced. This is our attempt to redress the balance.

Thirdly, we are highlighting the fact that women from all corners of the world are working towards freedom from exploitation and domination. We hope this will inspire women to act, and re-ignite those women who have found it virtually impossible to balance a politically active life with the demands of family and finances.

It can be difficult to fully grasp what PGA is, what it does and even who is part of it. But these interviews show that, however contradictory and chaotic this network is, it involves real people and has a direct effect on people's struggles around the world.

Given that the meeting took place in Bolivia, the majority of participants were from Latin America, which is reflected in the selection of interviewees. We would like to have had more of a balanced representation of women from all five continents.

There are plenty of reports about the discussions, workshops and decisions made at the conference (these are mostly on the PGA website, or contact us for printed versions), which is why the following pages only touch superficially on these.

It has taken almost a year to put the book together because, symptomatic of the PGA network as a whole, we live in different parts of the UK. We have to make a

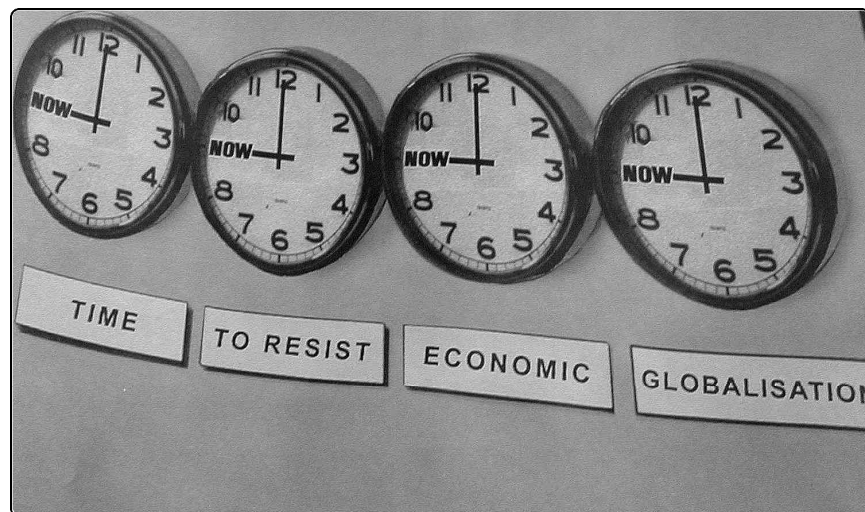
living and are involved in our own neighbourhood revolutions, all of which made meeting up a logistical feat. However, as global capitalism was alive and well as we went to press, we figured it was all still relevant.

We should also mention that we've shamelessly reproduced other peoples' writing, so if you do recognise your words, we'd like to thank you and, as editing is a sensitive business, hope we've done justice to your writing.

Just a technical point to bear in mind as you settle down to read this from cover to cover. The depth of the interviews depended greatly on language and translation possibilities. In some cases, English and Spanish were people's second or third languages - for both us as interviewers and for most of the interviewees. Instead of excluding women who didn't speak our languages, we have included their accounts, on the basis that although there is less detail, the message is still clear.

We would like to be able to publish this collection in Spanish too, so please get in touch if you can help with producing a translation. Any profits made from the sale of this booklet will go towards a Spanish reprint and towards a PGA travel fund, to enable people from the South and Eastern Europe to get to PGA meetings. The full text can be downloaded from the PGA website (www.agp.org), and is anti-copyright for non-commercial purposes.

The main thanks, of course, goes to all the women we interviewed, and to the proof-readers and Karen for design and layout.





Peoples' Global Action in a nutshell

People's Global Action (PGA) is a network for spreading information and coordinating actions between grassroots movements around the world. These diverse groups share the same opposition to capitalism, and commitment to direct action and civil disobedience as the most effective form of struggle. PGA grew out of the international Zapatista gatherings in 1996 and 1997, and was formed as a space for direct and unmediated contact between autonomous groups.

The first conference took place in 1998, when movements from all continents met in Geneva and launched a worldwide coordination of resistance against the global market economy and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Later that year, hundreds of coordinated demonstrations, actions and street parties

took place on all five continents, against the meeting of the G8 and the WTO ministerial meeting. From Seattle to Genoa, many of the groups and movements involved with PGA have been a driving force behind the global anti-capitalist mobilisations.

A second international conference took place in Bangalore, India in 1999 and the third in Cochabamba, Bolivia 2001. There have been regional conferences in Latin America, North America, Asia and Europe, and three caravans of movements: the Intercontinental caravan, the Colombian Black Communities tour and the Peoples' caravan from Cochabamba to Colombia.

PGA is not an organisation and has no members. However PGA aims to be an organised network. There are contact points for each region, who are responsible for disseminating information and convening the international and regional conferences; an informal support group that helps with fundraising; a website, numerous email lists; and a secretariat.

The basis of unity and political analysis is expressed in the constantly evolving manifesto and hallmarks. See www.agp.org for more background on PGA, its organisational principles and the manifesto in full.



Hallmarks

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism, and all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation.
2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.
3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker.
4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximise respect for life and oppressed people's rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism.
5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy.

Hallmark #4 was changed in Cochabamba to remove the word "non-violent". Non-violence has very different meanings in India (where it means respect for life) and in the West (where it means also respect for private property). The North American movement felt that the term could be understood to not allow for a diversity of tactics, or even contribute to the criminalisation of part of the movement. The Latin American organisations said that "non-violence" seemed to imply a rejection of huge parts of the history of resistance.

Non-violence has to be understood as a guiding principle, relative to the particular political and cultural situation. Actions which are perfectly legitimate in one context can be unnecessarily violent (contributing to brutal social relations) in another.



Setting the Scene:

The Third International PGA Conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia – September 2001

THE PLACE:

Cochabamba, the third largest city in Bolivia, is best known as the "city of eternal spring". But as Oscar Olivera, a factory worker and spokesperson for La Coordinadora (the Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life) reminded us at the beginning of the conference, it wasn't the pleasant climate that made this highland city the perfect location for a meeting of grassroots groups from all over the world. The previous year, Cochabamba became a key symbol of the struggle against global capitalism, when tens of thousands of local people took to the streets against the privatisation of their water supply by the US transnational Bechtel... and won!

Consequently, Cochabamba is a politicised town. As well as graffiti on the walls reading, "the water is ours, damn it!" and the anarchy-feminist graffiti of 'Mujeres Creando', (women creating) murals around the streets depict cultural symbols of indigenous resistance - like the coca leaf, an avaricious uncle Sam, and Aymara Indian heroes ("long live the coca leaf, death to the Yankis"). With the conference beginning only days after the attacks on the Twin Towers, local groups of activists set up display boards on the main square, with front page photos of the attacks and slogans such as "Imperialist Yankees: what goes around comes around". Anti-American feeling was very palpable.

THE PEOPLE:

The incredible diversity of groups who make up the PGA network is one of its most striking aspects. Almost 250 people travelled from over 40 countries to the gathering in Bolivia. This included representatives of some of the strongest social movements from all five continents, such as the Ecuadorean peasants confederation (CONFEUNASSC), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the two hosts of the conference, Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba (the coca-

growers union), and the National Federation of Domestic Workers of Bolivia (FENAETROB).

From Asia, there were representatives of the Indian National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and of BKU, the national farmers federation, the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform from Sri Lanka (MONLAR), and a representative of the Nepali peasants association with over 10 million members.

As a result of visa restrictions and due to a lack of links, there was an obvious under-representation of social movements from both Africa and the Middle East. However, four delegates from the new popular movements in South Africa - landless peasants, the Forum Against Privatisation, and urban struggles against evictions and service cut-offs - were able to make it.

There was also a strong presence of indigenous peoples: Quiché of Guatemala, Kuna of Panama, Mapuche of Chile and Argentina, Quechua and Aymara from the Andean region, Quichua from Ecuador and Maori from Aoteroa.

Many of the Brazilian and Argentinian delegates were from a new network of young, mostly urban organisations that have specifically organised around Global Days of Action such as May 1st or around the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Equivalent in many ways to these groups were those present from Europe, North America and Australia, who have mobilised on the streets of London, Genoa, Barcelona and Davos. Activists came, for example, from Ya Basta! in Italy, the Movement of Global Resistance (MRG) in Catalonia and the Swiss anti-WTO co-ordination.

THE MOOD POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH:

The repressive new world order that the USA has justified by the attack in New York was immediately evident. There had already been some police pressure on people organising the conference, and a visit by Interpol.

After the attack, the Bolivian government practically sealed the border for PGA and the governor of the province declared to the press that the PGA delegates were all "potential terrorists" and had organised the riots in Europe and North America. The US ambassador publicly threatened Evo Morales, the leader of the Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba, for having dared to simultaneously condemn the terrorist attack and the state terrorism practised by the USA in Iraq, Colombia, etc. The first day of the conference was a little tense...

THE INTERVIEWS:

In between long assembly discussions, workshops, mealtimes, bouts of diarrhoea, chicha (local home-brew) drinking and salsa dancing, and on a few hours sleep, we managed to find some time to tape the following interviews. On the first day of the conference, all our recording equipment was stolen. This meant that we weren't able to have conversations with all the women we wanted to. These twelve interviewees are only a handful of the amazing and inspiring women we met in Cochabamba.

Below: Hazel & Mia doing an interview, Right: Cochabamba woman serving hot drinks in front of an anti-yankee mural





Ivania Network of Autonomous Groups, Brazil

Ivania Maria is 39 and has two sons. An ex-nun radicalised by Liberation Theology, she rejected the politics of the Left to form an autonomous group of rural ecologists, part of a loosely affiliated wider network of autonomous de-centralised social movements from northeast Brazil. She worked initially with women abandoned by their husbands ("widows of living men") and moved on with them to organise land occupations. She distinguishes their group from other landless movements in Brazil by their belief in non-hierarchical forms of organisation and rejection of land ownership. She works with rural farmers to cultivate a more ecologically sensitive relationship with the land, moving from settlement to settlement with her two sons. (This interview was conducted in Portuguese with translation into Spanish.)

How did you get involved in political action?

From the beginning? I have peasant origins, I was born in the countryside but as there is only school up until Primary, especially in the northeast of Brazil, I had to leave the countryside very young to go to study in the city. I joined the church and it was

there that we formed a group of young people, and began to reflect on Liberation Theology and Paulo Freire. I was a nun at the time, and I was given the option of leaving the convent and going to work on the outskirts [low-income areas] with three other *compa eras*, who were also nuns.

It was then that we saw that the Church did not correspond with what we wanted to struggle for. The Church was not the path we wanted to follow. In the Church we did have a degree of self-reflection, but only up to a point, and we didn't manage to break with the patriarchal structures or models.

So we began to act, building the Workers Party in Brazil. (The Party was two years old already, but in our region it was only just beginning.) We didn't stay long in the party as we realised this wasn't what we wanted either. We became disillusioned with the Party structure, after we had been in the countryside and had contact with rural workers.

So then we organised the movement with rural workers. That was more or less 16 years ago. This was a time of great conflict in the Sertao Central of the northeast, and also a very sad time because the conflict was accompanied by drought and hardship which brings a lot of misery and a lot of hunger - as in the present day.

What kind of work did you do?

When we first arrived, we began a focused discussion about the situation for women, and for women as rural workers. This is because we had many *compa eras* who were widows of living husbands. It happens a lot in the northeast, that men go south in search of work and never return, and yet the whole community, the church and their families, demand that their wives remain faithful.

We had to use new methods and be creative, to find a way for women to love themselves again, to recover their self-esteem. We had to find new dynamics to get out of this situation, to overcome it

instead of learning to live with it. Even those *compa eras* who were afraid to take part realised that by participating they would be able to take control of their lives, but that they would go through a lot of pain at the same time. They were afraid to participate because they had to break with and confront that model of society imposed by the church and by everybody else.

We explored new ways of working. I couldn't even write and I began to write. All this happened as a way to enable the women widows to find a way to speak, because they would not speak at first. I couldn't draw either, but I began to draw. We also used clay, mud to express what we were feeling. Mud and clay are things which are experienced first hand. The houses are made of mud, floors are made of "beaten mud". We washed clothes on a river-bank that was also made of mud. The idea came up that as they did not go out to attend meetings and that everything was work, work, work, we decided to wash clothes with them. We started to play with mud, to express what we were feeling, to make dolls, to destroy the house that is overwhelming me (literally, "crushing my head").

As a result of this work, some *compañeras* are now autonomous and independent. From this starting point, we passed on to more daring actions, like the land occupations. I had no sons then. There was some land where these *compa eras* who were "widows of living husbands" lived. They built a shack for me and we began to work on the land together. After a while the land was not enough to go round and we organised the occupation of a larger piece of land. But that was after doing political work and having worked on the land for a time.

You occupy a piece of land after you have managed to establish a relationship with the land, after getting an analysis of the global situation, an understanding of the way things are and a political awareness.

What work do you do on land occupations?

The settlement where I am at the moment is two years old. We were in another before that. As we

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Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology, a term first used in 1973 by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Roman Catholic priest, is a school of thought among Latin American Catholics, according to which the Bible demands that the church concentrate its efforts on liberating the people of the world from poverty and oppression. Latin American priests in the latter half of the 20th century realised that most of their parishioners lived in grinding, abject poverty and saw the church as one of the few viable community organisations. Inspired by Marxist ideas, radical

priests, nuns and lay-workers began to engage in the struggle for social justice using grassroots organising methodology. Their support for revolutionary movements and their criticisms of traditional church institutions has won them fierce opposition from conservative factors in the Roman Catholic church. However they are still, paradoxically, part of the colonial legacy which was responsible in the first place for the decimation of indigenous cultures, and set in place the structures of poverty in Latin America.

don't want titles to the land or credits for houses, everybody builds the houses together. When we leave a settlement and go to another, we leave the house for the next family to arrive. And when you arrive at another settlement, they receive you with a house that has been constructed collectively.

It's my choice to travel between communities. I go with my family. Sometimes I go with other workers or families that want to have this experience. There are people who stay. I choose to experience what is going on in the other settlements and to foster a new kind of relationship with the land. We don't have many means of sharing our experiences with other settlements and it is dangerous to be swallowed up by human society, so we do this to help and to share experiences with other communities.

We don't arrive saying that we are ecologists. This is something that the workers themselves begin to understand and adopt. They realise that the culture of destroying the earth, of slash and burn techniques and so on, is something that is imposed and destructive.

They start to change and it's a slow process. First you have to show what ecology is, and they have to

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understand it. We work with children, women and men on the idea that everything, from the micro-organism in the earth to a horse, has a different value to the one it is given by society.

I began to travel from place to place after we researched the first droughts in the region. We began in the settlements in the driest region, where children die of hunger and thirst. We carried out the investigation over a year and then we went to another settlement and did the same. From there

the idea was born to go from settlement to settlement.

When they started going on about this story of celebrating 500 years since the discovery of Brazil, we began to protest against 500 years of lies and domination. Two years before the anniversary, we collected a type of informal literature "de cordel", which used to be a way for workers to communicate with each other by writing in verse and stretching out the papers in ropes for display at fairs. It was a way to recover the history of people's struggle.

What are the aims of the group?

Let me see if I can explain it. One of the objectives of the group is not to be centralised. We discussed this and decided it by consensus after many years of self-critique and internal reflection, years of trying to build a different society.

One of the objectives today, in the present time which extends back into the past and forward into the future, is to develop ways of life, attitudes toward life, which enable people to establish a new relationship between each other and between themselves and the land. We understand that the Earth is not the heritage of any group or even of the landless who occupy the land, nor of proprietors or big landowners. It is the heritage of humanity.

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One of our objectives is to live autonomously on the land. And this is one of the big differences that we have with Movimento Sem Terra ("Landless Movement- MST) today. We have a great divergence with them because of this belief of ours. Because when you occupy land, through the Agrarian Reform, the ministry gives you the right to receive a title as the owner of the land and so you stay in a

Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Paulo Freire (1921- 1997) was an educator from Northeast Brazil, home to the country's largest concentration of rural population, with the lowest living standards in Brazil. He practised a new theory of "liberating education", a way to give the dispossessed the tools to view the world critically, and to transform the self and oppressive power relations. The methodology he developed was considered so threatening that he was forced

out of Brazil for 20 years and it has since spread all over the world. You hear the word "concientizacion" frequently in Latin America. The translation of "awareness" or "consciousness raising" goes some way towards explaining it, but it refers specifically to learning to perceive social, economic and political contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.

relationship with the state, which finances your work on the land. This is why there is no longer a free relationship between you and the land, as this relationship is mediated by commerce . You are accountable to the state that pays for production.

How is your group structured?

We are autonomous and decentralised. When we criticised the structure of the Party, we beheaded the leaders. So we start with the following principle: in our country and in others, leaders are reproducing society's values, despite having worked on representation, and run too high a risk of being corrupted.

There are 15 people in the group I am in at the moment. In the settlement there are 37 people. It has grown but there are problems with distance- it is very isolated.

Do you remember any actions you have organised with the group which have been particularly successful?

The last occupation we did was on the land of a powerful landowner. We were about 50 families. In the process of preparing the occupation we began to discuss how we were going to make decisions in such a way that there were no leaders and we would all have a vote in the decision making process. This occupation was done by Movimento Sem Terra (MST)

and the rural workers union from that area. When we began to criticise their way of working, the MST and the union pulled out and took the families they had brought away with them. And so there were only nine families.

We were very sad because we had been preparing for a long time - sometimes even for a year. MST don't work on this process of transformation, of changing the relationship with the land. So we

decided to do it anyway. There were three single mothers left, including me with my two sons. To be more precise it was two single mothers, one widow of a living husband and six other families. One woman was pregnant. We got a lorry to carry the most

necessary things - hammocks, food. We didn't know what we were going to find. There could even be police or gunmen and we didn't know how long they would fight. The lorry took us up to our route and then we walked from 11 until six in the morning, through dense vegetation.

When we reached a riverbank, we built our shacks. We were really very tense because there is a

big difference between relying on 50 families for your security and to be only nine families. You have to mount guard, look for water. We were very vulnerable.

The following day, when they realised that we were there, the owner of the *hacienda* arrived with various gunmen and surrounded us, and the police surrounded us too. There we were, we had two *compa eras* on guard and two other *compa eros*. Everyone else stayed inside their houses or hidden in the bushes. We had planned it for the boys to make lots of noise with tins and saucepans, to try to give the impression that there many people in the huts.

The police said that they were going to come in to our compound and we said: "No, you 're not coming in." We had to be very firm and show a lot of courage. We had had an assembly where we had decided that we would not let them enter.

They took a step forward, saying that they were going to invade. With our faces full of determination, we said that we would not be responsible for the consequences. We said there were many families there, determined to defend the land that they had occupied and that if there had to be deaths, they would be on both sides. Then we saw that they were having misgivings.

We said that we were determined, that we hadn't come here to risk our lives, but that if they wanted to come in, we were prepared to die. If they killed, they would also die. They left and then we began to shout. We had a set of pistols and shot a few times into the air.

There was a reporter there who started to commentate, saying that we were all mad and had nothing to lose, that we were armed, that there were many of us, that we were very dangerous and prepared to do anything. Thanks to this we escaped a massacre. We heard shots around us, but they didn't come near.

But it so happened that this land belonged to a very influential landowner. He had links with Members of Parliament, with senators. He had a lot of influence with the commissions who drew up the statutes for the agrarian reform in Brazil. It was the

eve of the elections in Brazil. We thought they must be waiting until the elections were over so they could carry out a massacre. The landowner went to the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCRA) to ask for the land to be reintegrated, saying that the *hacienda* was not big enough to apply agrarian reform. So INCRA gave the rights to the owner's family because they said he had inheritors and so the land could not be expropriated.

So INCRA came to negotiate with us, as we had lied to them, saying that we were many families. We negotiated going to another farm. We had no food and we did not have enough people to work in order to survive. They gave us a choice between three different farms. We checked out each one of the three.

They treated us with respect because they thought there were lots of us. They took us to see the land, for us to choose which one we liked the best. When we accepted one of them, we were worried because, how were we going to tell them there were only nine families?

When you negotiate with INCRA, you have the right to transportation to take the families to the land. It was interesting because, at the time of negotiating, the president of INCRA asked us how many trucks we needed to transport all the families. We looked at each other and told him that we would have to discuss it with the assembly, because there were many families who were not present at this meeting for fear of the gunmen and repression and violence.

So when we got back there after the meeting we died laughing- we were only nine families! And so we told them, "Look, almost everyone has gone, there are only nine families left, but even so we are going to resist until the end and we want a truck for these nine families".

It was funny because when we passed by the doorway of the house of the landowner, which was bristling with gunmen, in a little lorry headed for the city, there were only nine families, and they were mad with rage because they had expected a whole procession of lorries.

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Rural workers and the landless

Although there has been massive rural to urban migration in Brazil, nearly 40 million people still live in the countryside, and another 10 million live in towns with a population under 20,000. There are also signs of urban to rural migration as a result of exhaustion of employment and income opportunities in large cities.

Many of the inhabitants of the countryside are rural workers in agriculture, with permanent or, more typically, seasonal employment, particularly in harvesting, an activity which also involves women and

children. Millions of rural workers are landless because land tenure is extremely concentrated in Brazil where less than 3% of the population owns two-thirds of Brasil's arable land. In the face of slowness of official land reform, they began to invade unproductive properties in the 1980s.

As a result of their organization and massacres of their activists in Rondônia and Pará, they entered the political limelight, and land reform was placed high on the political agenda.

Movimento Sem Terra

The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement is one of the largest social movements in Latin America with over a million members. One of the founding groups of the PGA, it has facilitated occupations by hundreds of thousands of landless peasants, now living in 1,600 settlements around Brazil. MST also run education programmes and save organic seeds, while resisting the introduction of genetically engineered crops to Brazil and fighting neo-liberal economic policy.
[www.mstbrasil.org]

Why did you come to this conference and what did you find?

We saw the PGA manifesto and it inspired us because we were criticising centralisation and issues around representation. It was very good to know that internationally, we were not alone, that there were other people and groups who wanted to break with the same models. It gave us strength to break with oppressive models and the possibility to be international in our struggle, to increase our profile.

We have taken part in global actions, like the 1st of May, when we did a decentralised activity, without speeches, only a procession of people. We also took part in another which was interesting, with rural workers and students.

There have been things at the conference which have frightened me, strange things, like the idea of a delegate which is far too similar to a representative. People were speaking, representing many groups and it seemed quite contradictory that PGA should adopt this way of working because the what PGA described in the manifesto is different to what you see here.

We also had problems because not all the group could come. I was chosen but it does not mean that I am representing the whole group, rather that I am the spokesperson of our collective experience.

One concept that is talked about but not put into practice with PGA, is the idea of horizontal relations as a new form of solidarity. Do you have an idea of how horizontal relations can exist between the north and south movements?

The contacts which we have had with groups in Europe has been with groups with very similar interests, so we have not had problems, nor have conflicts arisen. It has been about having discussions together. One thing which we have been afraid of is the money relationship which is established between some northern and southern groups, and this seems to alter the flow of relationships slightly.

The contacts we have with groups in Europe have mostly been in the sense of solidarity, of information, the sharing of experiences, communication, strengthening the communication of experiences. We wrote a report about slave labour

of children and women, which has put our lives in danger. There are groups in Europe who have asked how they act in solidarity, whether we need money or legal help if we are tried. We think that it is more interesting for them to come and experience our lives here, with or without money.

There is a magazine in France, whose name I forget, whose form of solidarity was to publish the report. We also suffered repression because of this, some houses were burned down. We had death threats, against children, against everyone. One form of solidarity would be to spread this information.

It was interesting because they took on spreading this report, but some *compa eros* have come already, to share this experience, to eat beans with us and to live our lives. So it is possible to build a solidarity movement between the North and the South, putting an end to this paternalistic vision, which it seems some *compa eros* in Europe used to have. We already proved to the PGA that you can construct an international movement of solidarity that goes beyond money.

Is there a conflict between raising children and being involved in political activity?

My sons were born during conflicts over land. One is 10 and the other is nine. So it was a case of one in the push - chair and the other in my arms. They were brought up collectively. We share children, we don't feel as if we own our children. Women have a supportive relationship with one another. There are times that some have six to eight children and we take turns to look after the children. If someone wants to go on a demonstration or some other activity, the children are looked after.

One time we occupied a piece of public land by the Secretariat of the Ministry of Agriculture, and we spent 17 days in the middle of the main street in Porto Alegre - sleeping and eating. The police arrived with the Minors Court to weaken the protest, saying that they were going to take the children away to Social Services, because they said these children were in danger, because they were dirty

there was a danger they could get diarrhoea.

We formed a barricade of women and children and said that the children weren't going anywhere. We were hungry and without water on our settlement - if necessary we would die there in the middle of a public square so that the whole world would know what was going on. From that point on, many people approached us, offering solidarity.

One of the things which happens with children when we go on demonstrations is that when they begin to speak, they themselves already have a different outlook.

Can you describe your vision for the future?

Today we are beginning to write up, collectively, the life experience of the settlement, and through this we have begun to perceive the sexist, capitalist relations which play themselves out day by day in the settlement. The scorching, the beatings, men working whole nights to get the money together to pay the money owed to the government for credit. The group wrote about the life of the settlement and what they proposed as a group to improve their lives. Although the settlement is very divided politically, this group wants to change the relationship with the state, which it is linked to through INCRA, to be able to live out this experience more humanely.

One of the things which strengthens us, although I am repeating myself here, is to challenge the social relations, values, everything imposed by the free market system. And that's what we want to do, starting from food, for example, not to eat genetically modified foods, or industrial foods. To negate a consumer society, clothes and music and going on in the same vein, to comics and children's games.

We are living a dream based in reality, a dream of many generations, inspired by all the *compa eros* who have participated in the vision of a better world. I don't want to talk about it because it is a collective construction. It is the construction of many *compa eros* who thought, who died and others who continue to build relationships built upon solidarity, equality and love.

Omoli Bangladesh Aboriginal Association

Omoli is 35 years old and is married with three sons. She has been the General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Samity (Bangladesh Aboriginal Association) since 1993, and is actively involved in the land occupation movement in the northern areas of Bangladesh. She speaks Santali and Bengali, and the interview was done through Badrul Alam - a male translator.

How did you become involved in politics?

We indigenous people are suffering many, many problems. Our land has been seized by landowners and my people are not constitutionally recognised as indigenous peoples in Bangladesh.

Actually, the specific event that made me join in political activity is that I saw that indigenous children are not getting proper education. In my community I also saw that many landless indigenous people can't live in their native country, and have

had to emigrate to the neighbouring countries.

How do you organise actions?

Mostly, local members come to the thanna, or district admin unit, to raise their community's problems. The leaders then try to raise the problem with the people involved and the government; they also try to find out what the real issue is and demand that the government try to solve the problem.

The members who are living in the communities or thannas are the main forces behind any demonstration and action. They are the ones who organise the local people. We've got organisational principles, which include both direct action, and civil disobedience. But until now we've only used direct action. In the past we have used direct action in land struggles, and tried to occupy the fallow land for the landless indigenous peoples.

A while back, one of the big landowners killed a demonstrator, Alfred Sharon, and we built a resistance against this. We held a big demonstration, and also filed cases against the killers. We had some positive results: the killers fled and all the indigenous peoples occupied their land. Even now after a couple of years, the land is still in the possession of the landless peoples.

What is the division of labour within your association?

Actually, indigenous communities are a bit different. We work together, even women work the field, and so in the organisation there is no discrimination in the real sense.

How do you manage to balance your family life with the political activities you are involved in?

I saw the repression of the indigenous peoples with my own eyes and I thought that it was my moral duty to defend the lives of our peoples. It's not

moral to live in the family only. Besides my husband also helps me with the political activity. I bring the children to day school, go home and then go out for organisational purposes.

Why has the Adivasi association become involved with the PGA network?

Last year an Asian regional PGA conference was held in Dhaka and the Adivasi peoples organisation participated in these activities. We were very inspired by the principles of the PGA, and the understanding of the problems of grassroots movements. My organisation is a grassroots organisation, and because we are working in rural areas, nobody knows us. As the PGA has experience of the activities of grassroots movements and is trying to involve these movements, it's a chance for us to highlight our activities on a global level.

I think it's necessary. We are living in Bangladesh, we are victims of discrimination and we are fighting to establish our rights and there are many other people in other regions in similar struggles. We don't know what they are doing and so it's really necessary to combine this movement. That's why solidarity is necessary world-wide.

What can we learn from each other?

The PGA conference is an opportunity to get to know each other's struggles. I think it's very important to get to know each other, and to exchange experiences in the whole movement. I follow the determination

Below: Bangladesh Domestic Workers Union protest,

Opposite: Anti-World Bank demonstrations in Prague, September 2000.



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Bangladesh

Bangladesh Krishok Federation

Bangladesh Krishok Federation is a nation-wide and grassroots-based people's federation which has been working among the peasant community since 1977. The Federation's main objective is to emancipate the farmers socially, economically and politically.

All the policy with regard to land occupation and actions is democratically decided by the Federation's eight-associate organisations; the Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (Bangladesh Peasant Women Association), the Bangladesh Adivasi Samity (Bangladesh Indigenous People Association), the Bangladesh Floating Labourer's Union, the Bangladesh Floating Women Labourer's Union, the Bangladesh Rural Intellectuals Front, the Gavachhaya Sanskritic Kendra (a cultural

organisation) and the Revolutionary Youth.

The establishment of land rights for poor landless men and women is one of the most important aims of the Federation, and its members have already occupied over 70,000 acres of fallow land, and organised actions such as demonstrations, blockades, marches, processions and sit-in strikes.

More than 100,000 people have so far been rehabilitated to the occupied land. The organisation also fights against the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, capitalist globalisation, commercial bourgeoisie and bureaucracy. This includes work on women's issues, the environment and genetically modified seeds.

Bangladesh Adivasi Samity organisational structure

The organisation has more than 100,000 members who elect leaders at a conference every two years. It has a central committee consisting of 15 members, six of whom are women. The central committee is the supreme decision-making organ of the association. Decisions made here depend on

the principles of the organisation. There is a thanna (local admin committee), a district committee, and a Union committee.

Omoli works in the Chantal community, which is her indigenous community. They also work with the Bangladesh Krishok Federation.

of the peoples here. People are coming from different concerns and have the determination to do something, so it's very inspiring and I think that's useful for my own activities.

What do you see as the problems with the PGA network?

For me, language is a big problem, because I speak neither of the two official PGA languages, Spanish and English. And because of language problems, I can't communicate with other peoples and

movements. I feel my first duty is to learn English, so I can overcome that problem.

What is the vision of the kind of society you would like to live in?

I want a society where there will be no exploitation or discrimination, where people believe in peace - a "rich" society. I believe in a changed society where there will be no exploiters. I want a free society. It can be called socialist, democratic or any other thing. All we need is peace, we want to live in peace.



Karla Collective for Discussion and Action – Argentina

Karla is 28 years old and part of a radical students group called the Collective for Discussion and Action; based at her university in Buenos Aires. The Collective was set up after a major conflict at the university over cuts in government funding. They have formed their own autonomous study groups, organise with workers and unemployed, produce a monthly newspaper and put on puppet shows. Three months after the interview was carried out, the Argentine economy collapsed and grassroots rebellion spread across all sectors of society.

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On a personal level, how did you become politicised?

Mainly while I was at secondary school, through small conflicts with the authorities. We were told to wear school uniform and some of us refused and got into rows over different issues. Later, I joined a socialist party. When you're young and want to do something, the first thing that comes along is a party. There I learnt about *asambleas* (large political meetings), but I also realised that we didn't decide anything for ourselves. We had to say 'yes' or 'no' but generally we said 'yes' because we didn't have much education. Then I went to university and

there, people were very politicised – especially in my department: Philosophy and Arts, where people are much more critical and want things to change. When I started in 1995, there was a big conflict going on and that's where I met people that weren't connected to any political parties and were beginning to think about a different kind of university, with their own projects.

Can you talk about the group you are currently involved in?

The group started during another big conflict at the university in 1999 over cuts in government funding to universities. We were part of an independent group, and we occupied the faculty for 15 days. The traditional left were asking for an increase of 3% and at this moment, we started to discuss together that there was no point in asking for an increase if the same people remained in control of the university. Instead we should take control of the university and manage the budget ourselves.

We stayed together and formed the Collective for Discussion and Action – about 60 people altogether. We published a series of bulletins with information about what had happened because the conflict had been so big, and because the student union structures were overridden by people organising from the bottom-up. It was also a very strong process against the university institution: the rector, the deacon, and all the hierarchies. There were barricades in front of the Board of Directors office, which is the government body at the university. This was the first time that an autonomous movement came together and worked horizontally, and it was the strongest voice within this conflict.

Now, the collective is more like a space. There are people who work in different areas. Some of us have started an independent study group, because we don't believe that there should be hierarchies when we learn – we should all be learning from each other. We have started this already because we don't believe that we should wait for a better future but instead create it right now, and if we want to create a new kind of university, we should start now. We now come together with many different self-managed study groups which emerged spontaneously at the same time.

We also connect with groups outside the

university – workers and the unemployed. We've linked up with a group of workers who sell newspapers, with hospital workers in one of the biggest public hospitals, and with workers from an agro-fishery institute which is a state enterprise but one where the workers are organising independently from the trade union. They have strongly criticised the trade union and have created their own assemblies outside the conventional bureaucracy.

Now we have a project to produce a newspaper every month, starting at a local level but later nationally, we hope. We want to publish 5,000 copies per month and the idea is to write about conflicts all over Argentina and internationally that don't come out in the official papers, or that are distorted by the mainstream media. This idea came very strongly from the newspaper workers who are in conflict with Clarin, the biggest newspaper in Argentina, which is a multi-national and controls newspapers, television, and supports the government. They want to get rid of the workers and replace them with machines. This conflict is carrying on, and over the past few months, while Argentina has been exploding all over the place, Clarin hasn't covered a single piece on the unrest.

What has been your experience as a woman within your political activities?

I don't feel I've ever had problems of discrimination or been devalued for being a woman. I have a very strong character so if a man tries to marginalise me, he will have to deal with it, so they generally prefer not to say anything! I think that because of my personality I haven't received this kind of treatment but I know that other women have.

Do you have any women-only spaces?

No. We haven't really addressed the issue of gender. Now we are starting to think about language and including both genders when we speak and write, although it's quite an effort. It is more of a secondary issue for us - we have problems which seem more urgent. Actually, the most visible people in our group - the natural leaders, the ones who are

“All the demonstrations these days are against the adjustment programme and against the government following the policies of the IMF. The IMF is seen as a horrible monster which is coming to suck our blood”

the most active - are two women and one man. Now that I've been here at this meeting, though, I'm going to think about it more.

What type of actions do you organise?

In general, the actions and demonstrations we organise are decided within our assemblies. In particular, we work on the issue of counter-information. It is difficult to organise a big march, so we work more with performance – on the streets, on public transport, or in the university, in the corridors and classrooms. We organise a lot of cultural events - we link our politics with culture all the time. As we are not a very large group, it is easier to get a message across and be visible through these kinds of activities. When we are in times of 'peace', shall we say, we work on a smaller level – organising workshops, events. But when there is a bigger conflict, we get involved with everybody else. In reality, it is our group that drives actions like occupations, but if there isn't a strong agreement about this in an assembly then we don't do it because we don't feel there is any point in doing it on our own if there isn't support.

More recently it has become very popular to blockade the streets with tyres which are set on fire. In the last few weeks, we blocked streets all around the university centre, and we put on performances, parties, music, and theatre. We also put on a puppet show. This is an important part of my activism. I did a course on puppeteering and now we are doing a performance based on a piece by Subcomandante Marcos – a story of Don Antonio about light and dark. We've adapted it to include a story about a frontier – it's a critique of borders and nation-states. We are also performing this in poor neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires, for children who've never seen puppets.

What has been going on recently in Argentina in terms of mobilisations against globalisation – the World Bank, the IMF?

In general, it has been very difficult to organise anything in Buenos Aires because people have very

immediate problems – they are starving to death, and they have no work. It has been hard to connect this with the issue of globalisation - it's much easier to talk about external debt, and then they understand that the IMF has a stranglehold on us and won't let us live in peace. Argentina is a very closed country which doesn't look out much to the rest of the world, and the Argentines are very patriotic so it's difficult to make people realise that things are going on in places like Genoa etc.

On the issue of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the ministers met in Buenos Aires from

5/6th April 2001 before meeting in Quebec, and there were various mobilisations here. In the run-up to the meeting, we had a big counter-information campaign across the city. We organised a march on a pedestrian street in the centre, which is full of businesses, banks, McDonalds etc. We did our performance there. Behind us was a group of anarchists with spray paint, writing graffiti on all the symbols of finance capital and multi-national corporations. It was a small action but it turned out well - it was four or five blocks of marching up to where the ministers were meeting. It was short but

Economic Freefall (May 2002)

Argentina suffered two and a half decades of International Monetary Fund (IMF) backed "free-market reforms", which meant privatising everything: water, telephone systems, postal services, railways, electricity, you name it - even the zoo was privatised. When the Asian and Russian markets crashed in 1998, foreign investment dried up in the so-called "emerging markets". Argentina was hit badly, a major recession struck, and foreign lenders asked for their money back, on time.

According to the IMF, the only way the Argentinean government could repay the \$132 billion debt, some of which dated from the military dictatorship, was by making more cuts in social spending, especially as many people had stopped paying their taxes because they were sick of political corruption. Pensions, unemployment benefits, health care, and education were all cut drastically, and state employees had their salaries slashed by 13%. It was the same old story repeated across the world: as countries are forced into deeper and deeper debt, the IMF strip-mines their economies for the benefit of foreign banks and bond traders.

In fact, it was the bond markets, unsatisfied with the pace of the austerity plans, that proved

to be even harsher task masters than the IMF. Unlike the IMF, they never bothered to send delegations to negotiate, they simply jacked up interest rates on debt issuances, in some instances from 9% to 14% in a fortnight.

After four years of recession, one in five Argentines are unemployed, and some economists say this could soon double. 40% of the population is now living below the poverty line, and another 2000 people fall below it every day. Hospitals are running out of basic supplies like bandages and syringes, schools are shutting down because teachers aren't being paid, child mortality and hunger are on the rise. This is all occurring in what once was one of the wealthiest countries in the world, for decades considered the great success story of neoliberal development in the "developing" world, the star pupil of the "Washington Consensus", and the main advocate for free trade in the region.

As the recession worsened, Argentinean stock plummeted, and the unpopular austerity measures became increasingly vicious. Protests spread further across the country. Things climaxed in December 2001 when, grasping for straws, the government decided to try a complicated re-negotiation of its debt repayments. Fearful that

the entire economic house of cards was going to come tumbling down and that the currency would be devalued, thus wiping out their life savings, the middle classes panicked and withdrew about \$135 billion from their bank accounts.

Afraid that a run on the banks would sink the economy, the detested finance minister, Domingo Cavallo, announced sweeping restrictions on the amount of money that could be withdrawn from accounts. Known as the *corralito*, these measures included a monthly limit of \$1000 on cash withdrawals as well as caps on off-shore transfers. With all the facets of the crisis interlocking, the economy was effectively paralysed.

The IMF freaked out, because the banking restrictions and the debt repayment plan would severely impact on the foreign banks, which own 40% of Argentina's debt. They refused to lend any more money, and within weeks Argentina defaulted on its loans, the first time a country had done so in years. From this moment the economy was in free fall. On the 13th of December, a general strike called by major unions brought the country to a grinding halt for 24 hours. Six days later, massive popular rebellions exploded on to the streets.

“That has been the best part of the PGA conference - to realise that there are similar people fighting on the same issues. You feel less alone and realise that we are part of a bigger movement”

good, and there was no rioting. We didn't want the shop windows to be smashed as it's then so easy for the police to repress us, but luckily they only spray-painted and it all turned out well.

Can you talk about the big demonstrations that have been going on recently?

These are generally against the structural adjustment programme which the government announced a few months ago. All the demonstrations these days are against the adjustment programme and against the government following the policies of the IMF. The IMF is seen as a horrible monster which is coming to suck our blood.

On the other hand, there is the whole picket movement which is constantly mobilising above and beyond the adjustment programme, because out of 30 million inhabitants in Argentina, four million are unemployed. Since 1996, this group has become very organised and is quite strong. For example, two weeks ago they started a march from Buenos Aires to

seven other parts of the country. They organised assemblies along the way and now they are on their way back to the capital and it is estimated that there are 200,000 people on the march, bringing together all different sectors: unemployed, peasants, state workers, students, teachers...

And how did you get involved in the PGA network?

We've been following what has been going on for a while. We have a friend who produces the magazine with us who has been interested from the very start and keeps us in touch with what's happening elsewhere. He sent us the invitation to this meeting in Cochabamba. This is the first time we've come to any PGA event. We are in touch with people from the Primavera de Praga group from Buenos Aires who are also here but they only mobilise on global days of actions to coincide with international meetings. The difference is that we feel that it needs to be an ongoing struggle.

What are your impressions of the week here in Cochabamba?

I think that things could have been organised quite differently. A few days ago, I was very angry about everything that was going on – about the confrontation between North and South, about the culture clash which we weren't able to discuss openly and honestly.

When I read the invitation, I got the impression that it would only be groups like ours participating, that organise without hierarchies and believe in autonomy and direct democracy. I got really excited and couldn't believe that there were groups all over the world thinking and organising along similar lines! So I came along to meet these people and I got a big shock on the first day when so many people said: "I'm the leader of so-and-so group, and I represent so-many thousands of people."

As the week went on, I started to reflect on it. Of course, I know that here in Latin America many groups are like this - there is a long tradition of strong leaders. But I think that perhaps the convenors could have done much more in terms of

selection. It doesn't seem to me that there even was a selection process. There certainly would have been more agreement politically if there had been more people from smaller groups that organise horizontally and don't represent so many people. After feeling really angry, and after our visit to the Chapare region and seeing the mobilisation of the coca-growers, I feel I have a bit more understanding about what is going on and how it all works.

For example, there is Evo Morales who is here at the conference as a leader of the coca-growers federation, and he is also a Member of Parliament and looking for political support in all this [see interview with Silvia]. It's not that the leaders are bad or corrupt. The people support them and believe in them and this type of organisation. If they really wanted to move beyond this type of organisation, it would be great, but it's not happening, and I don't think we should be separate from all these people who believe in this form. I think it's about lack of education. It's very similar in Argentina.

The autonomous groups are primarily students, and where people have had less education, there is more conformity and it's harder for them to imagine that there could be something different. But I think it's good that we have come together and that they have seen other ways of organising too.

And how has it been meeting people from other groups and countries?

That has been the best part of it - to realise that there are similar people fighting on the same issues. You feel less alone and realise that we are part of a bigger movement. I have found it much harder to relate to other people from Latin America than people from Europe. Maybe it's because my parents are Italian, or because our ways of organising are more similar, but I think we all came with a desire to share and exchange experiences, and for this reason it has worked really well. I feel as though I'm going away with a lots of contacts that I'm not going to lose. It's not about writing down an address and then forgetting about it – I think we will really be in contact and take this network further.

Los Piqueteros

Rising unemployment in Argentina over the last few years has created the world's largest concentration of unemployed industrial workers. Many *piqueteros* (picketers) are experienced workplace and union activists. They use the tactic of blocking roads as a way of disrupting production, setting up camp right on the asphalt, putting up tents and cooking food. Women and children are a fundamental part of the movement, and are always present.

The *piqueteros* have stepped up their activities in the last few months, paralysing

the capital a number of times, most recently when the latest IMF delegation arrived to 'negotiate'. In February 2002 they blockaded oil refineries and depots throughout the country, demanding 50,000 jobs; new, shorter shifts to employ more workers; no petrol price rises and the re-nationalisation of the oil industry and all the privatised companies. They also usually demand food packages, the release of political prisoners, unemployment benefits and 'work plans' – a type of workfare scheme worth a meagre 120 pesos a month.

What do you feel about the dynamic between groups in the North and South?

I think it is more about a clash of political cultures than a clash of cultures in general. I think that the people who have been organising PGA up until now have developed a facilitation process which is quite exclusive. What I mean by this is that when we have an assembly at the university, nobody comes and tells you at the beginning how the assembly is going to be run. For us, the assembly is sovereign and decides how it will organise and who will co-ordinate it, otherwise we say that the person at the front is a bureaucrat and manipulator. What happened here quite a lot was that people from the North, because of their obsession with organisation and sticking to a timetable and having everything in its place, actually took control of the process and put themselves above the rest of the participants. I don't see it as a deliberate decision to dominate us or anything like that; it happened because of this fixation with order. It's a way of organising that many people here are not used to.

I think horizontal solidarity can only happen if everyone understands and agrees with the process and plays a part in it. If it was really horizontal, we wouldn't be able to blame other people, which has been happening here towards the end of the week – everyone would take responsibility for the process. On the other hand, I think a lot of people from Latin America, especially those who come from groups that organise more vertically, came here to impose their political line. You can't have a dialogue with this, it's a confrontation more than an exchange. The informal exchanges were great, but the plenary discussions were about who could impose their idea the loudest. In Latin America, it works a lot like this – it's a question of force.

How do you think things can be improved for future PGA meetings?

I think that at the start, everyone should explain a bit about their form of organising and there should be a proposal for how we are going to organise – we could even spend a whole day on this in order to

come to a consensus. The process has to be explicit and everyone has to have a voice. In the North, the custom is to cut people short, to limit the time they have to speak and to come to a consensus quickly. In Latin America, it's the opposite. We spend hours and hours in discussion which is not an alternative either, there is a lot of repetition, but we need to find a style that is between the two, and to learn from each other. I think we need to come with this

attitude – to learn from each other. I think that now we are all thinking about how to take this further. It's going to be a long process. And I don't think that the PGA meetings should be about taking decisions – I think they should be about giving space for people to share their stories about their struggles, and to learn from each other and exchange strategies and ideas.

Anarchy in Action

Popular assemblies, also known as neighbourhood (*barrio*) assemblies, have mushroomed in Argentina since December 2001. A recent survey by the newspaper *Página 12* found that 33% of those questioned in the capital had participated in them. Assemblies are held on street corners or public spaces, and operate in the most transparent way, with what they call a "horizontal" structure and no leaders or representatives. Born of the first *cacerolazos* (pot-banging demonstrations), and the fertile coming together of neighbours on the streets in protest, the assemblies discuss and vote on issues ranging from non-payment of the external debt to the defence of local families in danger of eviction for non-payment of rent. They have organised collective food-buying, soup kitchens, support for local hospitals and schools and even alternative forms of healthcare. Every Sunday, all the Buenos Aires assemblies meet in Parque Centenario for the Interbarrial – the inter-neighbourhood mass assembly.

Certain sections of mainstream politics are attempting to participate in or co-opt the assemblies – like one proposal made in Congress that the assemblies be given their own space and resources at the Congress building – but these proposals have been vehemently rejected. Pressure from left-wing parties such as the Partido Obrero (Workers' Party), has been harder to resist. At an Interbarrial in Centenario, a motion was put that "the party militants stop coming along to

assemblies to lay down party lines – that they take the assembly's position back to their parties instead". The sovereignty of each local assembly has been reiterated again and again at the Interbarrial and motions voted there, based on proposals from each assembly, are taken back to local assemblies to be ratified. Despite this, a controversial proposal for a Constituent Assembly – an assembly of delegates – which many felt was an unacceptable move back towards representative politics, was voted through at the Interbarrial of March 17th 2002.

Despite their differences, an important similarity is that both organise outside the sphere of work. The assemblies' refusal to negotiate with the government, under the slogan 'Que se vayan todos' – out with all politicians – clashed with some sections of the piqueteros. Since the economy collapsed at the end of last year, the total of Argentineans living in poverty has risen to some 14 million (out of a population of 36 million), and

the middle class has been destroyed. The piqueteros' struggle has been going on for years with little support from the wider public; those who participate in the *cacerolazos* and at bank protests are accused of having acted only when their own pockets were finally rifled. Despite these contradictions, everyone sees the need to link their struggles together; and many of the piqueteros' demands, which seemed radical just a few months ago (non-payment of the national debt, for example) have become the battle cries of the newly-impoorished middle class too. On the 27th February, a march of some 5,000 piqueteros from the poor Buenos Aires suburb of La Matanza was met by a number of local assemblies, who provided breakfasts and then joined the march to the Plaza de Mayo. The piqueteros were also cheered along the route by the people of Buenos Aires, who gave out food and drink, with some even banging their pots and pans. A new slogan was born – 'Piquete y cacerola, la lucha es una sola' (pickets and pot-bangers, the struggle is one). Piquetero demands include things like the return of savers' deposits, while motions at popular assemblies almost always include support for the piqueteros, and for those occupied factories which are under workers control.

For updates, see:

www.buenosairesherald.com (English daily newspaper)
<http://.argentina.linefeed.org> www.americas.org
www.zmag.org/argentina_watch.htm



Mia West Java Peasant Union - Indonesia

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Mia, with another student, formed a group which criticised the Suharto regime in Indonesia, and went on to organise a mass movement, becoming the leader of the National Student Front (NSF).

After the fall of Suharto, she and others from the NSF headed for the provinces to spread the word to another sector of society. She joined the West Java Peasant Union, where she works in the local peasant organisations, going from village to village with her son raising awareness about land issues and international trade. She is 27 and a single parent.

What made you want to mobilise as a student?

At university, we learnt about the theoretical side of things. We didn't really know what was going on for people, for the rest of the Indonesian population. So we started going round the villages and getting to know peoples' personal problems. The government wanted to build a dam in a place where the villagers didn't need a dam, so we organised with the peasants, held meetings with the government. Through doing this, we have aborted 75% of the construction process of the Jatigede dam, although it's not over yet.

There's a big obsession with lifestyle in Indonesia. School children prostitute themselves to buy McDonalds for lunch. That makes me sick. I'm surprised here to see people drinking Coca-Cola,

smoking Malboro and wearing Nike. Nobody I know would do that in Indonesia.

How would you describe the politics of your group?

We have many problems in Indonesia. They're caused by multinational companies, the World Trade Organisation, and our government. The first thing that we had to do was to unite and bring people together.

We have campaigned around issues of GMO's [Genetically Modified Organisms]. We were being forced to plant GM products by the government even though people were against it. We then organised a boycott and refused to plant GMO's. Indonesia is a developing country so there is a lot of "development". The government has built many things that people didn't need. We try to find what's best for ourselves, then when the government pushes us to do what they want, we organise, we demonstrate, we boycott.

Our vision is to create a true democracy. Democratic in the sense that land is owned by the people and that the people who work on it are able to use it to get a better life. We believe in working collectively. But you know, legally in Indonesia you cannot do that. We have to get a legal permit or a certificate when we want to work on the land. The land administration project dictates that land has to be owned by one individual - by men, that is, not by

women. This is a big problem. So now we don't bother with permits anymore. We work on the land illegally to get common ownership.

I work with local peasant leaders on spreading consciousness, raising awareness in the villages.

What issues do you discuss with the villagers?

We talk about their problems, about everything, gender issues, education. You know, most Indonesians cannot receive an education because it is too expensive. We try to do informal education, we run it in the parks. We explore questions of land ownership. We still need to do much more work for them to help themselves and for our own benefit.

How do you organise actions?

We make a plan before we do a demonstration. We talk with people, work out the propaganda, spread the word. Sometimes spies like to come to our demonstrations, so we know we have to keep them out. It's not hard because our villagers know each other.

Are there any important actions which stick in your mind?

Lots! In 1999, on 10th December, Human Rights Day, we and the peasant farmers went to the UN office in Jakarta, on the main street. We made a plantation. We brought paddy rice, we brought earth and the peasant farmers were there in their clothes, and they cut bread in the street on the main road. We call it "happening art", an artistic action. That was against the Agreement on Agriculture of the WTO.

Countryside stats in Indonesia

Of the zoomillion plus people in Indonesia, more than half still live in the countryside, despite the trend for millions to migrate to the cities in search of work. In the past three decades, increasing local and foreign capitalist investment has left a deep mark on

agriculture.

Peasants' land on Java, where more than half the country's population is concentrated, has been turned into real estate, tourist areas, dams, and golf courses.

Structure of the West Java Peasant Union-SPJB

The SPJB has 7.2 million members and is a coalition of 11 local peasant organisations from 11 different districts. The co-ordinating committee is made up of village leaders and meets twice a year. The SPJB's leaders

manage 6 divisions: economics, politics, campaigns, education, organisation, women. There's a congress every five years where a 5-year programme is drawn up.

There have been so many shouting demonstrations over the years. We're different. We have non-violent demonstrations. Everybody respects each other.

One was in 1998 when Suharto, the leader of Indonesia's fascist regime was brought down and there was a big mass student action. About 100,000 students from my campus took part in a big demonstration. I led the mass action when I was seven months pregnant. I will never forget that moment. And another was when Michael Camdessus [the former director of the IMF] came to Bandung in February 1999 and we threw stinking rotten eggs at him.

“Our vision is to create a true democracy. Democratic in the sense that land is owned by the people and that the people who work on it are able to use it to get a better life.”

Is it hard for you to balance childcare and politics?

It's not so difficult. It's the best experience for my son. He gets an education, a special education. It's better for him.

I worry about his safety, but I have faith in friendship. There's an understanding that if something happens to me they will save my son. You know, my son says, "Mum, I want to go on a mass demonstration! Take me!" I say, "Yes, I will pick you up if we're going to put on a big demonstration". My son comes with me on demonstrations. His songs are different to other children's songs. His songs are activist songs.

Why are you involved in PGA? How useful do you think it is?

I think it's important to be a part of PGA because we are local organisations and sometimes we can't do anything when we are facing the multinational

corporations. So we think that it's important being a group in an international movement. It gives many of our members confidence. I'm not afraid to fight the WTO because we are a part of an international movement.

What do you think about the concept of "horizontal solidarity" between organisations in PGA from northern and southern countries?

Sometimes I'm ashamed when the South go to the Northern non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and ask for money. It's a fact that we need money, but that's not all. I think we can pay our own organisational living costs with our money. Many NGOs in Indonesia get money from the North and they never spread the money to the grassroots. I don't want to be like these NGOs.

Circulating information is one thing that is more important than money. This is our problem: the government wants to build a dam and they do research on it. There are many experts in Indonesia, but they're paid by the government. I need one who's independent. If the people in the north know experts, I want them to work with us. One of the researchers for the Jatigede dam in Indonesia is from the UK. You can put pressure on the researcher in the UK. This kind of solidarity is useful.

I'll give you another example about the dam. They told us that it was for electricity but the electricity department told us they have enough electricity. It is in fact going to go directly to the multinational companies' factories - to the capitalists. It is important to have this information.

You have to check and re-check many times. When we came to the World Bank they say that "we haven't funded the project.". When we go to the government they say the World Bank has given money. Nobody is honest and I don't know who the companies are. We have to break into offices at night to get information about multinationals.

I think it's different. I imagine that in the North if you tell people about the WTO, about the multinationals, everybody understands, everybody's

The West Java Peasant Union

The farmers launched the West Java Peasant Union -SPJB- publicly three weeks after President Suharto resigned. Peasants had provided bananas and other food to students	who had rallied against Suharto, many unemployed rural workers donated money from their own pockets to assist the students.
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interested [not from our experience! – eds]. In my country, if I told the villagers about the WTO's bad influence, no one will listen because they are thinking "Can I feed myself tonight?." Their most pressing problem is to get food every day. It's a problem and a big difference between North and South. You would be shocked. Our peasants have no land, they are landless. So when we talk about this being an effect of the IMF, they say, "Stop talking about the IMF, I need land!"

What lessons can people learn from each other?

When we went to visit the Chapare, I learned a lot about the big Bolivian organisations. On our way here I learnt about organic farming from Rudi, someone in Geneva. It's important to be here at the conference, but I think you can learn more if you actually spend time with people where they are struggling.

Are you worried about the effects of September 11th?

I'm not afraid of American bombs. I have to say; "See what happened to fucking America." My heart says; "Oh, too many people died for nothing." I don't know which is stronger, my head or my heart?

America is threatening to bomb Muslim countries. You're leader of a social movement in Indonesia. Are you worried?

No. We are soft Muslims in Indonesia. I respect Osama Bin Laden. I do respect him, he's strong and he's well organised. But I wouldn't want to be a member of his organisation. Most of Indonesia isn't as religious, a bit like me. But I'll say one thing - I can't believe the dollar is still worth so much. It hasn't suffered. Unbelievable!

Women using traditional ways to separate paddy, during a demonstration in front of United Nations office and McDonalds."





Above: Paddy action taken in front of a McDonalds, bring rural concerns the city centre.

Opposite: Anti-Yankee displays in the central square in Cochabamba, post September 11th.

What kind of society you would like to live in?

Aaah my God! "A better world...." Sounds like "Imagine" by John Lennon.. Ha ha!.. No..no!

Food for everyone - enough food for everyone. Something that makes me sad is that so many people go hungry. Not because there's no food, but because they don't have the money to buy it. Multinational companies control the food.

What else? Gender equity, no racism. A better environment to bring up children in. Cheap education for everybody. No militarism - I dislike the military.

The overthrow of the Suharto regime in Indonesia

Suharto seized power in 1965-66 in one of the bloodiest military coups of the twentieth century. His regime was responsible for brutal aggression against East Timor. These atrocities were just part of a wider campaign of oppression.

Over the last three decades, Indonesia's industrial base expanded and foreign trade was liberalised. Suharto liked to implement ambitious development plans, crafted by Western-educated technocrats. He was also very generous with himself and his family: he and his six children are worth an estimated \$40billion, half the country's GDP.

The economic collapse of 1997, however, revealed the social inequalities which had

resulted from the decades of economic growth.

Student protests followed the IMF austerity measures, condemning internal repression and policies which had crippled the poor. They were tear gassed and attacked by water cannons, but after 6 demonstrators were killed, a wave of popular protest followed. It became clear that Suharto was losing his grip on power when 15,000 students took over parliament buildings, demanding Suharto's resignation. Soldiers simply looked on, trying to avoid the flowers protesters thrust into their guns, and he was forced to resign.





Bolivia: A Case History

Bolivia has a long history of social struggle, from Indian resistance, to the Spanish conquistadors, to the present day uprisings of almost every sector of society. During the 1930s, peasants and miners began to form federations and unions, and the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) was set up. When the military junta took power after the MNR candidate won the 1951 elections, revolution broke out in 1952, led by radicalised miners and supported by the Indian peasant population, urban factory-workers and the lower middle classes.

What followed was a period of revolutionary government that implemented a series of important reforms: universal suffrage for men and women, the nationalisation of big mining companies and a major land reform programme. Miners, peasants and urban workers joined together to form the powerful trade union organisation COB (Central Obrera Boliviana). In the beginning, there were strong links between the MNR and the COB, but as the MNR shifted to the right and became increasingly bureaucratised and corrupt, political divisions opened up between the union and the party.

As early as the 1950s, the IMF designed a "stabilisation" plan for Bolivia in response to a drastic fall in the price of tin, Bolivia's most important source of foreign currency. This aimed to reduce state influence in the economy, abolish subsidies and promote foreign investment. The US transnational, Gulf Oil, for example, obtained concessions to drill for oil.

As in so many other Latin American countries, the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by coup d'états and military governments, with the US always keen to look after its own interests. Colonel Hugo Banzer (who came back into power in 1997), carried out a successful coup in 1971 after training

at the infamous School of the Americas in Georgia, and for the next seven years imprisoned or expelled tens of thousands of Bolivians for political reasons, banned the COB and left-wing parties, and opened the door wide to foreign capital. He presided over the development of the South American model for the modern 'Narco-State': the denial of democracy and civil liberties in the name of the "war on drugs", while allowing military and government operatives to control and profit from the illicit cocaine trade.

The 1980s is the decade in which Bolivia, like almost every other country around the world, underwent profound structural change. The year 1985 was a watershed in Bolivian history, when the world tin market collapsed and the government suddenly began the rapid reshaping of its economy, otherwise known as structural adjustment, neoliberal or globalisation policies. These include:

- Reducing government expenditure by making public sector workers redundant, freezing salaries, and making cuts in education, health and social welfare services.
- Privatising state-run industries, which under President Gonzales (Goni) Sanchez de Lozada in the 1990s included the national airline, telephone, railroad, electric power and oil companies, and closing the majority of mines.
- Currency devaluation and export promotion, land use changed for cash crops, the flooding of the national market with cheap foreign goods, and reliance on international commodity markets.
- Raising interest rates to tackle

inflation, putting small companies out of business.

- Removing price controls, leading to a rapid price rises for basic goods and services like food and public transport.

In spite of these reforms, Bolivia is now weighed down by a \$6.2 billion foreign debt, making it one of the worlds most indebted nations. Much of this debt was incurred during the Banzer military dictatorship, when the country first got involved in the international cocaine trade. When he came back into power between 1997 and 2001, the US continued to back him, largely because he implemented Washington's so-called "war on drugs", against the coca growers. Ironically, the Bolivian economy has avoided complete bankruptcy largely because of the unbridled expansion of the cultivation, processing and export of coca.

Throughout these brutal reforms, which are the same all over the world, described by Harvard economists as "economic shock therapy", resistance has been growing and becoming more militant across Bolivia, reflecting a resurgence of the country's historically powerful social movements. There have been almost continuous

protests in Bolivia since 1985, in particular in 2000 and 2001, which have included widespread road-blocks against increased costs of living and shortage of food. Mass strikes and large-scale marches by miners, coca-growers and teachers have brought the country to a standstill for weeks at a time. These uprisings and confrontations look set to continue for the foreseeable future...



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Silvia has two long black plaits and layers of petticoat under a knee-length ruffled satin skirt. She speaks quickly, without a trace of hesitation, and her speech is punctuated by the rousing phrases of someone used to addressing and rallying large crowds of people. She hadn't slept at all the night before, and checks her mobile phone throughout the interview. She is from the Chapare coca-growing region of Bolivia and is currently the Executive Secretary of the National Federation of Peasant Women, part of the Federation of the Tropics of Cochabamba - one of the hosts of the PGA conference. Her native language is Quechua and she also speaks Spanish. She is married with one son and has adopted two orphans, a boy and a girl.

When did you first get involved in political activism?

I've been participating in organisations since I was thirteen. My mother and father moved from the Chapare region to the city of Cochabamba, for health reasons. I stayed behind and as I was the oldest daughter I had to run the household and carry out the communal tasks in the trade union community, so I've been learning from a young age. Later, I became a community leader, and rose up to the top of

the Federation. I never thought I would be a national leader. But my organisation's confidence in me has helped me to get to this position and thanks to my family and my husband I have been able to take on those responsibilities, working for women on a national level.

What is the Federation fighting for?

We have decided to organise as women and men against the injustices that we are suffering as a result of neoliberal policies in Bolivia. Day after day, the rich get richer and we, the poor, become poorer. We know that men, women and children have human rights. But not a single one of our rights is respected.

I began to organise with other women because of our plant, the coca leaf. It is not harmful - it's a traditional plant to be consumed or chewed, for the good of humanity. However, the government confuses and compares it with the drug cocaine. This is the main cause of government repression, and is fully backed by the United States, which has imposed restrictions on the Bolivian government through the US Embassy, banning the growth of coca leaves. This is where the human rights violations come from.

So we are organising and fighting to defend our coca crops, our land and our territory because the producers of the coca leaf in Bolivia have no other alternative crop with which to support our families. Taking our coca away would be like taking our food and will reduce us to misery and hunger.

In its natural state, it's a medicine for us. The sun comes out, we have breakfast, and immediately we chew coca. When we get tired working, we have a rest and chew it again. We get through long marches thanks to the coca leaf. It gives us energy and strength.

The Law 1008 recognises the production of coca in Article 12 but now the US-inspired Plan Dignity appears over and above the law. The US has tricked the international community with this Plan Dignity, which has contributed money under the pretext of fighting drug trafficking. However, the Bolivian government has not done anything to fight the drug trade. It has only fought against the coca producers - poor families from El Tropic de Cochabamba. If the government, with its pretext of the drug war, would fight against the real drug traffickers, I believe that Bolivia would not have such a bad image.

We can't let Plan Dignity eradicate the coca crops under the pretext of this "war against drugs". Plan Dignity also indicates that the lands of El Tropic should be handed over to the transnationals. That's the US's objective. The Plan says that 15,000 families must leave El Tropic for their area of origin. There are people here who have fled poverty from all over Bolivia. El Tropic is a synthesis of poverty at a national level from all different departments, Quechua, Aymara and Guarani indigenous campesinos together, and we have all decided to defend the cultivation of coca.

The eradication of coca will not only affect us economically in El Tropic but it will affect the whole country. Since the eradication started, the price of coca has risen drastically, and as the majority of people who chew coca do not grow it themselves, they can no longer afford it. It is affecting all the campesinos in Bolivia. This is why there have been mobilisations at a national level.

Coca: the facts

Coca is not cocaine. Coca is a sacred plant used in rituals and forms an essential part of local cultural identity. The leaf has been consumed for over 2,000 years in the Andes.

Rich in vitamins and minerals, the leaves are commonly used for chewing, making coca tea and relieving the effects of altitude sickness, hunger and tiredness. It is an integral part of everyday life for most people in Bolivia - banning it would be like making tea illegal in England!

There are four stages in the route between the coca leaf and cocaine. The first is the cultivation of the leaf, which has always been legal in Bolivia. The second stage is when the coca leaf is crushed with chemical precursors to make a paste called cocaine sulphate. The third stage comes when cocaine hydrochloride is manufactured - the white soft powder that comes from state-of-the-art chemical laboratories which are not to be found in Bolivia. The fourth stage is the sale of cocaine in

Europe and the US. The last two stages have traditionally been controlled by the Colombian cartels. Bolivia's role has almost always been limited to the cultivation of the leaf and the production of the base paste.

Bolivia is now the world's third largest cultivator of coca, after Colombia and Peru.



"Coca is not cocaine": mural in Cochabamba.

The government talks a lot about alternatives to coca cultivation. What has happened with these programmes?

There is no other product that could provide economically for the families of El Tropicico. There is no market for anything else. According to Plan Dignity, the government has dedicated itself to the development of crop substitution. So why are there no programmes? It has failed. There is no real alternative development in El Tropicico de Cochabamba. It's the complete opposite: with the money that comes for alternative development, they buy helicopters, tear gas, weapons, salaries for the military and luxury goods for the repressors. Then the money runs out and all the while the "crop substitution" never arrives.

It will never arrive. We are aware that it will never arrive. So there is no other option for the families but to plant coca. And so together all the families have decided: we will all plant coca. If they do decide to take us to prison, then let them take us! Better to be there in prison than dying of hunger. Or

if not, they should kill us with bullets once and for all rather than leave us enduring hunger with our children. More than anyone else it is us, the women, who have realised this. Because when a woman is in her house every day, every night, she has to listen to the sound of her children's hunger. Men, on the other hand go out in search of work and they don't have to listen to the sound of children's hunger over and over again. That is how women have begun to understand the situation and have begun to organise and take up our defence alongside the men and our children.

What kinds of actions do you organise?

We organise large-scale mobilisations like national blockades. There's an interdepartmental highway between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, and when the Six Federations of the Tropics do blockades, nobody gets past, not even cars. The government has to use the armed forces and the police to get them through. That's how they manage to disperse us - with gas and bullets.

The government has carried out many massacres against *cocaleros*: in 1994, in 1996 and 1998. We have organised marches of women against these massacres to the seat of the government in La Paz. In 1996, we signed an agreement with the government but it did not keep to its word. So after the march we went on hunger strike for 12 days, when we realised we had been tricked. This has happened many times - for example, last year the government signed an agreement to get our national blockade lifted, but later it went back on its commitments yet again. It's the same with the alternative programmes to coca which they promised - they haven't carried out any of them.

How are decisions made within the Federations?

Sometimes the government accuses Evo Morales of being an instigator and taking decisions in the name of the grassroots members, because he is a Member of Parliament and President of the Six Federations. But they are wrong - it's not like that. Whenever there is a meeting to decide on any type of mobilisation, it is

Law 1008, "Plan Dignity" and transnational interests in the Chapare

Law 1008 is a harsh US-influenced law which was passed in 1988 as the judicial basis for the "War on Drugs". The law establishes special drug courts with their own regulations. It contradicts the Bolivian Constitution by presuming the guilt on the part of the accused. They must remain in jail, without bail, until the case has been heard in three courts - a process that can take several years. The net result has been the gross overcrowding of Bolivian jails with many innocent and mostly poor people, while big-time traffickers and financiers get off scot-free. However *cocaleros* have also tried to use the Law in their interests to argue that Article 12 allows for coca to be cultivated in the area by small coca producers - to back their main demand that each campesino be allowed to cultivate one "cato" (1,600 square

meters) of coca for traditional use.

Plan Dignidad is basically a smaller version of the infamous Plan Colombia (see www.agp.org for more info). Under US pressure, the Banzer government began to implement the four-year plan in April 1998, in a fundamentally militarised strategy to eradicate all coca in the Chapare, supposedly by December 2000. The combined armed forces (including conscripted Bolivian soldiers) enter coca growing areas and destroy everything in their path, leaving behind a scorched earth. In recent years more than 30,000 hectares of coca crops have been eradicated, from which over 200,000 people would have made their living, directly or indirectly.

The "War against drugs" is in fact a great excuse for the US to gain strategic control of key

areas rich in natural resources across Latin America. The Chapare region is very rich in oil deposits - there are now mushrooming international oil exploration and tropical lumber interests in the area.

Resistance has been met with heavy repression. The conflict has claimed over 100 lives in the past four years, while 500 people have been wounded. But the *cocaleros* have had some key victories. For example, when the Clinton administration agreed to provide \$2 million in funding to build three new military bases, massive protests in October 2000 resulted in the Bolivian government agreeing to shelve the plans for the bases. The *cocaleros* have also succeeded in preventing eradication in many areas.



Mass rally in Chapare by coca growers during the PGA conference - holding indigenous flags of diversity.

at the grassroots community level that decisions are made. None of us as leaders make the decision – what they say from below is carried upwards by us. We don't impose from above. We take the decisions based on the grassroots and everyone is clear about what we are doing and why.

When did you first decide to get involved in party politics and why?

We had never considered it, but with all these injustices we realised that we had to get involved in

party politics and legislation, as well as in community politics. In 1994-95, all the peasant organisations came together to form what is called a "Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the People". According to our legal statutes, we are called the "Movement towards Socialism" (MAS). It's the grassroots members who decided this, not us. Evo Morales is there because the grassroots have obliged him to represent them there. It could be that he doesn't want to, but the people want it.

Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba: background and organisational structure

The Federations are made up of some of the poorest small peasant farmers in Bolivia. Those who arrived in the Chapare before 1985 were for the most part marginal peasant farmers from the highland areas of Bolivia. After the closing of the tin mines in 1985, a large number of militant ex-miners came to join them, bringing with them organising experience they gained in the mines. The organisational structure they have formed

claims to be inspired by communitarian socialism, in which the leadership is controlled by the grassroots. Their tactics bring together direct action and parliamentarism.

- In each community, 80-100 families form a union together, and the women and men each have their own community leader.
- 15-20 of these unions form a confederation, each of which has a women's representative and a men's

- representative.
- 27 of these confederations make up one of the Federations of El Tropico de Cochabamba, and this also has an executive committee for both women and men.
- There are around 50,000 people per Federation, and Evo Morales is the President of the Six Federations of the Tropics in Chapare, as well as an ex-member of parliament.

This is a new experience for us. Of course, it's difficult for him to change things because there are 130 members of parliament and only three are from the peasant movement. But it's very useful for us, as he knows about everything that goes on in parliament and can inform us about any laws that are going to be passed.

Now, we're thinking that out of the 130 representatives, we want to have at least 30 more, maybe even up to 50 %. We'll see how it goes in the next elections in 2002. At the Congress of the Political Instrument in October 2001, we will decide who will be the candidates of the movement in the presidential elections.

There are a lot of powerful interests who are against Evo and want to get him thrown out of parliament and even killed. For example, during one of the blockades we organised, one of the companies who lost a lot of money is trying to get Evo withdrawn from parliament, accusing him of being responsible for the blockade and saying that he should cover their losses. We still don't know what is going to happen about this. But there is no way we are going to let him lose his place in parliament. I believe that as a peasant movement, we have to have our own representatives who are peasants and belong to our organisation, in parliament.

Do you feel that there are still problems of sexism in the movement?

Clearly in some departments you still get sexism. Men want to be the only ones organising and don't want us to organise separately. There are 3 departments with mixed executive committees, and we have six departments with women-only committees as well. This strengthens us.

A lot depends on how much we do at a community level to politicise and inform women so that they start to make their own decisions and organise with other women. In this way, women become leaders: they train themselves up on a local and departmental level, and then it is their role to guide, inform and politicise others. It is a great advantage to us to organise together and to realise

“We have decided to organise as women and men against the injustices that we are suffering as a result of neoliberal policies in Bolivia. Day after day, the rich get richer and we, the poor, become poorer.”

what we are suffering as women, so that we can confront the neoliberal model.

Why is the Federation involved in the People’s Global Action network?

I think it is very important. Evo has been following

what has been going on with PGA and has been involved in previous meetings representing the Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba at a Latin American level. For me, it’s essential to have this kind of exchange between countries and between organisations.

Maybe we have differences - who knows? I think we do. I think Peoples’ Global Action is vital so that from a grassroots level we can struggle together, share ideas, take decisions to confront the World Bank and IMF, which try to humiliate and crush us. We should work together on a Latin American and global level, because all the organisations which make up the PGA are marginalised, discriminated

against and exploited in some way.

I think that we can learn a lot from each other’s cultures and traditions and we can be stronger in the defense of our customs. For example, in Bolivia, they want us to forget our native language Quechua and only speak Spanish. We cannot allow this to happen. Here we can talk about ways of reclaiming our cultures with other groups.

What is your hope for the future?

My objective is to guide and train my *compañeras*, above all at a national level. I don’t want to be the only one learning - I want everyone to learn. Being a leader is hard work, it’s not easy. It’s serious, there’s no salary and sometimes it can feel like a waste of time. I want other women to get trained up to be leaders so that more and more women will know how to defend themselves.

Update on the coca-growers’ movement

Since the PGA meeting in September, there has been an escalation in the number of confrontations between *cocaleros* and government forces, resulting in many deaths, injuries and arrests. Silvia was held in prison from January 17th for a month after being arrested with other union leaders for a range of politically-motivated charges.

In mid-October 2001, a heavily armed group of some 800 troops from a combined military and police unit attempted to eradicate coca plants in the Rio Blanco area. Over 2,000 *cocaleros* tried to block them from entering. A campesina coca grower called Nilda Aguilar was killed when she was hit in the head by a tear gas grenade, and many others were injured. The security forces eventually retreated when human rights workers and the parish priest intervened.

In mid-November, the Quiroga regime sent 4,000 military and police troops into the Chapare region to forcibly eradicate coca. The Bolivian press exposed that 500 illegal paramilitary forces were among those troops, funded by the US to do the dirty work of assassinating peasant farmers and social activists.

On November 25th 2001, the government and

coca growers sat down at the same table in Cochabamba at the National Coca Summit to seek peace in the Chapare. Although US ambassador Manuel Rocha announced that any suspension of "Plan Dignity" would prompt the US to cut aid to Bolivia, at the end of November, the government announced its suspension because of popular protests against the policy.

However, severe repression continued in January 2002. In Sacaba, security forces violently entered the central coca market, which resulted in two *cocaleros* killed and 31 injured, and four police and military killed and 37 injured. 82 coca growers have since been detained, with a special focus on union leaders, including Silvia, who was again



later released on strict bail conditions. Security officers also confiscated the coca growers radio station in a clear move to suppress freedom of information.

On January 24th, Evo Morales was ousted from the Congress in order to be tried on criminal and other charges. He immediately went on hunger strike along with many coca growers. A wide range of social groups marched in Cochabamba in protest at his removal and demanding the immediate release of detained *cocaleros*. Since then he has gained greater popular support as a result of his removal from parliament.

After being elected as president for the coca grower’s MAS party, Morales is standing for the national presidential elections in August 2002. The latest poll gave them 4% of the popular vote at the national level - 1% more than the ruling party. The US government has already issued threats to the Bolivian population if they elect Morales.

For recent updates see:
www.scbbs-bo.com/ain/
www.americas.org/bolivia

Marcela and Carmen

The Coalition for the Defence of Water & Life, Bolivia

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Marcela and Carmen both played a key role in the Water Wars which ousted the US transnational Bechtel from Cochabamba. Marcela helps to manage international links, such as speaking tours and volunteers from abroad. She is 31, with no children. Carmen is part of the Federation of Irrigators and a spokeswoman for the Coordinadora (Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life). She is 43 and is divorced with two children.

The Coordinadora is a coalition of workers, environmentalists, artisans, peasants, market vendors, neighbourhood organisations and others struggling against the privatisation of Bolivia's water system.

What is the representation of women within the Coordinadora?

MARCELA: There isn't a specific women's group within the Coordinadora. Carmen is the most visible person at the moment. We have never really looked at the question of women and men – it has always been open, anyone can get involved. This week we'll be having our first ever workshop on the participation of women in the Water Wars – to explore the role of women and how they have been involved.

One of the very important things that happened over these few days was that the most marginalised sectors of society - the street children, the unemployed, the homeless, and women – took control of very symbolic spaces.

It's striking that when Oscar, one of the spokespeople of the Coordinadora, talks about the Water Wars, he always mentions the participation of women. Along with the young people, women's participation has been incredible, he says. I remember that in the neighbourhood where one of the largest blockades took place, the women stayed there to make sure that

no-one would get through and that the police wouldn't break it up, while the men came to the centre of town.

CARMEN: We did a workshop with the irrigators and what emerged was how resourceful the women were – for example, against the tear gas, they came prepared with vinegar. Then they stood in the front line to face the soldiers saying that it would be harder for them to hit women. You almost always saw women at the front.

MARCELA: Yes, I remember that whenever there were confrontations with the police, it was mostly women who were fighting back and getting arrested. Their bravery was really incredible.

Why do you think this was?

MARCELA: Perhaps because women have more of a capacity for indignation against injustices.

CARMEN: It's also interesting that at the blockades, the people in charge of the groups were women, especially outside the city centre, because they are the ones that don't drink alcohol. They wouldn't be drunk and starting fights. They would go around and shut down the local bars and say "Right, we're going to take things seriously here. No one is going to drink!"

MARCELA: The women had more moral authority. And they were of all ages. Another important thing was that when everyone was gathered in the central square for a few days, it was women who brought food, like groups of nuns.

It's also very striking that at the start, people were talking about "La" Coordinadora. Oscar, Gabriel and others tell a story about a day when they were being hunted. They went into a convent, and the nuns said: "We want to meet La Coordinadora. Who is this incredibly brave woman?"

There was this idea in a lot of people's mind that

the Coordinadora was a woman! That it was a physical person, rather than a group of people. There was also an old man who went to Oscar's office and wanted to meet the Coordinadora, and Oscar kept saying: "She doesn't exist! We are a group of people." But he didn't understand so in the end they had to introduce Carmen as the Coordinadora!

This was lovely – that people had an image of the Coordinadora as a brave woman, from the countryside. We were always represented like this, like in cartoons in the newspaper.

Do you think this has changed people's attitude to women?

CARMEN: Yes, I think so. When the whole issue about water started in 1994 in a village called Vinto outside Cochabamba, it was the women who organised and started to fight against the government.

What was also incredible was the children and young people on the streets who took over the square and felt really important.

MARCELA: One of the very important things that happened over these few days was that the most marginalised sectors of society - the street children, the unemployed, the homeless, and women – took control of very symbolic spaces. They were the ones at the centre, the objects of massive attention for a few days. People brought them food. The ones who had been invisible and no one knew had existed. Things were really turned on their head for those who have always had the final word: the politicians, the governors, important people. Those who had a voice were the marginalised. It was an amazing experience.

What about your personal experiences during those days?

CARMEN: I was in charge of the organisation of the blockades, so I was shut in an office with I don't know how many telephones! If there was a warning that the army or police were going to break up a blockade, I was responsible for communicating with the *compa eros*. I was hardly on the streets, but someone had to do this job. I was also involved in

the meeting about an alternative proposal to the Law and lots of meetings with the state governors. Sometimes I would go on my own to these and be in meetings that were only with other men.

MARCELA: One of the things that Oscar remembers is that when he was being arrested and dragged away, Carmen went over and said: "Just wait a minute, you're not leaving with him!" and she started to argue with police, and they arrested her too!

CARMEN: That night I was the only woman arrested along with the other men, but I wanted to be with them - I didn't want to be on my own. But the police said: "What if something happens to you?". I said I could happily be in a cell with 20 of my *compa eros* and nothing would happen. It was a very interesting experience and there was a lot of solidarity.

How long were you held for?

MARCELA: It was only a few hours in the end as people went out on the streets in protest and the pressure was really building up so they had to let us out. That was the 7th April.

CARMEN: I think it was really worth it. It was a sign to the World Bank and the IMF that the model won't work out how they want it to. That there will be resistance to the privatisation of natural resources. I think it was a sign to the world that we can prevent this kind of thing happening.

We are now starting an election period and based on our experience, we are against traditional political parties. What they want is that we dissolve as the Co-ordinadora. They are terrified that we'll convert ourselves into a political party. But this isn't our intention. I think we have shown that trans-national corporations are not the priority. I don't think now that the government would dare to pass a Law without first consulting the local population. The consciousness of people in Cochabamba has been raised. After the Water Wars, Cochabamba will never be the same.

What was the response from groups in other parts of the world in terms of international solidarity?

MARCELA: The two people who played a key role in

this were Jim and Tom – they sent out information by email on what was going on here in Cochabamba. What we've realised is that from April onwards, a new phase had begun in terms of our struggle, and part of this was about using new form of communication to send news abroad about what was happening. After they did this, we realised that there was an incredible amount of support around the world, and that lots of eyes were on Cochabamba. There were solidarity actions in places as far as New Zealand.

We never for once imagined that something like this would have so much resonance. Another thing that happened immediately is that contacts were made abroad. The week after the Water Wars, Oscar went to the protests against the World Bank in Washington. There was so much solidarity. For example, in September there was a march by some of our *compa eros* from Cochabamba to La Paz on foot. What the government did was to stop the marchers and forcibly brought them back to Cochabamba. Some of our *compa eros* disappeared, so

"We unite because we are fed up with the simulation of democracy which only renders us obedient and impotent, and turns us into obliged voters and tax payers for the benefit of the rich; because it is urgent to begin to take action together... each sector does not have sufficient strength to resist alone... There is no individual salvation, we will improve everyone's well being or no one's."

– Communication of the Coordinadora, Dec 1999

we very quickly sent out news of their disappearance with Jim and Tom. Immediately, not even two hours after sending the emails, hundreds of faxes and letters came through for the government demanding to know what had happened to our *companeros*, saying, "We are watching you!". This is really important. The government now knows that it cannot treat us like this.

Chronology of events

JUNE 1999: The World Bank issues a report on Bolivia in which it discusses the water situation in Cochabamba. The Bank recommends that there be "no public subsidies" to hold down water price hikes.

SEPTEMBER 1999: The government signs a contract with Aguas de Tunari, a subsidiary of the Bechtel Corporation, with a clause stating that the contract itself supersedes any other contract, law or decree, and that at the end of each year, the rates would go up as measured against the consumer price index in the United States.

OCTOBER 1999: The national parliament passes Law number 2029, the law of basic services (drinking water and sanitation), which eliminates any guarantee of distribution of water to rural areas, prohibits autonomous water collectives & states that within areas of concession, only private

companies can distribute water. Aguas del Tunari immediately increased water prices, in some cases by up to 400%.

NOVEMBER 1999: Local irrigators, professionals and factory workers organise a march in Cochabamba against price increases and the new law. A week later the Coordinadora is formed after a meeting of rural and urban groups opposing the private company.

DECEMBER 28, 1999: First mass mobilisation. 15-20,000 people demonstrate in the central square of Cochabamba to get the government to change the law and revise the water contract. A general strike and road blockade lasts four days. Tear gas is used for the first time in 18 years.

FEBRUARY 4, 2000: Second mass mobilisation and peaceful occupation of the central square after the government failed to fulfil its promise to revise

the Law and the contract. As everyone leaves, thousands of police appear and fighting starts, carrying on for two days. 175 protestors injured.

MARCH 2000: The Coordinadora organise a popular consultation in the Cochabamba area served by the water company. Out of 50,000 people, between 94 and 98% say they don't want the contract, the law or increases in water bills.

APRIL 4, 2000: Third mass mobilisation lasting eight days, with up to 80,000 people in the streets. A 17-year old protestor is shot dead by sharp shooter trained at the School of Americas.

APRIL 9, 2000: Congress modifies the law with all the changes outlined by the Coordinadora. Road blockades are lifted.

APRIL 10, 2000: Control of the water returns to the town!

"The Bolivian government would rather respond to the directives of the World Bank than take into account what the people themselves consider to be their needs. The heart of the problem is this: who decides about the present and the future of the people, resources, work and living conditions? We, with respect to water, want to decide for ourselves: this is what we call democracy." – Communication of the Coordinadora, January 28, 2000

There has been so much support from abroad. Jim says that he gets at least one email a week from people who want to come and work with us. We haven't had to pay a penny for them, they've even brought money with them for the organisation.

Carmen and Oscar have been travelling to speak about what has happened, and so have I - not only to share our experience but also to learn from struggles in other parts of the world and what their alternatives are. Something we have learnt over time is that we cannot only be against things, and say "No to the World Bank, No to the IMF!" We also need to have an alternative, otherwise we're doomed.

That's a little bit what happened here. We got back the company and now what do we do with it?! We never imagined in our wildest dreams that we would be in charge of a company. How are going to manage it? Of course we need to say no, but we also have to have something on the other side as an

alternative, otherwise nothing is really going to change.

At the most, we thought that we would be able to get a modification of the contract, and to change a few parts of the Law, but we never thought we would have this kind of victory.

Why do you think you were so successful?

CARMEN: I think that one of the main reasons for our victories is that we organised a lot of educational workshops about the Law with the people of Cochabamba so the people on the streets knew exactly why they were there. The group of professionals within the Coordinadora (economists, lawyers, academics) analysed the contract very closely and found that it was completely illegal. There was a lot of press coverage and the people of Cochabamba knew that this trans-national was of no service to them at all. They had the power of knowledge.

MARCELA: I think there are two main things. I agree completely with Carmen – firstly, the clarity of information that people had about what Aguas del Tunari were doing and why they were against it, and secondly, which I think we have to admit, is that they made a lot of mistakes themselves. Coming in and increasing the prices straight away was very foolish of them. If they hadn't done this straight away, maybe they would still be here. This really hit people very hard. For example, there were people who were earning 500 Bolivianos per month and had to pay 300 of those on water. It was unbelievable.

Also, when the government arrested people, more came out on the streets. They were very stupid!

CARMEN: For example, when we organised the march, we thought that everyone would get together, a thousand or so, and after a few speeches, that would be it. But the government came out to repress us with tear gas, beating people up, so people reacted very strongly in response to this. They made mistake after mistake. They was a point when we were really weak: it was the seventh day of the

blockades and people were completely exhausted. And luckily they arrested us! Just when we were in crisis, they did something to get people back on the streets. At that point, thousands of coca growers came into Cochabamba to support us which was amazing for us. Yes, it was two things: we were politically conscious and they were a disaster! They really helped us a lot!

"The other great success of this movement is that we have lost our fear. We left our houses and communities in order to talk amongst ourselves, in order to get to know one another, in order to learn to trust one another again. We occupied the streets and highways because we are their true owners. We did it counting only on ourselves. No one paid us, no one sent us orders or fined us. For us, urban and rural workers, this is the true meaning of democracy: we decide and do, discuss and carry out. We risked our lives in order to complete what we proposed, that which we consider just. Democracy is sovereignty of the people and that is what we have achieved."

Communication of the Coordinator. Sunday, February 6, 2000

What is the situation now with SEMAPA? (the local water company)

CARMEN: Before the Water Wars, SEMAPA was directed by people related to the government, but afterwards the management changed and it included representatives of the Co-ordinadora as well as one of the workers. We have worked to try to get the users onto the management and to have a transparent process that is accountable to the people.

MARCELA: Another of the things that has happened since April is that people have come to the offices of the Coordinadora about issues other than water. This is what the spokespeople are saying now: we are all realising that the struggle was not only for water. You may suddenly have control of the water, but other living conditions stay the same. Not a lot has changed.

So now the Coordinadora is moving into other

The Water Pressure Group - NZ

On April 23, 2000, the front three pages of the local paper in Cochabamba carried stories of the protest in New Zealand by activists known as the Water Pressure Group. They hosed down the Bolivian Consulate in Auckland from a bright red fire truck, bearing placards reading "Bolivia – The World is Watching You!" A map on the front page of the newspaper linked the two cities, showing the shared struggle against privatisation across the world.

After the Water Wars: public control of water

When the directors of Aguas del Tunari, the Bechtel affiliate, abandoned Cochabamba they left SEMAPA, the local water company, with substantial debts. The Coordinadora decided to channel its energies and creativity into finding successful alternative solutions to both corrupt public management and privately-owned public services. Representatives from the Coordinadora have now formed an uneasy alliance with the local government in the reconstruction and management of SEMAPA.

Currently, the SEMAPA Board of Directors is made up of two members chosen by the Cochabamba Municipal Council, one member elected by the union of SEMAPA workers, and two members chosen by the Coordinadora. While there is very strong public support in favour of the Coordinadora, they face opposition in

certain government circles and business elite, in whose interests it is to see this model fail.

In the transition to public management, the Coordinadora is guided by three principles:

- popular participation in key decisions
- transparency in the administration of the new water enterprise, and
- social equity, including subsidies to keep water prices affordable for the poorest water users.

They have expanded water connections into some of the poorest southern neighbourhoods of the area, and have instituted regular community meetings throughout the city and rural areas to identify pressing needs and find shared solutions to common problems.

types of campaigns, denouncing other problems. Many people come to see us from all over the state, for example, an old woman came to us about her land being taken away by the legal system. There are also parents who come to us about the privatisation of education and health.

We are now trying to organise a series of campaigns, start discussion groups, go out into the neighbourhoods and let people know what is happening in their area. We are also trying to give people legal advice about their situation, for example, people come from a rural community about a plan the council has, and Carmen can analyse the project and let them know if they are being cheated. People now see the Coordinadora as a trustworthy centre where they can take their problems.

CARMEN: In terms of privatisation, the situation is changing somewhat as it is now the municipalities that want to privatise their water system. We've had

contact with people in these areas to help them resist, organise, understand the legalities. Now there are organisations that have come together in other parts of the state of Cochabamba and Bolivia and have created a structure like the Co-ordinadora, which the local and national government are getting very worried about! There is quite a lot of fear. We have really set a precedent.

MARCELA: We're also very clear that we don't want to enter the system and become another institution, because we don't believe in the rules of the game. We are going to carry on as assemblies, as committees, with spokespeople. It has to come from the grassroots and in that sense, we see this as a long journey of opening spaces, even if it is just a conversation with one or two people. One of our companeros says that it's about a process of rewearing the social fabric.

Neoliberal structural adjustment policies have divided us and turned us into small separate cells, so now it is about bringing these together – not just individuals but whole social groups. For example, the irrigators, a very rural group, have linked with the professionals, a very urban group: peasants with economists. This is what it is about.

Do you feel like part of a global movement?

MARCELA: I do now, but I didn't before, and I think this is the same for a lot of people. Before, issues around the World Bank and the IMF were very distant, in the newspapers that only economists read about. Since April, it has all changed. Both institutions are now in the language of people on the streets. Everyone knows that they have directly influenced what has happened here.

When I had the opportunity to travel and meet other people, it was incredible to realise that we are not alone. There are thousands of people all over the world in resistance, maybe not about water, but against the same policies which are affecting us here too. I think that this is an important part of our work now, to make links with people abroad, to understand what we have in common, and how we

can find solutions together – to learn from each other's victories. I think that since April, here in Cochabamba we are much more part of a global movement, not only people supporting us, but all of us supporting each other.

The Cochabamba Declaration:

"Here, in this city which has been an inspiration to the world for its retaking of that right through civil action, courage and sacrifice standing as heroes and heroines against corporate, institutional and governmental abuse, and trade agreements which destroy that right, in use of our freedom and dignity, we declare the following:

For the right to life, for the respect of nature and the uses and traditions of our ancestors and our peoples, for all time the following shall be declared as inviolable rights with regard to the uses of water given us by the earth:

- 1) Water belongs to the earth and all species and is sacred to life, therefore, the world's water must be conserved, reclaimed and protected for all future generations and its natural patterns respected.
- 2) Water is a fundamental human right and a public trust to be guarded by all levels of government, therefore, it should not be commodified, privatized or traded for commercial purposes. These rights must be enshrined at all levels of government. In particular, an international treaty must ensure these principles are noncontroversial.
- 3) Water is best protected by local communities and citizens, who must be respected as equal partners with governments in the protection and regulation of water. Peoples of the earth are the only vehicle to promote Earth democracy and save water."

Alex

Independent media - Australia

Alex is 22 years old and lives in Melbourne, Australia. She is involved with Melbourne Indymedia – an independent web-based news service, Ska TV - which produces weekly news and community television, and Space Kids - who have organised a couple of independent media events. She is also part of an activist network called the Autonomous Web Of Liberation (AWOL) and the Melbourne group which organised for Woomera 2002, a no-border caravan to an immigration detention centre in the Australian desert. To support her activism, she works occasionally as a freelance lecturer for journalism students and as a research assistant for a sociologist writing a book about the anti- globalisation movement.

How did you become involved in political activism?

I grew up in the country, but even so my mum was really politically active, and I've always been invited to take part in the discussions that my family were having. I remember seeing my mum speak at rallies when I was very young, so I have had that thread running through my life.

I became active in high school around forest issues and mining campaigning. But the first big thing I got involved around was Pauline Hanson, leader of the One Nation party. When I was still living in the country, there was quite a lot of support for her and I was organising a lot of protests. She came out of nowhere in late 1996-97 with a very protectionist, anti-immigration, anti-government funding to indigenous people – a very populist kind of rhetoric. She came from this kind of common, average space and expressed what

“I really like the idea of breaking down the divide between the spectacle and the spectator, and to stop having gatekeepers in the flow of all realms of information”

apparently a lot of Australian people really were feeling. She was doing a lot of national public tours, and many of the meetings got quite violent. But not the protests that we were doing. We organised an anti-racism rally and people from different community groups would come and then we'd walk to where the meeting was, form two groups on either side of the entrance and as anyone walked in, we'd just go silent. It was so powerful, because it wasn't really confrontational, but in a really different way it was. We also did a lot of anti-Hanson poster and public education.

How would you describe the politics of the groups you're involved in?

Most of the groups I'm involved in are media groups, and the politics of those groups are essentially about participation. I guess one of the places where I've got a lot of the inspiration is from the Situationists, even though they can be quite wanky sometimes. They talk a lot about the divide between the spectacle of the world that we're living in and us, who are the spectators. I really like the idea of breaking down the divide between the spectacle and the spectator, and to stop having gatekeepers in the flow of all realms of information. That came out of being involved with the anti- uranium campaign and then reading media reports about the protesters, which were so misrepresented. Then I went to a Ska TV screening one night and saw a ten minute film of the blockade we did, and it was so good. It was exactly what had really happened, and it was exactly who we really were, and I thought: "that kind of media really exists!" So I got involved in that.

The politics is definitely about trying to give people access to issues that are completely shafted from the mainstream corporate press. I think that is a fundamental thing that crosses over into all the groups I'm involved with. Although some of the

actions are issue-based, they are fundamentally grounded in trying to get as many people as possible to participate in the protest, the organising or the action - so that the actual process and structure of the group becomes just as important as what it's actually doing.

How would you place the political work you do within the 'anti-capitalist movement'?

Sometimes I don't even feel like I'm an activist because I think the mainstream world is so compartmentalised, both physically and in roles. Home-car-office-car-home. Within activism, I've just got the "media activist" role and I find it really frustrating because it's a very delicate line. To get access to certain places you have to appear objective, and appear to be a media person. But as a media activist, you can't be too objective because then you're not seen as an activist anymore. So there's a whole crisis of identity within that.

I guess I'm involved with the DIY, anarchist way of organising, but I often find anarchist groups too dogmatic. A lot of people say anarchism isn't an ideology, but behave as if it is and take it to quite a dogmatic length. I guess I'm involved with people who are more autonomous.

Could you give some examples of how you organise?

One example was with the Media Circus, which was an amazing conference. We opened a space and incredible stuff exploded within in. It was really interesting because it was organised with eight people who knew each other really well, worked together a lot, are complete geeks and always online. We organised on an email list and so we only needed to meet once a week for one hour. We'd speak like we did on the list, in shorthand and over the top of each other. We always knew that stuff would get done because it was a really strong group, although it wasn't particularly open.

AWOL works on a much larger scale – it's a lot more open and works with a lot more structure. At the start of each meeting, we have a creditation where we say: "so-and-so updated the web site last

week and that was good work,” as a way of people getting recognition for what they do. Rotating facilitation also works really well. We also have a progressive speaking list, work on consensus and have a timekeeper. We use handsignals, and at the end we do a quick go around about how people felt about the meeting and so you get a de-brief as well.

AWOL has been going on for one year, and one of the problems is that, like all activist groups - an establishment does form - even though it's really hard in a horizontal group to know how to deal with it. By virtue of people's experience, background and confidence within activism, there's always going to be levels of capabilities in certain areas.

What is the role of women in the groups you work with?

In AWOL it's usually mostly men, but a pretty good mix of who does stuff. The women are active and outspoken. AWOL hasn't necessarily got a deep feminist analysis, but it's not as bad as some of the groups I have been involved in. There are groups like the Feminist Avengers who do stuff in Melbourne who link into AWOL a bit.

With the independent media groups, there are not many women involved. Some women write and other women are involved with 3CR (community radio). With television, like SKA TV, it's really technically intense - you have to do a lot of editing and use computers a lot, and there you have mostly boys. They are not macho boys at all. But in terms of actual representation of gender, there are way more men, which is probably why I have taken on so much public speaking. I don't always want guys representing this.

With Indymedia, we never know who publishes - whoever goes to the site does it. But technically, there's two guys and me, and I don't do tech stuff. With Ska TV, women mainly do admin and a bit of filming and cleaning the office, and don't do that much editing. I don't know why - it's not as if it's a hostile place, and we talk about it constantly, even the guys. We do outreach and we do training. I know it's a crude generalisation, but it almost becomes

like guys with cars: “Oh yeah, did you get that DV?”, and “Where's that ICM cable?” and “Man, you've got to dub that! What resolution?” - you know, that whole dropping in the tech-word kind of thing. I think maybe more than women being technophobic, women can't be bothered with wanky tech-geeks.

How do you think the PGA network can be useful for political groups in Australia?

It's mainly because autonomous movements like AWOL or the media ones I'm involved with are getting increasingly co-opted and squashed by the more traditional left. For example, the Socialist Workers Party are not necessarily more conservative in their rhetoric, but they are definitely more conservative in their ideas of social change. There are lots of them in Melbourne and have strong links with socialist groups in Asia.

In many ways, they are really organised regionally and appear to have quite good solidarity networks. They'll often bring in someone from the Philippines to talk about the student movement and that kind of thing. But I think the way that they organise and the things that they do really undermine autonomous organising, and so the groups that I'm involved with need to network with similar autonomous groups in our region. I think that the world we're in now is so fucked up, and the momentum that we've got in this crazy amorphous thing people call “movement” is so precious that we have to take seriously anything that could undermine it.

At this conference, I've heard about incredible struggles in Bolivia, but honestly, Bolivia is quite obscure to Victoria, Australia. I really think we need to hook up a lot more on a regional level. I have met a few people from Indonesia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea that I hope to set up some kind of regional network with. It sounds like a lot of the people in the northern hemisphere have already done that, but we're still quite isolated, even though we feel part of the global dynamic that's been so inspiring.

Situationist International

An avant-garde group of revolutionary artists that coalesced around 1957 in France. Their incisive theories (especially that of “the spectacle”) and imaginative tactics have had a powerful and lasting effect on radical culture and politics. They are best known for their instrumental role in the May 1968 uprising in Paris. Some key situationist quotes are:

“In a society that has abolished every kind of adventure the only adventure that remains is to abolish the society.

“Be realistic, demand the impossible.

“Power to the imagination.

“The future is still bleak, uncertain and beautiful”

What do you think are the problems with the PGA?

I'm in two minds about it. One the one hand I think: “God, there's no cohesion, and there are no structures for communicating with each other, and we can't get anything organised and we're arguing about the manifesto!” But at the same time, I really don't think it even matters that much. Because essentially what really matters is the local. I'm probably frustrated now because I can't see how being here's going to help anything. But I think for me to go home and say to AWOL, we've got a contact in Ya Basta!, and a contact in London Reclaim The Streets is going to be pretty amazing. We know we're on the same level and we can actually do some real face to face networking.

What effects do you think the terrorist attacks on September 11th will have on the ‘movement’?

I think we simultaneously overestimate and underestimate ourselves in different contexts. Sometimes we underestimate ourselves by saying: “we're not having any impact” but we are! Just look

I think that the world we're in now is so fucked up, and the momentum that we've got in this crazy amorphous thing people call ‘movement’ is so precious that we have to take seriously anything that could undermine it.

“All our communication with each other is completely mediated through capitalism and the fragmentation in the West is partly the reason why we don’t have such a strong community-based movement.”

at the WTO and IMF rhetoric: they’re spinning so much. They are totally picking up on what we’re saying. But we also overestimate ourselves by saying: “They are going to use this to shut us down” - as if the only thing the governments are thinking about is the political dissent in the world.

But now there is this image of planes being crashed into the Twin Towers. The authorities have got this amazing card to play, so I think the impact will be even stronger repression of protest and public demonstrations. There will also be much more insidious control through surveillance which creates a state where you end up editing your own behaviour.

The other thing I think is really scary in terms of these issues is that they have the potential to really polarise the movement. People can get really sucked in by the populist, reactionary way that the media has been spinning this story. I mean that on the one hand people need to be sympathetic, but at the same time be aware that terrorism is something that the USA has been carrying out against the rest of the world for so long. George Bush is the most amazing proponent of Orwellian double- speak that I have ever heard. You know: “war is peace”.

What do you think the groups from the South and North can learn from each other?

I think one of the most amazing things I’ve experienced in this conference are the struggles I’ve heard of and the people involved. They are marginalised, but they’re not this weird fringe of crusty, punk activists! We met thousands of coca-growers in Chapare yesterday, which seemed like a genuine grassroots, community-based struggle - it was a really diverse bunch of people. I think we can observe and try to learn from how they get so involved at the grassroots level.

I think it’s partly to do with the fact that they are being pushed a lot further and they’ve got to fight now. I think that their societies haven’t been as divided by capitalism and industrialisation in the West. We have such advanced capitalist systems - we exists in such separate compartments and it’s rare to have whole communities still living in a subsistence way. All our communication with each other is completely mediated through capitalism and I think that the fragmentation in the West is partly the reason why we don’t have such a strong community-based movement.

In general, Southern groups can learn about issues such as gender equality from Northern groups. Even though there are a lot of really strong women’s movements here, there seems to be just too many men who have spoken for way too long. Some Southern groups could also learn from us about how to work together in a horizontal way. There are Southern movements that have leaders at the conference and I find that a bit frightening.

What is your vision for a better world?

There’s a book by Ted Trainer called ‘The Conserver Society’. He talks a lot about things like edible landscapes, parks having apple trees so there is free food in public places. People have access to personal and community gardens. He also talks about alternative energy: methane and solar energy. So in terms of a sustainable, local, organic food supply, I’m really into that. I like the idea that if we lived in a society where we’d work for two days, we’d

have five days to do what we wanted.

For me the abolition of roles and the abolition of binary and linear ways of thinking is just as important as any actual structures. I’ve been thinking a lot lately about the idea of simultaneous contradictions. Like the fact that nature, human relationships, human feelings and those kind of base, natural kind of things are random, spontaneous and organic. How ridiculous it is to live in any kind of world that tries to put boundaries around that! I’m thinking about how to live in a society that allows for fluidity, but still functions.

I don’t think I have too firm a vision of what it would look like, but I have experienced moments of it. At the Media Circus, someone got up and totally criticised something about the structure and a really amazing debate started and there was this moment where space was opened up... It’s like when you go to a Reclaim the Streets party and when you arrive, you’re thinking: “Is this really going to happen?” Then suddenly the tripods go up and guerrilla gardens appear and there is someone handing out free food. That’s the dynamic! I don’t know if it will look in terms of the aesthetic, but in terms of that moment, I guess it’s really about freedom. That freedom is the one that I imagine.

The Media Circus...

Was organised for the second time in Melbourne, July 2001. It aimed to reclaim the media space and to continue fostering a bottom-up media culture. It was a space to tell stories of resistance, and comprised of

screenings, workshops, forums and exchanges.

Media circus program ‘Rouge States’: www.rougestates.com

Woomera 2002 - Autonomadic Caravan and Festival of Freedoms

Woomera 2002 - the festival of freedoms was held March 28 - April 1, 2002, in the South Australian desert. Woomera is best known as the site of Australia's largest onshore internment camp, the result of successive Australian government policy of imprisoning those who move without papers. Woomera 2002 was the culmination of a series of actions, when those outside the wire joined in the long history of protests of those behind to insist on freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary and extrajudicial imprisonment, and for dignity. During the

days of action 50 people escaped from the detention centre and 11 are still free.

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT Friday 29 March : At around 5.40pm it was announced in the spokes-council that contact with the detainees had alerted us to an action planned at 6pm inside the centre. We formed a long parade of colour and music, and orange flares and rainbow kites filled the sky. We reached a five meter fence topped with razor wire - and we could see detainees well enough to wave and shout to each other. Next, unbelievably,

the fence came down and we were separated from the detainees by two fences divided and topped by huge coils of razor wire. It was frantic and amazing - all the times I have ever talked about borders, ever critiqued the state, ever condemned racism, ever decried human rights abuses - were all crystallised and FELT in our hearts - no longer words making up a critique, but the disgusting reality right in front of us.

People began to pour through the fences. A bar had been used to wedge apart the huge concrete-based bars which form the fence,

and more and more people jumped through into the arms of the stunned protesters. When people hit the ground they were surrounded by protesters who tore off their shirts and scarves, hats and pants, quickly changing them to disguise them.

On the night of June 26th, protesters drove up to the fence of the Woomera detention centre, the vehicles were used to pull the fence down and again 34 asylum seekers escaped.

"We are
all illegal
until
no-one is
illegal."



Gender declaration:

PGA is a movement which is crosscut by the gender perspective, therefore we take action against discrimination along the line of gender, class and ethnicity.

Discrimination is a social phenomena linked to power which permeates culture, economics and politics.

Economic globalisation has impoverished women who have double and triple workloads, which is why people talk about the feminization of poverty.

In the workplace women do not have equal rights, do not have the same salary, are the first to be fired, we have to put up with sexual harassment and even abuse or rape from bosses and colleagues to stay employed.

Within politicised groups, women are still subjected to discrimination.

Both men and women are caught in chauvinist cultural conceptions: a form of domination, is it disguised as a subtle chauvinism, people do not practice what they preach.

Therefore, we need to politicise the struggle of the sexes, within the confrontation against capital, because it is useless to convert it into personal battles so we declare that the private is public and the personal is political. we need to politicise the struggle of the sexes, within the confrontation against capital,

In the PGA, we revindicate women's struggle as an integral part of the fight for social justice; we are demanding the construction of a just society for women and men. Therefore, we feel we should start inside PGA and remove any form of sexual harassment and discrimination against women, taking the first steps in the construction of equality.

Men and women are in this struggle together. It is a commitment on a personal level, an organisational level and throughout all the work done through PGA. - Cochabamba, 17th September 2001



Andrea Nicaraguan Confederation of Trade Unions

Andrea is a forty-five year-old Nicaraguan trade unionist. She works for the Nicaraguan Confederation of Trade Unions (Confederacion Sindical de Trabajadores) and has raised four children. Here, she talks about the issues affecting workers, such as multilateral financial institutions, environmental concerns, the rights of women and the role of PGA in strengthening global struggle against "savage capitalism".

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How did you become involved in political action?

In 1978, not long before our triumphant revolution. I was very young, a housewife with two small children. But my partner was a student who joined the revolutionary struggle, and gradually the whole family had to become involved. It was a crime, then, just to be a young student. You were already a suspect. People thought that if they were going to die, it might as well be for a just cause.

After the insurrection of September 1978, the Guardia began a clean-up operation. We all had to leave the city because we were on a black-list as collaborators with the Sandinista front. I joined the ranks of the Sandinistas in Honduras where we went into training, waiting to return to Nicaragua, which we did after the revolution, in 1979.

What does your political work involve these days?

During the Sandinista regime there weren't so many demands on the unions, because it was easy enough to sit down with the administration and company owners to negotiate collective agreements. Since

1990, we've been learning how to defend the workers and gaining legal expertise. Companies continue to abuse the workers' rights, and these days the Ministry of Work is on their side, whether they are state-owned, private or transnational. To achieve anything, we have to go down the judicial route. Social organisations like the National Centre for Human Rights have given us a lot of support. Our main aim is to defend the human rights and labour rights of workers.

Can you explain the structure of the Nicaraguan Trade Union movement?

It's a tiered structure: union, federation, confederation, central. But each level is autonomous, with its own assembly electing delegates to the next level. Individual unions are responsible for what they do in their companies, while the higher bodies take very general decisions,

such as calling a resolution against the FTAA [Free Trade Agreement of the Americas] or planning a big march for the 1st of May. The Congress, which meets every two years, might decide to back the Sandinistas, but an individual worker would not be obliged to pledge support. Most of us do, because we were born from the triumph of the revolution. But it doesn't mean we don't have colleagues who are not Sandinistas.

To form a union requires a minimum of twenty workers. They elect an executive committee, write statutes, an action plan and a list of demands to be presented to the Ministry of Work, such as for a communal eating space, health care contributions, or for workers to be rewarded with a bonus, such as a basic food hamper at New Year.

What about women in the Unions?

The Women's Secretariat tries to ensure women's needs and rights are recognised within collective agreements, and that they are well represented within the movement. Of the thirteen people in my Confederation, four are women. We also hold a

"Globalisation affects the earth, water, health, education, living standards, everything. So we must learn to do integrated work. Even though we specialise, we must retain that broad overview of what it is we're fighting for."



National Women's Council. This has a consultation function, but it effectively passes resolutions because its views are directly taken up by the Confederation. It's very delicate and arduous work, hinging on training and persuasion. We have proved our capacity to represent ourselves within the structure, and have won space and respect. But there's much more to be done. The Education Council is charged with integrating women's issues and also those of younger people, who can also face discrimination. I work for the Women's Secretariat and with the Young People's Secretariat, which encourages greater participation by younger people and greater awareness of their needs. It's fairly coordinated and interesting work.

What kinds of actions do you organise?

Demonstrations when workers' rights or broader human rights are threatened, such as against the privatisation of pensions, or price rises for electricity, telephones and water.

We are trying to defend ourselves from neoliberal measures. In Nicaragua, the national bank, energy, water, education and health services have all been privatised, and telecommunications are in the process of being sold off. During the demos, thousands of people take to the streets, letting off noisy home-made 'mortars', which are very cheerful! If the administrative option has been exhausted in a specific dispute, we'll hold a workplace strike and refuse to leave until an agreement is reached.

What are your views on trade unionism in other parts of the world?

We have links with lots of other Latin American unions, but there seems to be less interest in union activity in Europe, and I think their work differs from ours. It appears to be more about dialogue and persuasion, whereas ours is about struggle and pressure. It's very tough for us to extract benefits for workers. We do have links with organisations in European countries and the US, which is useful, despite our different cultures. We try to respect our

differences. We're also affiliated to international networks centred on particular industries, such as clothing, foodstuffs or construction.

Why did you get involved with the PGA?

We identified with the manifesto because of its clear opposition to the IMF, World Bank and the WTO. The IMF and World Bank dictate economic measures in our countries, such as the pensions sell-off. Our puppet governments are totally complicit, disregarding the hunger and misery of their own people. High unemployment levels are their way of keeping down inflation.

It is shameful and embarrassing that Nicaragua, with its fine natural resources and hard working people, has been entered into the HIPC initiative [the debt-relief programme for the poorest, most indebted countries in the world]. How can a country with these means be so poor and disgraced? That's why we're against the IMF and World Bank. We are against the WTO because it sets the terms of trade, forces us to import at a high price, sell our products very cheaply and accept the quotas they impose. Its beneficiaries are the rich countries, not the poor ones. Because these things impact on workers, they form part of our struggle as trade unionists.

How is the PGA useful to you?

It is an important forum for exchange. For instance, the Mexicans I talked to were very interested to know what's going on with the *maquila* [sweatshop] situation in Nicaragua, and I've spoken here with Asian women about how we deal with women's issues in trade union structures. We're globalising our strength against globalisation, so that it is seen from a human, and not just an economic, point of view. It's about joining forces around the things that unite us, and I think it's helping to strengthen the global level of our struggle, though, as with all processes, it has its limitations. It needs to be much wider, and to have clear definitions, so that newcomers can have all the information they require at their fingertips.

What sort of things can we learn from each other?

Last night, we were talking about the potential for capacity building and sharing practical tips on how and when to do things, on all sorts of different themes. It's a change from the paternalism we have experienced with some of the NGOs, who have worked in Nicaragua without attempting to share their methods or pass on their expertise.

The PGA has a role in us analysing and deepening our vision of what we want for the

"We're globalising our strength against globalisation, so that it is seen from a human, and not just an economic, point of view."

future. Systems fail - we've seen the collapse of the socialist block and it's happening to capitalism now. The US is in recession. This approaching war endangers all of us, not just the US and the Arab world. If we want to inherit better things, we have to do the work now.

How do you think the September 11 attacks will affect our social movements?

The fact that we oppose the WTO, IMF and the WB is an aggression for them, and they are right in so far as they strive to defend their economic interests. But we, every day, are living a constant, extremely violent aggression. Thousands of children die every day worldwide. Thousands of mothers die in childbirth. And if you include all the men who die in wars provoked by capitalism... It's a highly violent system - one which prevents people seeing where they are going and what they want, because of the unbelievable stress it places upon them. Imagine that one day you can give your children bread, milk, rice and beans to eat, but the next day haven't the means to provide so much as a cup of coffee. What do you do if they are crying out for food? I'd be happy if for one moment these powerful men would stop to consider. But their arrogance means they'll never think about it while they are in power. I believe the church should play a more



The Sandinistas

In 1936, Anastasio Somoza, heavily funded by the US, founded a brutal dictatorship that was passed from father to son to brother for 43 years.

After many years of bloody battle, the Somoza dictatorship was finally toppled on July 19, 1979 by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). On July 20, the Sandinistas entered Managua to the triumphant celebrating of hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans. After the victory, the Sandinistas were very successful in implementing programs to achieve the people's self determination for the first time in their history. These programs achieved world-wide recognition and included gains in the areas of literacy, health care, education, childcare, unions and land reform.

However, as Nicaraguans struggled to

become more self-sufficient and independent, the Reagan-Bush administration began funding the Contra War against the Sandinista government in the early 1980's.

This war cost 60,000 lives and destroyed the infrastructure and economy of the country.

In 1990, Nicaragua held its second democratic elections. The Nicaraguan people, after suffering the ill-effects of ten years of war and a US trade embargo, voted for the US-backed Coalition candidate, Violeta de Chamorro. Many Nicaraguans felt pushed against the wall by their dire conditions and saw no other way to end the US's aggression. Yet, despite this coercion, the Sandinista Party still received 41% of the total votes. Today, the FSLN is still the largest, most popular party in the country.

belligerent role. They should not attack the poor, but those who cause the misery and hunger. As the Pope has said, this capitalism is savage. 'Savage capitalism' he called it. And they try to demonise our movement!

Do you think there's a danger of us being equated with that of terrorist fundamentalists?

Possibly, given that we operate outside their belief system and see things another way. But they'd be mistaken. We are just poor people trying to improve things for other poor people. I am Nicaraguan, by grace of God, but I don't just feel Nicaraguan. My people are all over the world - anyone that has a sense of humanity. I don't resent anyone for being

"It's a highly violent system, one which prevents people seeing where they are going and what they want, because of the unbelievable stress it places upon them."

born in Europe. It's just an accident of geography. In our movement we are very willing to share our different cultures, whether among nations or within our own.

Has there been much incorporation of ecological issues in your trade union movement?

Yes, more and more so. For example, against the use of environmentally damaging chorines and dyes. We used to focus all our attention on the workplace, but people don't live in factories. It's expanded to include education and capacity building in the *barrios* where people actually live.

Recently, it came to light that an agricultural product which was regularly used on cotton and banana crops in Nicaragua had actually been banned in other countries. Many died of skin cancers as a result of contact with the chemical, and there's currently a huge court case underway against the United States fruit company, which we seem to be winning so far.

If you don't learn to care for the environment you'll never achieve the outcomes you're dreaming of. Globalisation affects the earth, water, health, education, living standards, everything. So we must learn to do integrated work. Even though we specialise, we must retain that broad overview of what it is we're fighting for.

Do you think they're scared of a unified, global analysis on our part?

They try to deny it. I think it's funny how capitalism develops technology for its own ends, and can also end up a victim of the technology. The internet might facilitate the swift transfer of capital, but it also enables social movements to be more cohesive. There's a race on between "savage capitalism" and human beings. And we are confident that we can get there first.

What is your vision for the future?

I'm fighting for social justice, for a world where human beings are respected, where there's no discrimination against women, where kids can go to

school and enjoy their childhood. My struggle is for everyone to have a decent home and to know where tomorrow's meal is coming from. Let me make one thing clear: I'm not struggling for everyone to be able to have a car or a credit card. I'm struggling for public buses, and energy for power to keep warm. People die of cold on the streets in the USA, which is supposed to be the First World. We have to succeed, because right now we are killing ourselves. I don't believe things should be this way.

"Let me make one thing clear: I'm not struggling so that everyone can have a car or a credit card."

On PGA...

“I think Peoples’ Global Action is vital so that from a grassroots level we can struggle together, share ideas, take decisions to confront the World Bank and IMF, which try to humiliate and crush us.” - Silvia

‘It is possible to build a solidarity movement between the North and the South, putting an end to this paternalistic vision which it seems some companeros in Europe used to have. We already proved to the PGA that you can construct an international movement of solidarity, that goes beyond money.’ - Ivania

‘The idea of PGA is great, but the structure is not workable. Also, I think PGA should pay more attention to alternatives.’ - Nadia

‘The informal exchanges were great, but the plenary discussions were about who could impose their idea the loudest. In Latin America, it works a lot like this - it’s a question of force.’ - Karla

‘What I really regret is that people working on the same kinds of struggle in different places did not talk in depth.’ - Josefina

‘Circulating information is one thing that is more important than money.’ - Mia

‘I’m not afraid to fight the WTO because we are part of an international movement.’ - Mia

‘That has been the best part of the conference - to realise that there are similar people fighting on the same issues. You feel less alone and realise that we are part of a bigger movement.’ - Karla

‘We live in Bangladesh, we are victims of discrimination and we are fighting to establish our rights and there are many other people in other regions in similar struggles. We don’t know what they are doing and so it’s really necessary to combine this movement.’ -

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Josefina Funa Commission, Chile

Josefina is a radical lawyer from Santiago, Chile. She is part of the Funa Commission, a human rights group which exposes torturers from the years of the Pinochet dictatorship and aims to reactivate social networks.

They pursue justice as the retelling and restoration of history in Chile. She is also a part of a legal group who work voluntarily with social movements, providing training and defence.

She talks here about reconciliation and peace in the legacy of the Dictatorship; the choice between armed struggle and pacifist resistance; the risks you come to terms with as a mother-in-struggle; sexual politics in revolutionary movements in Latin America and the pros and cons of Peoples' Global Action. She is 30 years old and has one son who is two and a half.

What does the Funa Commission do?

It's a very recent thing. Funa was founded when Pinochet was imprisoned in England. We took the concept from the Jews who have identified Nazis, going to their work places and denouncing them. We used this idea to try to reconstruct history and

recover the collective memory of the Chilean people. I've been in the Commission for about a year.

We identify the people who committed human rights violations but have not paid a legal price for what they have done. On the whole they are torturers, or people who took part in mass murder. Nowadays nobody knows about what happened 20 or 25 years ago and today these people are enjoying a comfortable life, financial benefits, stability, a good job or a wealthy retirement package, without having to take any responsibility for what they did.

Our idea is to unmask them and publicly denounce their actions during the dictatorship - in front of their families, their work colleagues and neighbours, and to make them realise that we have not forgotten what happened.

Another objective of Funa is to reactivate social networks, which were broken down during the 10 years of "democracy". Work in communities was deactivated, along with solidarity networks and other organisations.

Through these two things, we aim to achieve the social justice that is sorely absent in Chile.

How has the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation been dealt with in Chile?

The subject of national reconciliation exists, in that the government asks us to forgive each other and to carry on living. But in Chile forgiveness happened like this: they went to a priest, he said: "I forgive everybody", and they staged a sham reconciliation. Nobody asked the children of the imprisoned and disappeared if they had forgiven or not.

Our group is different from other human rights groups in that you don't necessarily have to have suffered repression personally. So we're not children of the disappeared or the executed. There are some, but it isn't about that. It has to do with your consciousness and your desire to clean up the wound, to make the past known, so that we can look each other in the eyes and are able to ask for forgiveness.

Of course, that's assuming you want to forgive. Forgiveness is so personal. After all, this is the reality of the situation. I don't know a single person, at least, not anyone who has a certain level of awareness of human rights, who is able to forgive acts of genocide of this magnitude. Except for some who might be a Catholic, and have this faith, which allows them to make these acts of forgiveness. But they are motivated more by religion than awareness. It's not possible to forgive just like that, because the

(no contact details for security reasons)

Funar - Chilean slang word that means: to rot; to go off; to go mouldy; to be found out

The Pinochet regime in Chile

General Pinochet overthrew the first democratically elected Marxist government in 1973. President Salvador Allende was among the first to die in the violent coup. Pinochet dissolved Congress, suspended the constitution, banned opposition, arrested trade unionists and imposed controls on the media. Thousands were forced into exile. 400 US CIA experts assisted Pinochet.

The regime embarked on a radical programme of denationalisation, closely assisted by free market economists. The police state lasted for 17 years, until 1989, when Pinochet was voted out of

power, continuing as Commander in Chief of the army. In 1998, Pinochet stepped down as head of the Chilean army and became a senator, with a guarantee of parliamentary immunity for life.

Detention, torture and assassination under Pinochet

An official total of 3,197 people were tortured, murdered and then disappeared under Pinochet's brutal 17-year regime. Thousands of others passed through torture chambers set up by the regime in its jails, military bases, and secret detention

centres. Inside the infamous centres, victims were subjected to violent and continuous beatings, often to the point of death, before doctors revived them to prolong their suffering. Many people were subjected to systematic rape and sodomy. Pregnant women and young children were also killed. Pinochet was also involved in Operation Condor, a US-led South America-wide operation to kidnap and kill dissidents opposed to the continent's rightwing military regimes.

Right; Mothers of the disappeared



Pinochet's imprisonment in England

In September 1998, the 82-year-old General went to London for surgery. The Spanish judges Catellon and Garzon, investigating Pinochet in connection with the torture and disappearance of Spanish citizens during the Pinochet regime, contacted Interpol and Pinochet was arrested. After much legal wrangling, Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, declared Pinochet would not be extradited to Spain for the cases of genocide, terrorism, torture and murder being pursued against him, due to ill health. The General left for Chile. He was brought to trial in Chile but walked free from a Santiago court

in 2001 after pleading ill health and being classified as "demented" (a decision mocked by human rights campaigners), effectively ending all investigations being led against him around the world.

But when Judge Juan Guzman indicted Pinochet, he struck a powerful blow at the parallel universe built up over 17 years of dictatorship. The false story of Chile's past had been shaken and the case against the ex-dictator became a symbol, not just for justice for the victims, but also for the restoration of the true history of Chile.

might meet a taxi driver who is prepared to attack you if you haven't got the right change and you don't understand why there is so much violence, but if you think that there are 50,000 ex-torturers in the streets doing all sorts of different activities, it is not so hard to work out.

I feel there is a lot of generalised social rage, but that people are not always able to concentrate on finding out where this anger comes from, and against whom it is directed.

Can you describe a Funa action?

One of the biggest and most important Funa actions that we did was to a dentist who had used his profession to torture people. We "Funa-ed" the hospital where he worked and did a performance with medical students from the university who came with their white coats and masks. Some were members of Funa and others were genuine medical students who wanted to take part. We always use theatre or poetry.

On this action, the man was unlucky enough to be in when we arrived, attending to people. Sometimes it can get very heavy, because there are people present who have been tortured by the person who we are going to expose and denounce.

So we arrived at this hospital and there were lots of people from the medical profession who wanted to accompany us. When they saw the man's face and realised who it was, they were shocked. Many people were angry, other people were afraid. We were carrying balloons, posters, and stickers and we walked to the other side of the hospital where we were told he was working.

We stopped outside his surgery and we started to read the pamphlet with his name and everything he'd done - the people he'd tortured. A group of maybe six people went into his office. Initially he seemed very disturbed. He asked them, "Who are you? What do you want? What are you doing here?" Somebody walked up to him and removed his dentist's mask. As it happened, there was a woman there who had been tortured by him, only she hadn't recognised him from the photos on the

posters. When his mask was removed, she realised he had tortured her. That was a really powerful scene. She looked at him and said: "Do you remember me?" The man replied, "No. I don't know you." She said, "You tortured me and my husband at Cuatramala", which was a concentration camp during the dictatorship. At this point, the man got afraid, when he realised what was going on and that there were 300 to 400 people outside. He started pushing people and others started shouting. It was really chaotic.

He ended up crying in a corner of his office and the *compa era* who identified him as her torturer left the place in tears - she was sat in the corridor crying her eyes out. The photographer who films Funa actions came out crying as well.

You know, a lot of people tell us that what we do is some kind of revenge. But if we really wanted revenge, one blow from each of us would have been enough to kill him. There were 300 of us who were going to denounce a torturer and we found him in. We accomplished our objective. He had to face this woman and look her in the eyes. All he could do was to shout and cry.

What happens once the actions are over?

People have never reacted with violence. It has happened that people have phoned torturers up and insulted them, but that's very rare. The consequences that do take place go quite a lot deeper than that.

In the case of this dentist, the union of hospital workers met and asked for him to be expelled from the hospital, because a man who worked as a torturer using his profession cannot work in the public service, that's obvious. So, the people - and this is the idea - take responsibility for exacting an alternative kind of justice. The dentist himself went to work as usual the next day - it wasn't his idea to give up his position. They are very afraid, because they feel totally exposed and vulnerable. In general they are very cowardly people.

What we have had is that people begin to mobilise. Their neighbours start to worry, and start



President says there has been a national reconciliation. No. That's what this is about.

Every time someone brings the past up, they are told to look into the future. But the future is constructed on the basis of the past and if the past is rotten, nothing good can come of it. So this is the work that we do.

It's like a wound. If you cover it, the wound is going to get infected and nothing good will come out of it. The only way to clean it is to wash it and put it out into the sun so that it can heal. This has not been done.

It seems to me that Chile is a time bomb, like many countries that have lived under a dictatorship. There is a lot of hate, there is a lot of bitterness, there is a lot of pain in society in general, and that explodes from time to time in various things. You see, there are so many people out there. You have to think that there were around 50,000 people who worked as torturers, for example, in security organisations. Today, these people drive taxis, or they are engineers. These are people who weren't directly members of the army, but civilians who collaborated with the intelligence agencies. These are the men who mistreat their women and hit their children, because they are deeply violent men, trained in torture, who are now out of a job. You

to try to get them out, saying they don't want torturers living in their neighbourhood, or a workmate who was a torturer. So they start to exert pressure to get rid of him, to make him feel that people have not forgotten or forgiven him.

“It's like a wound. If you cover it, the wound is going to get infected and nothing good will come out of it. The only way to clean it is to wash it and put it out into the sun so that it can heal.”

Are there any legal repercussions for the torturers?

There are loads of reports and charges but no one is ever tried, as the government is very afraid of the armed forces. They are very afraid of Pinochet and of the security forces that still exist today. The government has tried to cover things up. There have been maybe two or three judicial processes and those tried have received ridiculous sentences compared to what they should have served. Although I actually believe that no punishment fits the crimes of genocide they have committed - even if they spent the rest of their lives in prison, they could not pay for what they did.

How have the police responded to the actions of the Funa Commission?

In the beginning, the government reacted well to the Funa Commission. We even had media coverage, until they realised that this was potentially dangerous and that we weren't as small a group, as they had thought.

When they started doing Funa actions in other cities in Chile, we became a clandestine organisation because of heavy repression. The government realised that

this was something which involved many people and that it involved human rights. They have the human rights groups very tightly controlled, you see. They do marches and nobody bothers them - there is no repression, because it is a "democratic country" - these things are allowed. But it is not permitted for a group to expose a man who was important to the authorities, such as a high ranking military official who worked in the intelligence agencies, because they know it could touch them next.

We haven't only "funa-ed" people who have actually been torturers - we have also "funa-ed" businessmen. One businessman had a fleet of boats and let one of his boats be used as a torture centre.

It is then that they realise that everyone is at risk of being denounced. That is to say, right-wing politicians, the military, secret service - it could be anyone. The current President could easily be "funa-ed". He has been complicit in the passing of a series of laws that violate worker's rights, for example.

So now repression of the Funa is very, very heavy. There is no media coverage, except by some alternative media. Many people were arrested on the last three Funa actions - sometimes before they even started. They started to use tear gas and water canons immediately.

The latest thing they do is mix water with gas so it burns terribly. But you are used to that kind of thing in Chile. It happens about once a week. It's nothing out of the ordinary. Whether it's the miners or the students or the fishermen, there is always some group protesting. And the repression is always the same - tear gas, water, beatings, prison. I have not come across a single "democratic country" where this doesn't go on. At least not in any democracies in Latin America.

In the past, police repression was the least important. In reality, the biggest fear, the fiercest repression, was from the intelligence agencies. The police might hit you a few times, soak you, make you spend a night in jail, but the secret police disappear you. Nowadays they don't. But the practices of torture continue although you may think you are living in a democracy.

How did you get involved in political action?

My mother is a political activist and has been all her life. There were always meetings in my house and one day a man who was a leader of the fishermen realised that I was hanging around and listening, and asked me if I wanted to learn. I said yes, so he began to draw. He drew a very fat man and told me it was a bourgeois, then he drew a very thin man and told me it was a proletarian, and explained that he was a Marxist. So I educated myself and began to study Marxism at eight years old. At 12 years, I became active in a political party which was a left-wing Christian party.

From 1983, when there was a big insurrection, principally in Santiago, there were very violent national protests with many deaths and I began to realise that my concept of peace was untenable in the political moment that I was living. I took part in student organisations which were the strongest opposition to the dictatorship - not university students but secondary school students. It was during these protests that they tried all kinds of repression, from paralysing bombs to dogs. The secondary school movement had the greatest number of deaths over this period than any other group.

The first time that we took over a school, I was 15. They arrested many people and tortured many children. This was the heaviest repression in this period of the dictatorship. At 17, I renounced my membership of the Christian party when they declared themselves in opposition to armed conflict as a form of struggle. When my mother was exiled for her politics, I began to radicalise my political stance much more and joined an armed group which was mostly made up of children, modelled on the secondary schools movement, of which very few are still alive because they killed about 70%. There are many who are political prisoners to this day. I got away, yes. It wasn't easy, but I managed to escape that.

In the first three months of the democratic government in 1989, they killed more people than in the last years of the dictatorship. They ended up

The structure of the Funa Commission

It has a horizontal structure. An assembly of 20 people, with spokespeople who rotate, does the planning and makes decisions on the targets for actions and how they will be carried out. There are different coordinators for every Funa action. There are between 300 - 400 people involved altogether. They run benefit parties to fundraise.

annihilating this armed movement which had military instruction, but was without much of a political base.

After that, I went to university and I started to mix my skills a little, to use my technical knowledge in order to start thinking in a more political and less militaristic way. I can't put a label on my politics. The main thing I feel is a deep sense of pain, that there is too much poverty, too much humiliation.

I don't have a "political position" as such. I could describe myself as left-wing - I think I have some elements of Marxist analysis which are useful, but it's not to do with ideology - it's to do with my feeling of humanity. Any person with humanity cannot be on the right. For me, being on the right or being a fascist is a contradiction with humanity.

What event in your political past has had the greatest impact on you?

There are things that have moved me which have to do with my current political work, like the woman who confronted the dentist was a very powerful experience. But one historical experience which radicalised my way of thinking was in 1983, during a massive general strike. At this time there were already small armed groups and a very heavy, harsh atmosphere. I had a friend who was called Carmen Gloria who worked with indigenous communities - a brown-haired woman, very pretty. A friend of hers arrived from Europe who was called Rodrigo. He was the son of an exile and he wanted to photograph the protests. They stopped on a corner, in the area where Carmen lived, and saw that there were barricades and armoured personnel carriers advancing.

The military stopped their lorries and got out. They threw paraffin over the two of them and set fire to them - to both of them, to Carmen Gloria and Rodrigo. And while they burned, there are testimonies from the neighbours who heard their cries, that the military who surrounded them began to sing as you would round a bonfire with your friends. They started to sing and clap while they

burned. Rodrigo died of his injuries. Carmen Gloria survived but with burns on 70% of her body. She's a professional psychologist now, with a husband and children.

When this happened I was in a convent studying to be a nun. I was a pacifist, with a strong tendency towards the religious path, but with a contradiction between what I understood as the peoples' struggle and a religious life. When I found out this had happened, I went to ask the Superior to help me overcome the pain I was feeling. At this point nobody knew if Carmen Gloria would survive. The Mother Superior told me that if I was thinking about getting involved in politics, then I had no place in a convent. I said to her: "I'm not talking about politics. I'm talking about a woman and a man who were set on fire by the military". To me this is not politics. How could it occur to anyone to do such a thing? This experience was decisive for me. My pacifist position was not tenable. If it was possible to burn someone alive for taking photos, there was no possibility for a pacifist struggle.

How has struggle divided itself along pacifist/militaristic lines in Chile?

There was a movement in Chile called Sebastian Osevero, in homage to a father of two imprisoned and disappeared sons. He looked for his sons for 17 years and as he never got a response from the government, he stood in front of the parliament building and set fire to himself as a form of protest for his sons and all the disappeared. As a result of this, a group was formed. They were pacifists, so they went to the government building with their hands raised above their heads. The police arrived and beat them all with sticks, but they stayed there with their hands in the air. I felt that this had no effect. Surely these people are wasting their time, being tortured and never producing any results? The press covered it on two occasions, but the third time they met, it didn't matter to anyone anymore. These two demonstrations made me realise that at this moment, my path was a different one. I couldn't respond with a sit-in, in front of a military



tank - it wasn't possible.

I'm not suggesting by any means that everyone should adopt armed struggle. Nobody likes shooting another person, unless they are a bit mad. I had to do some armed actions, but I was never in a situation where I had to shoot anyone, not directly. For me, it would have been very difficult, because the conditions were either you, the soldier in front of you, or one of your brothers. I never had to make this choice. It's something that we had to do, were obliged to do, to try to halt the amount of violence, the amount of killings that there were at this time. The only option was to confront it. We couldn't let them continue to kill people.

How do people struggle for change in Chile now?

At the moment, to suggest armed struggle in Chile would be idiocy. It seems to me that today we are building something different. Firstly, we should be raising awareness among young people, who are very lost. They tend to rebel against their fathers, against their teachers, against any symbol of

Zapatista woman at a demonstration in San Cristobal, Chiapas, January 2001.

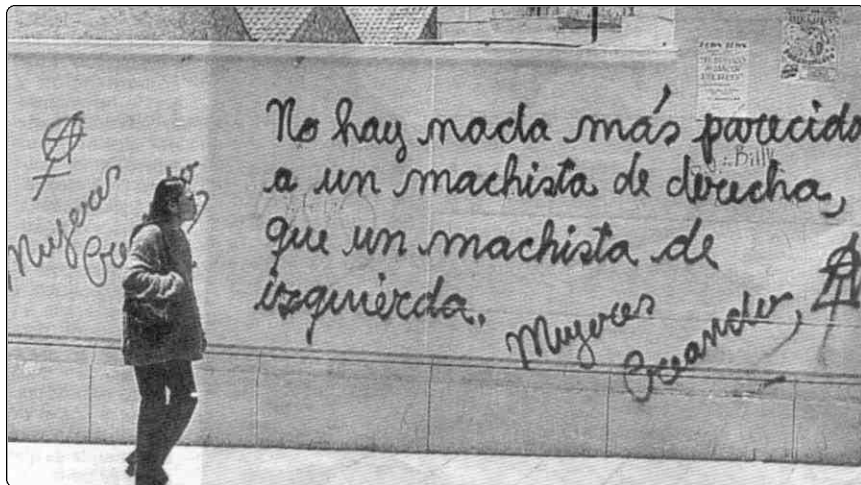
“I can't put a label on my politics. The main thing I feel is a deep sense of pain, that there is too much poverty, too much humiliation”

authority. It is important that people learn to identify the source of this rage and this impotence, and that the source is not the President or even Pinochet. The responsibility lies with a system. People need to learn to identify this common enemy. For me, this is the work for our times.

There were people who went home after the dictatorship and thought, that since we are in a democracy, there's no reason to struggle any more. They don't understand that it's not all over, that to have a "democratic government" is not an achievement. It was not for this that so many of my brothers and sisters died. It was not for this that my mother was exiled, that I suffered repression. This was not what we wanted. We wanted an alternative system, a fair system. We believed in a different society, not a negotiated democracy. You can't go home and say: "I fought - now let someone else do it." It's not about that. As those who were Cuban revolutionaries used to say: revolution does not end. You die with it.

The subject of power is a central theme for me. If you are not able to change your own behaviour

“there is nothing more like a right-wing chauvinist than a left-wing chauvinist”



and your own way of relating to people, you cannot expect others to make a change. If you give a revolutionary speech one day and the next day take your children to MacDonaldis, there can be no real change.

You have to understand that Pinochet could be in prison for the rest of his life and the struggle would not be won - it goes much deeper than that. It is about education, history, respect for diversity. It is very difficult to keep yourself distant from all the practices of power that you almost inevitably reproduce from the system.

Strangely I think that the struggle today is much harder and will last longer than the one against the dictatorship. During the dictatorship, everyone - from the Social Democrats to the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) which had the most radical stance - knew that the enemy was Pinochet. We united on a common front. Pinochet has gone, and now what? Everybody fights for quotas of power: the young are anarchists or punks or whatever foreign shit they latch on to and the workers fight their corner and the fishermen fight theirs. Now we need to work towards the unification of these struggles. We have to fight consumerism - the whole system.

How do you feel women are represented in your group?

There are more or less the same amount of men and women and in the Funa Commission. There is no distinction between people, whether they are a man or a woman. It would not occur to us that there is a difference. It is not discussed. The responsibilities are taken on by the people who are prepared to do it, and who feel they have the capacity to do it - and that's it.

I have problems taking the subject of women, the gender issue, as a theme. It seems to me that women's struggle has been to occupy a place within the system - for equality, participation, and to have the rights to do what we want with our bodies.

I think this lacks the necessary depth to understand that the construction of a better system

is not to do with being a man or a woman. I am not looking for quotas of power in this patriarchal system. I will fight for the destruction of this system and for a different system in which I don't have to fight to have a place in society.

I will say that revolutionary movements are profoundly chauvinist and this is something that has not changed, despite the fact that in the Cuban revolution, or in the Zapatista army today, the participation of women is fundamental. Many of the combatants in political and armed struggles are women. They have had to be twice as able, twice as effective, to get to occupy these positions of power.

It is not enough to change the economic model. For me, this is a big weakness in the revolutionary experiences of Latin America. The act of being armed men converted them into heroes which heightened their egotism and chauvinism. They have not been able to revolutionalise their most intimate relationships. That is much harder. It is a far greater obstacle than a military tank.

Is it difficult to combine having a child and involvement in politics?

Yes, it's very difficult. One issue is time, which can be sorted out with a kindergarten. The thing that is so difficult for me is that before, I understood that the struggle I was involved with was more important than my own survival. Death was something very ordinary which you took on board as the cost of your actions - people were prepared to take that risk. However, as the Nicaraguans say, it's not the same seeing things from afar as when they are upon you. It's not that you're not afraid - it's that your motivation is so powerful that it allows you to overcome your fear.

Since my son was born, I have had to make a choice - to understand that as a single mother, there is no other alternative. You can't say, "I'm going to do what I have to do and if something happens, your father can look after you". There's only me. I know my son depends on me, more so because he is still a toddler. I am always thinking, "if something happens to me, who will bring him up, and how will

On women...

“I remember that whenever there were confrontations with the police, it was mostly women who were fighting back and getting arrested. Their bravery was really incredible.” - Marcela

“I think that through feminism, women come to know themselves and each other, with all our potential, our strengths, our weaknesses, and we discover a freedom that we keep on developing.” - Julieta

“Sometimes if a woman has to carry barrels of water, which is physically hard, the men will do it. But there is no man that is more respected because he's a man.” - Nadia

“We have this nice principle that says that we're against patriarchy. But we lack ways of applying this to our reality and in our ways of working together.” - Rachel

“I'm not looking for quotas of power in this patriarchal system. I will fight for the destruction of this system, and for a different system in which I don't have to fight to have a place in society.” - Josefina

“I don't feel I've ever had problems of discrimination or been devalued for being a woman. I have a very strong character, so if a man tries to marginalise me, he will have to deal with it, so they generally prefer not to say anything!” - Karla

“The system always knows that a woman's weakest point is her children. Therefore if you are a political activist and the system wants to neutralise you and finish you off, your children will be the first target'.” - Josefina

“We share children, we don't feel as if we own our children. Women have a supportive relationship with one another.” - Ivania

“My son comes with me on demonstrations. His songs are different to other children's songs. His songs are activist songs'.” - Mia

“Better to be in prison than dying of hunger. Or if not, they should kill us with bullets once and for all - rather than leave us enduring hunger with our children. More than anyone else it is us, the women, who have realised this. Because when a woman is in her house every day, every night, she has to listen to the sound of her children's hunger.” - Silvia

they bring him up?"

There is a very powerful contradiction there. My child is my direct responsibility, but at the same time, to give up the struggle for what I believe in affects many children. I wonder if he would forgive me for abandoning him for a struggle which he might not even share. When I found out that my mother was heavily implicated in politics, I criticised her. I said: "You risked our whole family – me, my sister and my father - for what you believed in. You didn't ask me if I wanted to risk my life for your ideals."

You don't know if your children will say, "My mother was someone who struggled for what she believed in" or, "My mother abandoned me for ideals I don't believe in". There's no way of knowing which way it will go. The only way you can guarantee that your child will understand your choices is if you bring them up yourself. But what happens if you are not there? But to risk life and death makes no sense today. It's not even productive. Today is the period of construction and education - not to fight in the streets.

Having a child influences you greatly. It ties you down, however much you resist it. I always thought that loving a child must be a very big thing and I imagined it to be like the love I had for my own mother, but in fact it is much more than this. It disables you a lot. It affects many things, principally your political choices. I wouldn't take him on a street demonstration or even a Funa action because I don't want anything to happen to him. I don't want them to touch him. But my politics puts him at risk. When they wanted to neutralise my mother as a active subject they threatened her family. The

system always knows that a woman's weakest point is her children. Therefore, if you are a political activist and the system wants to neutralise you and finish you off, your children will be the first target. I think that my son is going to have to do what I did with my mother – to go through the same process, accuse me at some stage and hopefully at some time understand it. I hope so.

How did you end up at this PGA conference?

I got an email. I had never heard of PGA, but the invitation arrived and the platform was interesting - the idea of global action. In Chile there is no global action movement. It is an unknown theme. The first and only global action we did was as part of an anti-capitalist co-ordination group - a coalition of people from small groups that came together against a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank in Santiago in March 2001.

We planned a series of actions. The first was raising awareness so that people knew what the IADB was and what consequences this visit could have. Then we did street demonstrations. The government reacted strongly and repressed the protests as heavily as during the hardest times of the dictatorship. They imprisoned absolutely everyone and it was a socialist government! It was a very big demonstration. But the IADB left and the global struggle disappeared with it.

Coming here to Cochabamaba seemed to be a good chance to forge links and to start to generate the global struggle in Chile. Also, of course, to get to know the experiences of other places, a source of inspiration for me. Maybe other experiences and historical developments can signpost us towards where the communal struggle is headed.

Has the reality of PGA lived up to your expectations?

Let me see, now. No! I expected something else. I wouldn't actually say that I wasted my time because I've met lots of people with very interesting projects. What I really regret is that people working on the same kinds of struggle in different places did not

talk in depth. For example, in Cochabamba, there is a landless movement just beginning and here there are people from autonomous settlements and from the MST, who are years ahead in their struggle. They didn't manage to sit down and discuss it.

Everyone is saying this, so why didn't we do something about it?

Because you couldn't! Every time you started to talk you ran out of time. We wanted people to introduce themselves so that people could identify each other. I ask myself, what could have come of this meeting, if the five, six, or 10 countries, nations or peoples working on land issues could have come together for three days to meet, share experiences and plan global actions. They could have had, say, a day every month when seven distinct countries could take part in an action on a communal objective. That's what People's Global Action means to me. Not sitting for days discussing the principles of an organisation which does not even exist - it's only a network. I think we missed out on an amazing space. Something tremendous could have come out of it.

But I'm leaving here happy because I have met people on an individual level, although this is not what I was as interested in. I can go to north-west Brazil on my own and meet Ivania and spend much more time with them. I wanted to know what we have in common on the basis of this conference. What is happening in Nicaragua? What is happening in El Salvador? What is happening in Bangladesh? There are tremendous things going on in Bangladesh and we never got a chance to sit down and talk to them.

The most productive time was spent by the Original Peoples who met on their own initiative three times. This meant that they ignored the agenda, but they met and they raised proposals and achieved their objectives.

Do you think horizontal solidarity between groups in the North and South is possible?

I don't think so because people in the South don't even have this kind of relationship. I don't have this

Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

The IADB, the oldest and largest regional multilateral development institution, was established in December of 1959 to help accelerate economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is

based in Washington.

It promotes orthodox neo-liberal policies like privatisation and part-finances structural adjustment programs with critical results for the poor.

relationship with people in Brazil. Simply because we are so far away, so misinformed, so estranged from one another, that we are not able to have a relationship of solidarity.

We rarely act in solidarity with organisations in our own countries and I feel that we have never been in solidarity with the North. It is the North that acts in solidarity with us, because solidarity has been understood as: "You are an indigenous group. OK, you'll get such-and-such an amount sent from Germany for your project". That is international solidarity.

Now, it is different if you propose horizontal solidarity. For me, this is extremely complicated. Starting with: "What do we understand by horizontal?" We could have discussions for days, just on that. I see it as difficult when the issue of money is present because paternalism is a result of money. As far as I'm concerned, it does not have to generate a power relationship - it is the result of history. Yet

Family and activism: Zapatista woman with her child



for many people it provokes a sensation of inferiority. I don't see it like that.

If there are people in Europe who are interested in your work and can't work directly with you but can send you the money to do it, that's fantastic - I have no problem with it. We have to get rid of the prejudices around money. Money is an instrument and that's how you have to take it. If it's the instrument that they are giving you to do good work, then it's welcome. This is also solidarity.

When the network includes small autonomous groups in other countries without access to money, how do you act in solidarity? By working on the same themes?

For me, this People's Global Action is about forming a common front. If the levels of solidarity could come through in the work, not in money, it would be nearing a situation of horizontal solidarity.

It's difficult though, because while there are common themes, we are at very different stages. For example there is a girl from Holland and her major preoccupation is with genetically modified organisms, which I've never heard of, and climate change. But if I am going to talk about climate change. I firstly have to make sure that my people can eat. We are at very different levels of communication. On the other hand, the people from Bangladesh have the same concerns as she does. It's evident that they can go and work together on it. If people in Mexico have the same concerns as what is going on in Brazil, that's fantastic.

The difference between the North and the South is that the North have many things resolved that we don't. If you don't have the levels of extreme poverty which exist here in Latin America, you can look beyond your struggle to other things - like climate change. I don't think that the system is different but the effects and manifestations of it are. I think there are still a lot of difficulties. Even the terminology, for example, the concepts. I spoke with someone from the north west of Brazil and he said to me, "I don't understand the discussion of non-violent direct action or violent direct action."

“ It is important that people learn to identify the source of this rage and this impotence, and that the source is not the President or even Pinochet. The responsibility lies with a system. People need to learn to identify this common enemy”

"Why don't you understand it?", I said. "Because struggle is struggle. We don't divide it up in terms of violent/non-violent, so I don't understand what they are discussing."

There were people in that meeting who did not even speak Spanish, because they spoke Quechua or Aymara, and didn't understand what PGA was. We would have to start by sitting down and discussing things, understand what level we're talking at, and find out what "people" means for one person or another. I felt that we didn't understand each other. It's not the same having a translator at the conference, as to be able to eat together, have a coffee or do what we're doing which allows you to get to know this human being. To know what they are called, what they feel, where they live - you don't find that out at a workshop, so I think that in order to be able to create networks we have to get to know each other first. I think we are all on the same side, however we have not been able to recognise it and that is very sad.

What kind of world would you like to live in?

I don't have an ideal. I just want to live. I think we have the means to live and to live well. I think there is enough for everyone, enough land, water and everything. I want property to cease existing and the same for monopolies, the ambition to have more and more and more to the point that you can't even make use of it in your lifetime. I think it is so simple.

Nadia Rainbow Keepers - Ukraine & Russia

Nadia is 30 years and from Kiev, Ukraine. Her first language is Russian and her second is Ukrainian. She works as a translator, for a human rights organisation, and as a part-time journalist. She is part of the Rainbow Keepers, a radical environmental movement.

How did you become involved in political action?

My first environmental action was in 1987, with a public campaign against an experimental factory involved in producing spleen quartz. When quartz is shot into the clouds, it starts a rainstorm. They used it after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster to stop the contaminated clouds reaching Moscow, so the region where the rain fell became really contaminated.

They planned to build this factory in the city of Kiel. The local population was against it. Firstly, the production is dangerous. Secondly, people knew it was being built in case we had a second disaster at Chernobyl. We had an unstable situation and everybody expected another explosion, and that the region would get even more contaminated.

Apart from the local grassroots groups, most of the organisers were human rights groups from the Ukraine and the Helsinki Commission for Human Rights. Cultural figures, like poets, writers, actors and different famous people, also got involved with

the campaign. The site was beside my school, so I participated. We organised blockades in front of the cars that were bringing building materials. That was my first action, and I didn't know it was direct action.

At the time, people were really concerned about the environment and so people were really active campaigning on different issues. In Kiev there was also illegal felling of trees, and I was involved in campaigning against that. Then, in 1990, the students went on hunger strike for 17 days with certain political demands. And we won, you know. At the time our actions, the historians have said, were key points in the struggle for independence, breaking up the Soviet Union and getting democracy. Actually that's a complicated issue, especially if you see what we have now.

Using anarchist connections in the former Soviet Union which started to develop again in the end of the 1980s, I found out about the anarchist action camp and got involved with that.

What are the action camps?

Action camps are mostly organised against dangerous substances, such as nuclear power plants, gas terminals and chemical weapons disposal. We organise them every year, as a base for people who come to do actions around a specific problem. They are mostly during the summer holidays and last from one-two months. In recent years, since the Soviet Union became more open, more and more international activists come from Finland, Germany, Holland, the Czech Republic, Belgium and Poland. People who come to the camps are also active during the winter in their local area - not only with environmental work, but also with anti-fascist work, social projects and music projects.

What campaign are the Rainbow Keepers involved with at the moment?

Our latest campaign is against Lockheed Martin, the biggest military transnational in the world, and the main contractor of NASA and the US army. They are exporters of dangerous technology, and they plan to build a plant to dispose of chemical weapons and solid chemical fuel for rockets in Russia. First they are going to dispose of the Russian ones, but according to how it's happened in other countries before, there are reasons to believe that they will dispose of their own things too. And the technology is cheap and really old, and it's forbidden in the US.

How do you decide which problem to campaign on?

Mostly, we organise a campaign after we have had an invitation to come to an area. It could be from one of our colleagues, because we have a big network and are a member of the Social - Ecological Union. In all of the cases, there are local groups and local grassroots movements who got organised because of a problem that they have worked to solve for some time, trying all the official channels. When they see that they get no results they choose to fight. In all cases which require public hearings, there are violations of the law to ensure public hearings. The public and governmental environmental assessments are mostly ignored too.

Local campaigners organised a local referendum on the Lockheed Martin plant, and it showed that something like 86% were against it. But nobody paid any attention to it; they just abolished the result of the referendum. And then the local people call us, because they realise that they have to use our tools: direct action. And when the Rainbow Keepers came, we set up an action camp as a space - not only for direct actions, but also for different tools like information campaigns, organising press conferences, round-table discussions, expert assessments and sometimes using international support. Most importantly, we always try to encourage public activity - that's the only way you can deal with the problem. At first people don't believe in their ability to change something. Then we give them examples of what we have done over the past years - we give them information, trying to

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Cloud seeding

Cloud seeding experiments began in the 1940's and involves injecting particles into a cloud, which act as freezing nuclei. Cloud droplets adhere to the injected particles and fall to the ground as rain or snow. Scientists involved in the 'clean up' after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster claimed that certain regions of the Mahilou province,

quite distant from Chernobyl, received a dangerous dose of radiation because the Chernobyl cloud, which had been heading for Moscow, was shot down and deposited over them. This was done to save the eight million people in the capital. Nobody came forward to rescue those in the endangered regions.

reassure them and help them feel more confident. Then it works, because mostly the authorities can't go against widespread public dissent - they don't want a big social conflict.

In Votkins (the city where the Lockheed Martin plant is to be built), even the mass media was using the headlines: "In Votkins there is a social conflict rising." The mayor of the city was also supporting us, but he was taken to court, because he let the public meeting continue in front of the offices of Lockheed Martin. Even the local militia supported us, and tried to avoid any repression. Actually many people got arrested for a few days. There were some days where all the people in Rainbow Keepers were arrested, as well as some local activists. Then a meeting of the local population just moved to the police department where all the activists were kept. They were chanting slogans like: "the people united, will never be evicted."

Do you experience much repression from the authorities?

Yes, especially after Putin became President. There were bombings in Moscow and Putin said he wanted to eradicate terrorism. This was used as an excuse for the Chechen war. There is no evidence, but these explosions could have been put there to provide Putin with the Presidential seat, as a way of organising political ground for him. He used to be a colonel of the KGB and some months before he became president he said that you can never be a former KGB officer - you are always a KGB officer. So they said that there was a terrorist organisation, a new revolutionary initiative, which had organised the explosives outside the headquarters of the security services. They arrested three women and accused them of organising the explosives. One of them was a Rainbow Keeper, another one a former Rainbow Keeper and the third a wife of a political prisoner, also on the left.

So the repression is much tougher now, like all the anti-information acts including a law to search the Internet and a censorship law for the press. There was also a big fight to keep an independent

Chernobyl nuclear disaster

On April 26, 1986 at 1.23 am technicians at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station in the Ukraine allowed the power in the fourth reactor to fall as part of a controlled experiment. To carry out their tests, they deactivated several major safety systems that would have shut down the reactor in case of accident.

But the experiment went wrong, two explosions blew the top off the reactor building, and a fire started in the core which burned for several days, blowing a cloud of deadly radioactivity into the surrounding environment. It released thirty to forty times the radioactivity of

the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The silent killer continued to pour from the damaged reactor for ten days.

The Chernobyl nuclear accident was the biggest nuclear accident ever. The wind carried the radiation cloud north over Belarus where 70% of the radiation fell. The ground was heavily contaminated and will continue to be for thousands of years.

It is 15 years since the accident, but it is not over, in fact it is getting worse. The people live



with radiation all around them. They drink contaminated water and wash with it. There is very little food in Belarus and what there is, has a high chance of being contaminated. Many people are close to starvation with only

boiled potatoes to eat. Children are particularly susceptible to radiation induced illnesses and many have leukaemia, cancer of the thyroid and other cancers. Babies are born with serious deformities such as no arms, no eyes or tumours

television channel out of government control some months ago.

It's not hard to come to the conclusion that all these 'terrorist acts' are being used by the secret services and the police to strengthen their structure, and to get more possibilities for repression: to use their bombs, wars and repression on their own population. We now have really strict passport control in many cities. You can't stay in some places for more than three days without registering with the police. Most people don't do it, they just pay the police 50 ruble. That's the price for the corrupt police in Moscow. So the police have lots of money and they've got the right to do what they want with you.

What is the role of women in Rainbow Keepers?

Actually it's nearly half-and-half. There's not a lot of sexism. There could be some people who do it without knowing, but the women in the Rainbow Keepers are not really the ones who would stand for it. We have a lot of discussions about this too. Sometimes if a woman has to carry barrels of water, which is physically hard, the men will do it. Most of the people who come to the Rainbow Keepers are already politically conscious of these things. But there is no man that is more respected because he's a man. We're probably not solving these problems very strictly and seriously but use humour instead.

Rainbow Keepers

Formed in 1989, the Rainbow Keepers are mainly active in Ukraine, Russia and Karkasus, where they work on issues of nuclear power; radio-active waste; industrial pollution; chemical weapons storage; oil terminal construction; promoting anarchist ideas; problems of forest conservation, alternative settlements and alternative society.

They organise yearly action camps, conferences, direct action and publications.

The Rainbow Keepers have no formal structure - it's a movement where people co-ordinate actions. Decisions are mostly made by consensus, and the main decision making structure are the open meetings during the action camps and at a yearly conference.



“At first people don’t believe in their ability to change something. Then we give them examples of what we have done over the past years - we give them information, trying to reassure them and help them feel more confident. Then it works, because mostly the authorities can’t go against widespread public dissent - they don’t want a big social conflict.”

Why did the Rainbow Keepers get involved in the PGA network?

We got involved in the PGA because it was a movement that has been active on the same things as us over the last few years. We share the same political base and the groups in PGA are clearly realising the situation and there’s real room for action.

I wish that it would work more efficiently though, but once it helped us a lot. In 1998, before the first PGA conference, we put forward a list of actions for the PGA. One was against the policy of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), who wanted to fund nuclear reactors to replace the Chernobyl capacity. We got into a repressive situation. Actually, two days before the PGA conference, there was an information scandal, with lots of the information and arguments that we had put forward to the Bank, resulting in eight of 13 credits for the nuclear sector being cancelled. That was one-and-a-half billion dollars. So they couldn’t pretend to be blind any more.

The scandal was about the diversion of money and about the futility of the project, because the

Ukraine actually has enough capacity already. When we came home we were pressurised by the KGB. There were some illegal interrogations of people - threats. They told us that the KGB’s main task was to prevent any criticism of the EBRD policy in Ukraine and if we did actions against or critiqued EBRD, we could be arrested. Some people were threatened with rape and with being killed. They shadowed us and threatened our parents. We couldn’t believe it - we thought those things finished with the Soviet Union.

My flat was searched twice, they took computers, material and archives. The thing that many people thought helped us against even stronger repression was informational support. Many PGA people, mostly in Europe, were helping us to distribute information about this. When you make a case more

open, you are more likely to survive. After all, it was about one-and-a-half billion dollars. There were also support actions in a few places. [One of which the interviewer took part in outside the EBRD offices in the City of London -eds]

The idea of PGA is great, but the structure is not workable. This has to be improved regionally, I think. Also, I think PGA should pay more attention to alternatives.

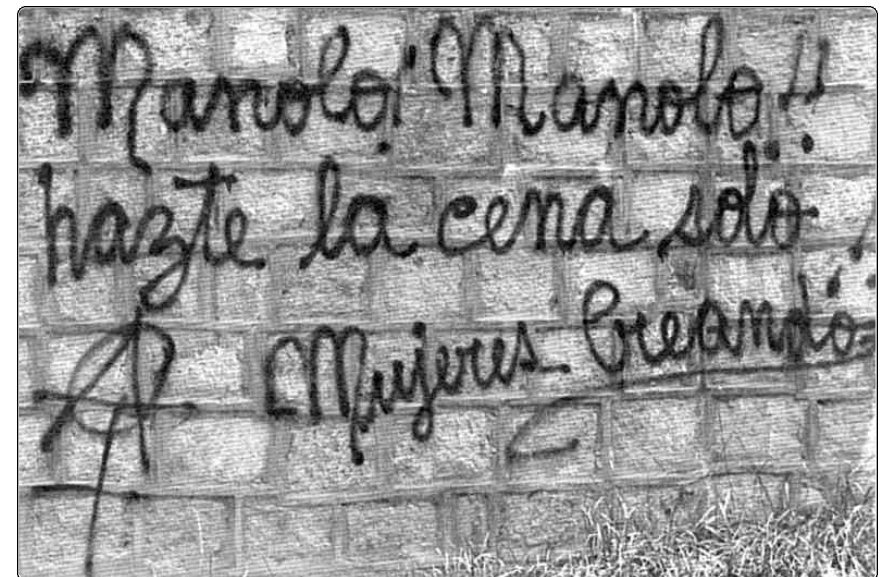
What kind of world would you like to see for the future?

I would like to see a horizontal society, with room for diversity, patience and tolerance towards each other. A kind of society where we can influence our own lives and not depend on governments to take all of the decisions - a civil society.


Social - Ecological Union

The union is an umbrella of more than 350 local groups and movements, encompassing thousands of people. The Rainbow Keepers are part of this union. The union give

support to different local initiatives for self-government including: ecological, cultural and civil initiatives [www.seu.org]



“Tony, Tony!! Get your own macaroni!”



Que vivan las gordas
que vivan las morenas
quiero ser mujer
sin modelos que imitar

“Long live fat women, long live brunettes,
I want to be a woman without models to imitate”
- Mujeres Creando

Julietta Women Creating, Bolivia

Julietta is actively involved in the anarcho-feminist collective **Mujeres Creando (Women Creating)**, based in La Paz, Bolivia. They shot to the headlines in July 2001, when hundreds of small debtors, with whom Julietta and her compañeras had been working, occupied government and bank buildings with dynamite and molotovs to demand the cancellation of their debts. The only group of its kind in Bolivia, **Mujeres Creando** address gender, sexuality, class and race. Their activities include publishing, non-violent direct action, running a small cultural centre and are best known for their graffiti, always signed **Mujeres Creando**. Favourite targets include neo-liberals, smug macho leftists and mainstream feminists.

How did you become politically active and involved in Mujeres Creando?

The group has been going for 10 years, but I got to know them nine years ago through some of the activities that the initiators of the group were organising at the university, like murals and different actions. I was very curious about what they were doing. It was a completely new kind of group. There was absolutely no talk about that kind of feminism at the time -- a militant, radical feminism, a feminism of the streets, of everyday

life. Of course, the government was talking about women's rights on the radio and in the papers, and about certain laws for women, but never about a feminism which engaged you in any form of struggle or politicised you. By contrast, the feminism of **Mujeres Creando** was so real and tangible. By the time I began to get involved, I was realising that political activity does not only happen in political parties or in organised groups; it happens as soon as you are conscious of your actions and your decisions - an intuitive kind of feminism. Within the university, there were a lot of groups on the left: - Trotskyists, Maoists, Guevarists,- but none of them appealed to me, or let me feel as though I could be myself. It was very different with **Mujeres Creando**.

How would you describe the politics of Mujeres Creando?

When we got together we said, "We're a group of women and we're a different kind of organisation to the ones around us, where the revolutionary subject is the proletarian, full-stop". And we said, "No!" Why? We tried to demystify this whole ideology. There are groups and sectors in society who are oppressed and these are no less important. We started by recognising that we are women from a

particular social class, that we have our own ethnic origins, that we are different ages, and that we are part of society. In this sense, we don't only struggle for women's rights or issues that affect women, but against all types of oppression - from a feminist proposal of society.

Another element that we critique are elitist groups, those on the left who are only made up of students and intellectuals, or groups of workers who only organise with other workers, middle class women. For us, the diversity of a movement is important. We don't want to be an elite group.

So do you also work with men in the group?

No, because for us it is very important to have our space as women. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, a women-only space is crucial and we feel it is legitimate to meet among women, to organise as women, to struggle for women. Possibly, when feminists, when society succeeds with a revolution which ends patriarchy, then we would consider being part of a group with men. In any case, our dreams and our utopias are for men too, without wanting to impose them.

Don't you feel that for things to really change, men have to be part of our struggle and change too?

We still have many male friends. We don't want to isolate ourselves from society, we feel very much part of it. For example, this cultural centre is open to men, most days. There are some days that are for women-only. A lot of male friends support **Mujeres Creando** from their own spaces and struggles.

Julietta and Maria (who initiated **Mujeres Creando**) have just produced a book for men which is a manual on sexuality. It's a feminist position, which presents a series of questions and challenges to men. We always get this criticism: "Why isn't there anything for men?", so my compañeras brought this one out. It's had quite a wide circulation and has been very provocative.

It's very important for us that our publications are not intellectual, in the sense that they are accessible - that they reach society and are an

Micro-credit: cure all or ruin all?

Micro-credit is a system which aims to provide small loans to people with very little money, who cannot borrow from conventional banks and who would otherwise become indebted to usurious money lenders charging up to 120% interest. Pioneered by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh during the 1980s, its strategy is to organise a group of local residents or co-workers, usually 15-20 people, mostly women, who meet monthly to save and circulate their savings as low-interest loans

within their group, whenever a member needs a small loan. The peer pressure exerted by the groups and the local context usually ensures prompt repayment of the loans.

The success of the schemes in Bangladesh quickly captured the imagination of the commercial banking structure which gradually began to direct its loan portfolios towards Third World government and NGOs. The World Bank then took on micro-credit as their panacea for eliminating poverty, as it

appeared to make capitalism work for the poor and softened the impact of structural adjustment policies. Of course it fails completely to address any of the root causes of poverty such as ownership of wealth and resources, and is a way of making more people get into debt and become dependent on the money economy. In many cases, like this one in Bolivia, it is not a genuine alternative to money-grabbing loan sharks, and has been subject to abuse and corruption.

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instrument for people who are asking themselves: "What on earth is feminism? What can it change in my life?" We want our publications to help them to reflect and ask questions.

On the other hand, we think that men who want to question their own machismo should get together and do it themselves, among themselves. There are hundreds of things they could do if they really question their own machismo. Finally, I think it is much more effective to work with other women, among women, than to work with men and keep telling them to question themselves, to change, and not be so sexist. And for me it is much more satisfying to work with other women.

How do you organise as a group and make decisions?

I think that above all, things really happen because somebody takes the initiative. We don't consult each other about everything we do, although there are things that we each take responsibility for - working in specific areas, for example, some of us organise at the university, others with domestic workers, others with rural women. If there is an initiative that we all like and can all participate in, then we get involved and help to organise it. I felt that in the PGA meeting there was a lot of democracy, a lot of respect for everyone which is great, but that initiatives were actually lost - people were neutralised. For us, the important thing is not to neutralise each other and that every woman takes her own decisions and puts forward her initiatives, without feeling inhibited. The important thing is not to neutralise each other and that every woman takes her own decisions and puts forward her initiatives, without feeling inhibited.

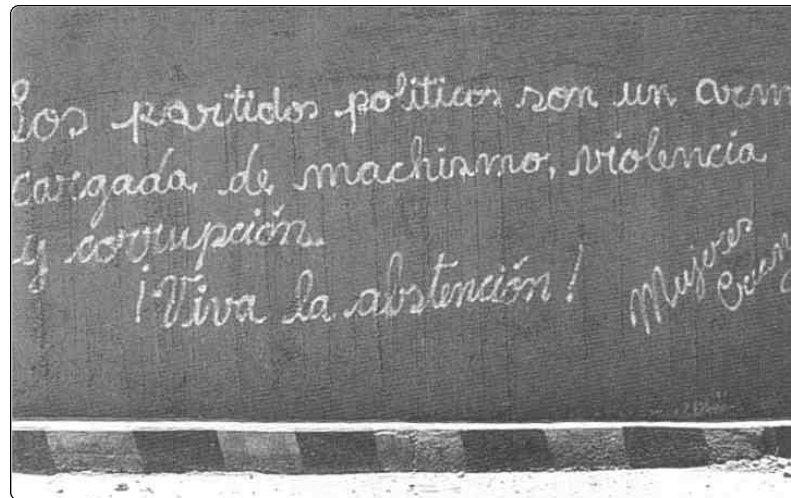
What kind of actions have you organised, and how have you done this?

We have a long history of actions! A fundamental element in our group is creativity. We are street activists, we are creative women, but we are not artists, and we don't want to convert ourselves into an artistic elite. We take up our right to create and to do new things. This goes hand in hand with our

struggles. Creativity is not separate from but complements our political practice.

After we brought out our newspaper eight years ago, we then moved on to graffiti, and into street actions, or 'creative actions' as we call them. The street is an important centre of political activity, because it allows us to interact with and be in permanent contact with people. Our actions don't only take place in the streets, sometimes we occupy other spaces. We mainly use symbols, rather than being explicit. We also use theatre: to symbolise blood, we use red dye; for death, we use crosses; for joy, we share bread and flowers with people. We've been doing these kinds of actions for a long time. When Hugo Banzer, the ex-dictator, was elected in 1997, some members of the group made a coffin and carried it on their shoulders to the main square where the government headquarters are, and there they burned an effigy of the president to oppose the fact that an ex-dictator had supposedly been democratically elected.

Two years ago we did a TV programme called *Creando Mujeres*, which covered the different issues we work on. We touched on the subject of the dictatorship, on NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations), on work, lesbianism, Barbies, racism, and on the question of justice. For example,



"We are street activists, we are creative women, but we are not artists, and we don't want to convert ourselves into an artistic elite."

we did an action at the Palace of Justice, where we went in and filled the offices with rubbish.

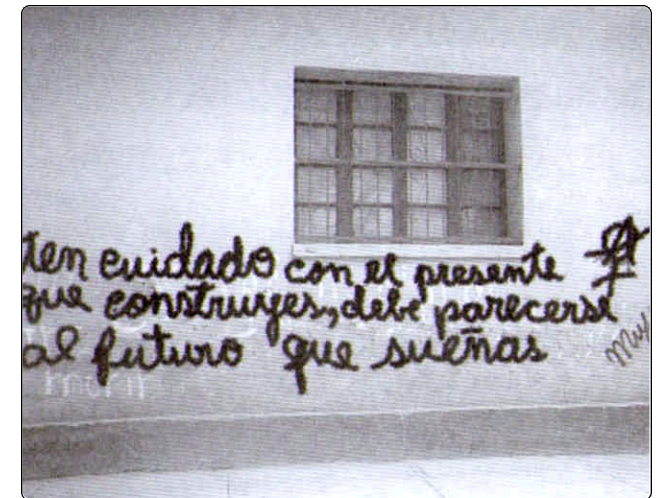
We've also done actions against Coca-Cola and McDonalds and we've brought out publications on neoliberalism and what it means in Bolivia. We were one of the first organisations to denounce the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) here in Bolivia, as a group of women in Germany sent us the document which we translated and published. We have promoted quite a lot about what happened in Seattle, in Prague. We've had various visits from people who were involved and we've given them the space to come and tell us about this.

Can you talk about your involvement with the group of small debtors?

When we worked on this issue of debt, it was no longer just us - we were working alongside the organisation of debtors, which is a large movement of over 10,000 people, whereas we are only a small group. So we had to rethink the idea of creative actions because we were working with a very large

"Political parties are weapons loaded with machismo, violence and corruption. Long live abstention!"

"Be careful with the present you are creating - it should look like the future you dream of."



“The street for us is an important centre of political activity, because it allows us to interact with and be in permanent contact with people.”

number of people who wanted to get involved in peaceful protest. Later on, it turned into something violent, out of sheer desperation and a whole host of reasons that I'll explain later.

We organised more collective actions where everyone took part, women and men. In one of them, we painted a mural: the people took their shoes off, put their feet into paint and then they lifted each other up so they could leave their footprints on the wall. The children also put their hands into the paint and left their handprints.

What did this symbolise?

It symbolised the whole journey that these people had made. The first time we did an action together, they had already been in La Paz for a month, from many different districts, and they still hadn't come to the negotiating table. It symbolised the harsh and difficult journey that they had made. They suffered a lot of repression as a movement. In another action, we threw ourselves on the ground with them in front of the police, so that we wouldn't be attacked. At the end, once an agreement was signed that

benefited the debtors, we organised a kind of festival with flowers and bread. The children began to share out the bread with everyone, a symbol of the food of the poor, and of the poor who share what they have.

Can you give us some background on the debtors' bank occupation, and the involvement of Mujeres Creando in this?

We had been working very closely with the debtors. Their organisation was fundamentally made up of women: 70% were women and 30% were men, and the leadership was made up of women, which is why we worked so closely together. We had openly denounced the abuse of micro-credit in Bolivia, as there were very high interest rates and a lot of irregularities in the charges. People's debts had doubled and tripled. When they arrived in La Paz, they were already asking for the forgiveness of their debts. We soon realised that these were people who had been indebted to micro-credit institutions for eight, nine, or ten years. They had been trying to pay off their debts all this time, but they reached a point when they couldn't pay any more - they were bankrupt, they didn't have a penny left. They had lost their businesses, their jobs, their few means of production and many were living on the streets.

We organised a range of activities with them - from actions, to reflecting on issues such as non-

violent direct action. We took films along to the place where they were staying in the university. We did courses explaining which international institutions were financing the Bolivian banks and financial entities. In a lot of cases these banks were actually misusing aid provided for micro-credit.

The debtors had been in La Paz for three whole months and all that time they didn't get a chance to sit down and be heard by the presidents of the associations, of the banks, the private funds, mutuals, and NGOs. During this time, many of them fell ill, and many had respiratory infections as they had been tear-gassed a lot. We brought out a newspaper with them and sold it together, so that the general public would revise their opinion of the debtors - people were saying that they were good-for-nothings who just didn't want to pay their debts. But then people began to realise that it wasn't that simple, and that in reality the financial institutions were committing usury and extortion, that they were cheating people and exploiting their ignorance, making them sign contracts that they didn't understand.

The debtors became really desperate. We were not involved in the action, because we do not agree with using violence, and we didn't actually know about it in advance. It was a group that decided to occupy the Banking Supervisory Agency. We found out about the occupation on the radio, and immediately we got involved as we had done so much work with them up to that point. One of us went to the Supervisory building to make sure that violence didn't break out and to try and prevent a massacre from taking place, as the police were ready to go in and start shooting at people inside the offices. Another *compa era* joined the negotiating table. The participation of Mujeres Creando was fundamental as it was a very tense moment, and in that situation the debtors weren't able to think very clearly. We were able to get everyone to sit down together and in the end an agreement was reached that benefited the people. They didn't get their debts cancelled, but a lot was put under scrutiny and the Supervisory Agency began to look into what was

Debtors armed with dynamite and Molotovs occupy bank

On 2 July, 2001, a group of small debtors entered the Bank Supervisory Agency building, unnoticed by security guards, followed by others carrying sticks of dynamite, molotovs and petrol. They held hostage 60 of the employees and some tied bundles of dynamite to their bodies to prevent any kind of police intervention. From the fifth floor of the building, they used bullhorns to give speeches explaining their protest. Two more groups, each of about 50 debtors, occupied the La Paz offices of the Catholic archbishop and the Defensoria del

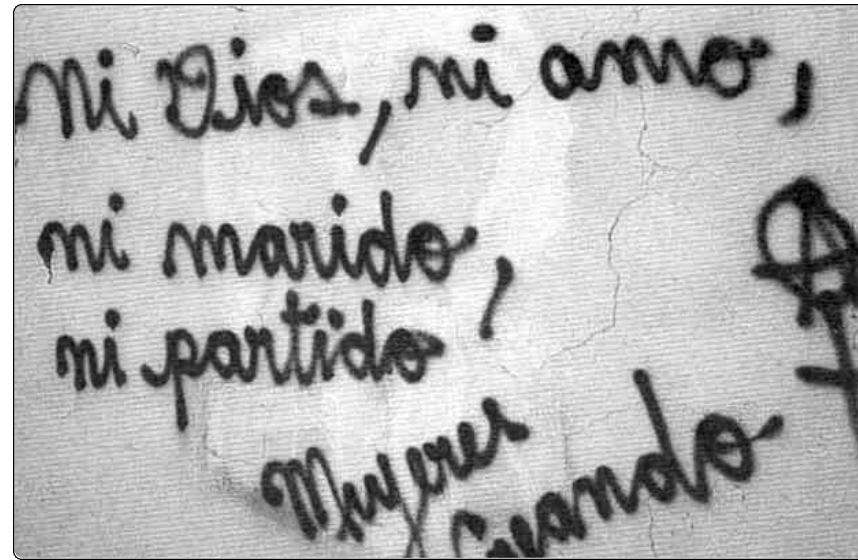
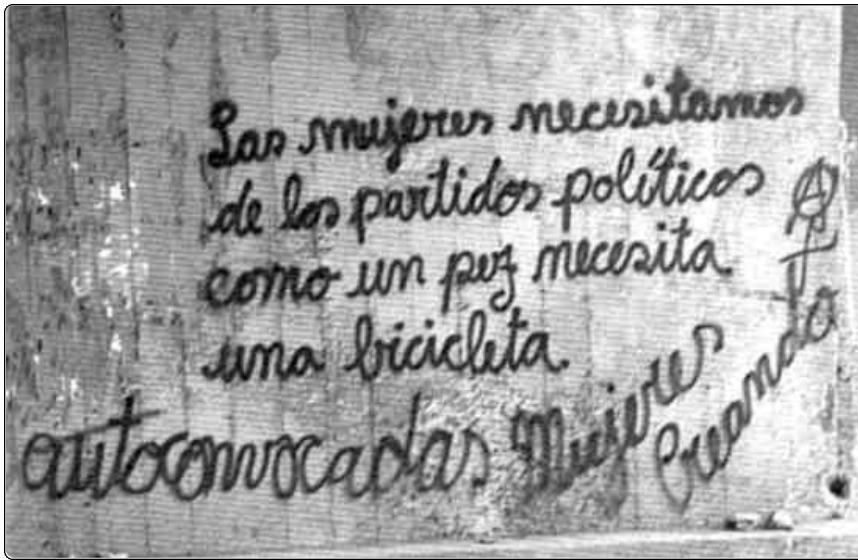
Pueblo (People's Defence) and began hunger strikes there.

One woman protestor declared through a bullhorn to the police surrounding the building:

"For the poor there is no relief, no justice. They have taken everything, leaving us sticks of dynamite to eat. Because only deal-makers have rights, we have been here, living in the street, in the cold of night, with scarcely one meal a day, for more than 90 days. And nobody will listen to us."

Ten hours later, protesters released their

hostages without injury and left the building after intermediaries from Mujeres Creando and human rights groups promised to act as guarantors to prevent police reprisals and mediate a dialogue between government officials and banking authorities. Despite assurances from the government that once the occupation ended the activists would not face repression, at least 70 were arrested soon after they left the bank building, but were later released without charge.



“Women need political parties like a fish needs a bicycle.”

“Neither God, nor master, nor husband, nor party”

happening with financial institutions in relation to micro-credit. We managed to stop the bailiffs seizing people’s property - their houses and their possessions - for 100 days, from July to October, 2001. In cases where they had complained of irregularities, these were revised, and in cases where the women had paid out more than they should have, this debt was cancelled. There were many successes.

All of these people owed less than \$5,000 Of course, there are many with much larger debts than this but we didn’t want to get involved with them as they are more capitalist. These people were among the poorest in Bolivia. Now, they are carrying on organising in their communities. Together with Mujeres Creando, we are going to organise an international seminar on usury, on high interest rates. This is a policy of capitalism, of neoliberalism.

“These are people who will have to continue borrowing money - they have no money and no resources, and we need to find a way in which micro-credit can benefit them rather than making them poorer.

But these are people who will have to continue borrowing money - they have no money and no resources, and we need to find a way in which micro-credit can benefit them rather than making them poorer. We want to carry on the work we have started together.

Do you feel part of a global movement?

Yes, I think so. You know, our aim is not to become the vanguard in any society. We have our struggles and we propose the changes we want to make to society and we try to provoke, but we don’t think that we are the only ones that are going to change society. We know that we’ll do it with other organisations around the world and in Bolivia, and although we disagree with many forms of organisation, we know that it is a common struggle. We also realise that we have to struggle here where we are, in our own society.

What we want fundamentally is to co-ordinate with other autonomous feminists around the world. In 1998, we organised the first meeting of autonomous feminists from Latin America and the Caribbean. In Latin America, there is a division, a political split, between the ‘gender technocrats’ or institutional feminists who work within

government, or within large NGOs and the autonomous feminists. We were appointed as the organisational committee for this first meeting of autonomous feminists, to deepen our reflection and debates. There we looked at globalisation in a lot of depth. We put forward many alternatives, as autonomous feminists from Latin America, and explored ways of coordinating our struggles. We plan to organise coordinated actions with other women, and to coordinate with other groups such, as anarchists and ecologists.

We’ve been in contact with Spanish *compa eras* as well. There are things that feminist women from Europe, from the North, can be active on, for example, on the question of funding which comes to Latin America in the name of women and is always mediated by big NGOs and by governments. This type of solidarity is helpful to women in Latin America and helps to combat colonialism. There are things that we would like women from the North to do in their own countries that in some way helps Latin American women, for example on immigration or xenophobia - not as a form of charity, but as part of a joint struggle.

Rachel Anti-capitalist Convergence (CLAC) - Canada

Rachel is a 26-year-old, French-Canadian student from Montreal. She mainly talks about her involvement in la Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes (CLAC) and the actions organised against the Summit of the Americas meeting in April 2000. The CLAC, along with the Tampa Bay Action Group in Florida, are currently the temporary co-convenors PGA network in North America (Canada and the USA).

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How did you become politicised?

It's a big question to see what makes that string vibrate. The political analysis comes with time, by being together with people, by studying, and by getting to know different realities. I also think you need people with a radical analysis to initiate and reinforce debate.

Like a lot of students, I got involved with the student movement. They mobilised around the question of wearing a school uniform. It was this big thing in college and it really impressed me seeing all these students demonstrating.

I also went travelling by myself and that helped me to broaden my analysis of what was going on in the world. When I came back, I didn't really know how to apply the values or principles that I had grown to believe in and that I wanted to put forward in my life. A big student strike at the university helped me to really get involved. Then the Summit of the Americas was coming up and I just went full

on from there. CLAC is the first political group outside student politics that I've been involved in.

What is CLAC?

CLAC was started two years ago, against the third Summit of the Americas and the FTAA, against capitalism and the globalisation process. Its aim is to extend the anti-capitalist network. I think most marginalised people in Montreal - people who live on the streets and punks are involved with CLAC, but there are also students, workers and mothers of all ages.

The political scene in Montreal is very diverse. The NGOs are very strong. We have a good relationship, but with some the debate about violence/non-violence has created a lot of division. This is mainly because CLAC has a principle of respect for diversity of tactics, which some people see as a call to violence.

We might organise on a different basis than the non-violent NGOs, but we still face the same enemy, have the same objectives. So why not at least coordinate so we don't walk on each other's spaces? During the FTAA days of action, the media used this disagreement about violence to create divisions in the movement. It was sort of recuperated, so people were bashing on others for throwing paint on a wall, instead of re-focusing the attention and debate on the important issues.

What I think is lacking in Montreal is representation from the ethnic communities. Montreal is a multicultural place and we don't interact with them much, nor with the aboriginal peoples from Canada. That's sometimes a bit of a worry. Also, people are very much involved for a short period of time, and then give up because they've had too much, because it's very hard. So that's the challenge - how to get people to be maybe a bit less involved, and have a more balanced life so that they can stay involved longer.

I thought the anti FTAA actions in April 2000 were really inspirational when reading about them.

What role did CLAC play in the organising of the demonstrations?

CLAC was more a coordination space for the various groups. Our actions were mostly based on affinity groups, and quite decentralised. We organised a Carnival against Capitalism that included events in Quebec City and Montreal over the month of April, and which culminated with the Day of Action on April 20th. The Carnival included conferences, teach-ins, concerts, cabarets, workshops, street theatre, protests and direct action.

CLAC and the Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee (CASA) organised a big march on 19 April up to the fence. We organised different coloured zones according to the principle of diversity of tactics. So everyone was aware that, for instance, the green zone was more festive zone, far away from the big fence and the meeting point, with relatively little risk of arrest. The yellow zone was more of a civil disobedience zone, with higher risk of arrest because it was closer to the fence. The red zone was for direct action, and CLAC organised that space.

There were people there from, for instance, anti poverty groups with a lot of older people and people in wheelchairs; they just didn't want to get mixed up with other people wearing gas masks. If you felt like doing something more radical, at least you knew which spaces not to do it in. It worked out very well actually. The only thing we couldn't plan for was the police reaction. The whole city became like a red zone eventually, and the fence came down in the first few hours.

Actually, it was a bit like PGA. Everyone was welcome that shared the principles, it was a co-ordination space that CLAC and CASA organised, and then people could do whatever they wanted in their affinity group. We made it clear that the people who participated had to agree, and the spokescouncil was open to people who shared their principles.

On the Saturday there was a big march,

Organisational structure of CLAC

CLAC is autonomous, decentralised and non-hierarchical, based on direct democracy. It has an open general assembly of about 100-150 people and working groups, with consensus decision making.

CASA

CASA is a Quebec City-based group, comprised of activists and organisers who were involved in local grassroots struggles and who shared the CLAC principles.

organised by the People's Summit, which are more reformist organisations and NGO's from all over the Americas. When the march turned away from the fence, a lot of people walked away from the march to go towards the fence. Although there was no violence in the protest, in other parts of the city there was tear-gas everywhere. They used so much that they had to go and buy some from the States and plastic bullets too. I've seen some and they are really, really big. Quite a few people got hurt, police also, and the fence came down, about five minutes after we got there.

How did the media react?

During the days of action, their emphasis was on violence - protester violence and police violence, nothing about the debates or issues. There was a lot of questioning regarding the police actions - a lot of them said that it was just too much and they didn't need to go that far. One night there were different meeting points in the city with people dancing and having street parties and there were some acts of vandalism - broken windows and things like that. As soon as something's broken they seem to think that it justifies the police's actions.

We did a lot of interviews with the press before the Summit. We agreed that we would be very active with the alternative media and do a lot of outreach and that we'd only deal with mainstream media in a very selective way, but it didn't really happen that way. We were deceived a lot of times and we had to write a lot of articles to put things straight. For example, one time there was a picture of one of us and they were connecting us to a bomb threat. Another time, someone involved with CLAC and seen as a leader by the authorities, was kidnapped and beaten by the police. We had to react to that.

I was part of the media committee. It was hard to deal with the media, because all they were asking about were questions on violence, and our principle of respect for diversity of tactics is really quite open. Even I didn't know how far I was willing to really defend that principle because I didn't know what was going on. What if someone comes up with a tank

or whatever and just shoots everybody in the crowd? Should we respect those tactics? There was some discussion within CLAC of whether we needed to specify a bit more clearly what we meant, but then other people thought that any violence is legitimate and that's what the media want to hear. If you say that you defend violence, you are going to be criminalised. Sometimes I just feel like saying to them that this violence is legitimate in response to the repression and violence of the capitalists, but then they use it against you.

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Did you do any outreach work before the actions?

I was in an affinity group which put on workshops on globalisation, the FTAA, the Summit and the effects of globalisation, which we presented before the CLAC assemblies, in universities in Montreal and in community centres. It was like popular education. That was really interesting and the kind of action I really wanted to do.

We did a workshop for an anti-poverty group and that was an amazing experience because it was in a faraway neighbourhood in Montreal, very poor, that I didn't even know about. There were older people there - people I never meet, because we don't share the same life, or reality. They asked us really fundamental questions, such as 'Why are these people doing this?', 'Don't they have a heart, don't they see that it's doing so much harm?' We didn't know how to answer these questions. People there were political in a different way, not because they've read so many authors and they've been to university and they have a doctorate and whatever, but because they are the ones who are suffering.

They are the ones who go hungry, who have no money at the end of the month. Their rights are being bashed, they are workers in very bad conditions experiencing these realities and they know it's connected to these big policies, to free



trade, but they don't really know how to connect these things, so that was a humbling experience for me. I think that had a more long-term effect than just two days of action. You create different links - human relations, in a group of 30 you might connect with one and that is a start. That is how it begins.

We also did a few information actions - going into shopping centres, or onto buses and we'd just talk about what was going on. We got kicked out of one bus, the driver said it wasn't a public space, on public transport!

The fence surrounding the conference centre quickly came down on the first day.

FTAA and the Summit of the Americas

The Summit brought together the 34 leaders of North, South and Central America, as well as the Caribbean (except Cuba). The Summit talked about issues like hemispheric integration and migration, security and terrorism, democracy and human rights, as well as the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) agreement.

The FTAA is the planned extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and capitalist expansion to the entire hemisphere. More than a geographic extension, it increases the power of big business - making the rich even richer.

The Summit of the Americas was held inside a four kilometres "bunker" made of concrete and 10 feet-high, galvanised steel fencing. Outside the bunker, more than 6,000 police and security forces were on hand, equipped with pepper spray and multi-shot, Arwen 37-guns - shooting hard-coated plastic bullets. The Police used 4,709 canisters of tear gas and 822 plastic bullets - firing 30 tear gas canisters per minute.

This was the largest police operation in North America directed against ordinary citizens.

The local community showed it's contempt for the fence by subverting it with political art, including underwear, and graffiti.



What is the role of women in CLAC?

We need to work on that a lot. We have this nice principle that says that we're against patriarchy. But we lack ways of applying this to our reality and in our ways of working together. I mean the most important thing we do is to rotate between men and women on the speaking list. There are probably a few more men than women involved, but we've never talked about this being a problem. A few women organised a women - only work group before the action, but it never really got going, because people were overwhelmed with what was going on before Quebec, so another working group was just too much.

We have very strong feminists in our group and the men respect that. After Quebec we had a weekend of reflection and someone was honest enough to say; but what is patriarchy really? Then we realised maybe we don't know what patriarchy is, maybe we need to talk about it more and have more information. Sometimes people talk about it and how you have to be aware of these things as an activist, but maybe we just don't really know what we're talking about. It's like being anti-capitalist - I mean that's a big thing, what does it mean exactly?

We mandated one person for statistics in the general assembly just to be aware of things like how

many people had spoken, and how many were men and women. Then you see the problem. We know that from the general assemblies women don't talk as often as men, they don't talk on the same issues and they express themselves in a different way. Why don't women feel comfortable about talking in general assemblies? We just don't know. I was very curious at the PGA conference to hear how other groups deal with that problem, because I'm sure it's not only in CLAC that it happens. We've noticed it at the conference too, you know - a lot of men were talking a lot.

How did CLAC become involved in the PGA network?

Someone said to go and see the PGA web site and I thought the PGA principles were very interesting. When I look at them now I see that they are so similar to CLAC's. Last winter Lois, who was involved with CLAC, said she thought CLAC should become the new North American convenors - that's how it started.

I think PGA is as useful for us as it can be for other groups here at the conference as a way to rediscover the concept of solidarity. It is important to share information about our struggles - how we organise and to talk to each other. When I met the Bolivian water people today, I realised how important the international support they got during their Water Wars was to them. I think it made the whole difference, because being far away from these struggles sometimes make them feel unreal.

After Quebec, CLAC is in a process of thinking about what to do next and what to focus on. I think people want to focus on local issues, because we're just sick of following the corporate agenda, of being in that emergency feeling, because the problems are so big. Just for the environmental thing, because the earth won't be able to support us much longer, but really, it's just crazy to be in that mood. We realised that we were applying the same things that we were opposed to - things like efficiency and not competitiveness exactly, but always going fast, and it drove a lot of people mad and sick. Through PGA we

The CLAC basis of unity

The Anti-Capitalist Convergence (CLAC in French) is opposed to capitalism. We fundamentally reject a social and economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and exchange. We reject a system driven by an exploitative logic that sees human beings as human capital, ecosystems as natural resources, and culture as simply a commodity. We reject the idea that the world is only valuable in terms of profit, competition and efficiency.

The CLAC also rejects the ideology of neo-liberalism, whereby corporations and investors are exempt from all political and social measures that

interfere with their so-called "success".

The CLAC is anti-imperialist, opposed to patriarchy, and denounces all forms of exploitation and oppression. We assert a worldview based on the respect of our differences and the autonomy of groups, individuals and peoples. Our objective is to globalise our networks of resistance to corporate rule. Respecting a diversity of tactics, the CLAC supports the use of a variety of creative initiatives, ranging between public education campaigns to direct action.

The CLAC is autonomous, decentralised and non-hierarchical. We encourage the involvement of

anyone who accepts this statement of principles.

We also encourage the participation of all individuals in working groups, in accord with their respective political affiliations.

With regards to the Summit of the Americas (April 2001) and the negotiations of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the CLAC adopts a confrontational attitude and rejects reformist alternatives such as lobbying which cannot have a major impact on anti-democratic processes. We intend to shut down the Summit of the Americas and to turn the FTAA negotiations into a non-event.

can unite our local struggles all together, and it's this energising network I guess.

Do you see any problems with it?

(Laughter!) Being here I see a few problems that need to be fixed, but I don't see them as big problems. They are more organisational problems, which if they had been improved it would have made it easier for the conference. Apart from that I guess decentralising is a big thing. For us in North America it worked out pretty well – we managed to get quite a few groups involved and we didn't end up doing all the work.

Of course there are things that could just get better, but I think we've got a good basis of principles for people to adapt according to their own reality. I think we need to free our minds. It seems that you can just do whatever you want with these principles with a bit of creativity and initiative. Then again it's maybe easy to say that when I don't know what's going on in Africa and Asia, but I think it's a good basis for people to mould to their own realities.

What is your vision of a better future?

I would like a world without oppression, exploitation and domination. A world where people feel free to express themselves with sensitivity and creativity. Where people can connect, and have relations based on reciprocity, and relations that are fully consenting, closer to nature. I know it sounds cheesy, but I have found myself while I've been travelling over the past few months in the mountains, far away from things, rediscovering the meaning of things. I think human beings should be a bit more humble, not just think that they can conquer everything and be really powerful. But feel a little bit more vulnerable sometimes. A world with lots of love and friendship (Laughter!).

“There was teargas everywhere. They used so much that they had to go and buy some from the States, and plastic bullets too. I've seen some and they are really, really big. Quite a few people got hurt, police also, and the fence came down, about five minutes after we got there.”



Reflections : finding common ground

"Why wait for a better future? Create it now!" - Karla

The stories and struggles of these twelve women give a sense of the radical spectrum and reasons why women mobilise around the world. These range from reactions to witnessing friends being burned alive and children prostituting themselves to eat McDonalds, to responses to the generalised misery and acute insecurity caused by economic globalisation. Hearing it first hand gives you a keener sense of the damage being exacted by capitalism and the state system.

In spite of the vastly different realities and positions of privilege and power within PGA - shaped by class, the colour of our skin, gender, or where we happened to be born, the myriad forms of domination and exploitation we all face are interconnected. Many of the women we interviewed see PGA as a vehicle to find out about similar struggles and have realised that they are not alone.

PGA is about finding connections and, ideally, being able to co-ordinate the fight for the global commons. The gatherings enable face to face communication and exchange of strategies, ideas and experience which strengthens and legitimates local struggles. At the same time, we feel there are significant pitfalls and contradictions. These are all to do with questions of power: how do we avoid reproducing the dominant power structures within and between our movements?

Hierarchies and power

While we try to understand the complexities of different cultural contexts and ways of organising, there is a huge disparity between the groups and movements who come together under the umbrella of PGA. These groups all share a confrontational attitude and take direct action, but range from large, hierarchically organised peasant

unions to small, horizontally organised collectives. The coca-growers federation in Bolivia, for example, might feel that taking state power will extend their grassroots struggle and enable them to make significant changes on a national scale.

We think history has proven that state power can only be paternalistic, undemocratic and oppressive and is inextricably tied to the capitalist system, and that having leaders undermines the potential for real direct democracy. It is inconsistent if we work with groups abroad who we would not work with at home. At the same time, how do you filter the membership of a non-organisation? In a positive sense, these differences can enforce a greater degree of tolerance and understanding, and prevent dogmatic ideologies.

Sexism and power

While women's relation to power differs radically not only between cultures but also within them, men's domination over women is socially structured and normalised across the world. However, we found it striking that the importance given to gender issues by most of the women we interviewed was secondary. There are a complex set of reasons for this, but arguably, politically active women have a relatively greater sense of power over their lives in contrast to the majority of women worldwide. Also, many women do not identify with what institutionalised feminism has become: the "freedom" to have equal quotas of power as men.

Our experience is that sexism persists within the most radical and progressive movements. In Cochabamba, a gender declaration was produced, partly in response to this realisation. Experience has taught us that fine words are meaningless when we lack ways to apply them in practice and we still feel that the gender issue was treated as an add-on, rather than a central theme in all discussions. However, it seems that genuine attempts were made to confront the problem of sexual harassment beyond just another appendix to the manifesto, and no incidents were reported.

North-South relations and power

One of the key visions of the PGA is that groups from the North and South struggle alongside each other, share information and experiences as equals, and in this way radically challenge the legacy of colonial power relations. However, we still face the manifestations of colonial structures within the network, both in terms of the vastly different daily realities of groups involved, and in terms of how we work and relate to each other.

For example, some groups in the South have responded to the calls for Global Days of Action with the reply that their daily struggle is constant and that spending a day protesting about a World Bank meeting is often not an option. Perhaps this also ties in with the inaccurate perception by some Southern movements that people in the "developed" world are basically all rich and do not face the same life-or-death realities. It is certainly true that many dispossessed people from the North are not yet part of the PGA network and many more links need to be made here, but many of us - from both North and South, also feel the need to question old-style forms of paternalistic solidarity.

What we need is to establish relationships which are not distorted by money. The real challenge we face is how to continue to move towards genuinely horizontal solidarity actions and relationships that both acknowledge and go beyond our different positions of privilege and power.

To conclude, these are some unanswered questions that result from the ambitious concept of PGA. These contradictions need to be genuinely confronted and discussed between groups at future conferences as these power structures will remain in place unless aired and challenged on an ongoing basis.

On leaders...

“None of us as leaders make the decision – what they say from below is carried upwards by us. We don’t impose from above. We take the decisions based on the grassroots and everyone is clear about what we are doing and why.” – Silvia

“I think the momentum that we have got in this crazy amorphous thing people call movement is so precious that we have to take seriously anything that could undermine it.” – Alex (on the threat from the authoritarian left)

“We’re very clear that we don’t want to enter the system and become another institution, because we don’t believe in the rules of the game. We are going to carry on as assemblies, as committees, with spokespeople. It has to come from the grassroots and in that sense, we see this as a long journey of opening spaces, even if it is just a conversation with one or two people.” – Marcela

“I believe that as a peasant movement, we have to have our own representatives who are peasants and belong to our organisation, in parliament.” – Silvia

“We are autonomous and decentralised. When we criticised the structure of the Party, we beheaded the leaders. So we start with the following principle: in our country and in others, leaders are reproducing society’s values, despite having worked on representation, and run too high a risk of being corrupted.” – Ivania

“Political activity does not only happen in political parties or in organised groups; it happens as soon as you are conscious of your actions and your decisions.” – Julieta

“We have our struggles and we propose the changes we want to make to society and we try to provoke, but we don’t think that we are the only ones that are going to change society. We know that we’ll do it with other organisations around the world and in Bolivia, and although we disagree with many forms of organisation, we know that it is a common struggle.” – Julieta

Beyond Global Days of Action: Sustained Campaigns

From the Global Street Party in 1998, coinciding with the G8 Summit, to the WTO Ministerial in Qatar 2001, Global Days of Action (GDAs) have been hugely successful. They have put powerful financial and governmental institutions under the spotlight and created pressure for change. GDAs have also been an important forum for exchange of ideas and expressions of our common struggle. Each event has worked as a catalyst for the mobilisation of the next one.

But GDAs are not enough. As many Southern groups have pointed out, the struggle is a daily one, and the challenge for the PGA network and the global anti-capitalist movement has increasingly been to incorporate local struggles - not only one-off spectacular actions.

Out of discussions in Prague and workshops in Cochabamba grew the idea of sustained campaigns; to go beyond single days of action to working on ongoing global struggles such as resistance to militarisation and criminalisation. In this way attention is given to daily struggles, from a global viewpoint.

Global Sustained Campaigns

>> against militarism, paramilitarism and state terrorism, as well as the general problem of repressive violence that social movements the world over have to face (more than ever after the events of New York and Washington).

>> for "Territory and Sovereignty". This is not only about issues of land reform versus expropriation by the multinationals, or of privatisation of water. The larger question is that of the right of communities to freely organise their societies, livelihoods and relation to nature. It includes opposition to all kinds of privatisation of public services - or much more generally - of global or local "commons".

>> for the construction of grassroots alternatives to the capitalist system, including popular education campaigns and popular consultations.

One way to find out more All lists can be subscribed to by following the instructions on the pages below:

Campaign against state militarism and paramilitarism:
<http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/stopwar>

Campaign for defence and recognition of self-determination and land sovereignty of all people:
<http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/tierra>

Campaign against all privatisation:
<http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/nosevende>

Campaign on construction of alternative models to the capitalist system, based on education and training:
<http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/alter>

Argentina 2002



Contacts and Resources

For lack of space, we've only included a small selection of contacts, and have tried to choose websites and publications that act as gateways to many other radical contacts. We've tried as much as possible to include postal as well as electronic addresses – apologies to all those of you who don't have (or want to have) access to the internet.

For a comprehensive annual booklet with full contact details for most radical, anarchist and direct action groups, publications and centres in the world get **The Agitator!** Copies costs £1.30 (including postage) from: **The Agitator, c/o PO Box 2474, London N8 0HW, UK**

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS/WEBSITES/NEWSLETTER/EMAIL LISTS:

PEOPLE'S GLOBAL ACTION

(Secretariat)
c/o Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW),
377 Bank Street,
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
e-mail: pga@agp.org
www.agp.org

CARAVAN99

(European PGA email list)
Subscription: go to
www.lists.riseup.net

INDYMEDIA

(links to world-wide independent media sites)
www.indymedia.org

THIRD WORLD NETWORK

(campaigning & research network)
228 Macalister Road
10400 Penang, Malaysia
www.twinside.org.sg

RECLAIM THE STREETS

(links to RTS groups around the world) www.reclaimthestreets.net

A-INFOS (international anarchist information service)
www.ainfos.ca

ZNET

(comprehensive activist resource site)
www.zmag.org

ANARCHIST YELLOW PAGES

(directory of anarchist groups world-wide)
<http://flag.blackened.net/agonya/yyp/index.html>

EARTH FIRST! JOURNAL

(voices of ecological resistance)
PO Box 3023, Tucson,
Arizona AZ 85702 USA
520-620-6900 (voice)
413 254 0057 (fax)
email:
collective@earthfirstjournal.org
www.earthfirstjournal.org

UK-BASED:

SCHNEWS

(weekly international activist news sheet)
c/o On-the-fiddle
PO Box 2600 Brighton BN2 0EF
email: schnews@brighton.co.uk
www.schnews.org.uk

EARTH FIRST ACTION UPDATE!

(newsletter with round-up of actions and good contacts for groups and current campaigns)
c/o Manchester EF!
Dept. 29 22a Beswick Street,
Manchester M4 7HS
Tel: 0161 226 6814
efactionupdate@bigfoot.com

SOCIAL CENTRES NETWORK

(for squatted and autonomously run social and resource centres)
c/o LARC . 62 Fieldgate St. London E1 1ES
Email: londonscn@riseup.net
Email list: londonscn-events-subscribe@lists.riseup.net

THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY

Old Castle Street
London E1 7NT
T +44 (0)20 7320 2222
F +44 (0)20 7320 2333
enquirydesk@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk
uk
www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk/

SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE PUBLICATIONS:

AUFHEBEN

(autonomous magazine) Brighton & Hove Unemployment centre.
4 Crestway Parade
Brighton BN1 7BL. UK
Email: aufhaben99@yahoo.co.uk
http://lists.village.Virginia.EDU/~spoons/aut_html/aufredit.htm

BELLOW (a bi-monthly

newsletter grown out of a network of DIY anarcho-feminists and radical anti-capitalist women in the UK)
Box 35 c/o Green Leaf Bookshop
82 Colston Street
Bristol BS1 5BB UK
Email: bellow1@bigfoot.com
www.bellow.org.uk

DO OR DIE: Voices from the

Ecological Resistance (annual journal with reports and radical analysis from the ecological frontlines)
c/o Prior House. 6 Tilbury Place
Brighton BN2 2GY UK
Email: doordtp@yahoo.co.uk
www.eco-action.org/dod/

DAYS OF WAR NIGHTS OF

LOVE: Crimethink for Beginners (inspirational autonomous writings from the Crimethink Collective) For copies contact:
Demon Box Collective Box 1042
SE-172 21 Sundbyberg Sweden
www.crimethink.net
info@demonbox.com

UNTYING THE KNOT

Feminism, Anarchism & Organisation
Two essays - Tyranny of Structurelessness by Jo Freeman, and The Tyranny of Tyranny by Cathy Levine.
Dark Star/Rebel Press 1984

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE

DEMOCRACY: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need for a New Liberatory Project" by Takis Fotopoulos (1997)

STOLEN HARVEST: The

Hijacking of the Global Food Supply by Vandana Shiva (2000), Zed Books: London

PROFIT OVER PEOPLE:

Neoliberalism and Global Order by Noam Chomsky (1999), Seven Stories Press

EMPIRE by Michael Hardt &

Antonio Negri (2000), Harvard University Press

SPACE, PLACE AND GENDER,

by Doreen Massey (1995), Blackwell: Oxford

WOMEN RESIST

GLOBALISATION by Sheila Rowbotham & Stephanie Linkogle (2001) Zed Books

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Disclaimer:

The editors warn all readers not to spend hours at international gatherings, writing manifestos that try to capture the aspirations of diverse movements, but to stay at home content in the knowledge that there is no-one out there worth talking to - honest!

Glossary

Affinity group A group of people who have an affinity for each other, know each others strengths and weaknesses, support each other, and do political/campaign work together. The concept of affinity groups has a long history. They developed as an organising structure during the Spanish Civil war and have been used with amazing success over the last thirty years of feminist, anti-nuclear, environmental and social justice movements around the world

Anti-Capitalist There seems to be little agreement amongst those who define themselves as ‘anti-capitalist’ (or those who don’t) about what it is they are actually opposing. There is a vast gulf between those who merely want to curb its worst excesses and often appeal to the state to do so, and those whose aim is to overthrow or at least fight against the system in its totality. To have any meaning, anti-capitalism has to involve opposing both capital and the state, locally and globally.

Companero/a Spanish word used to describe a friend or companion in struggle

Consensus decision making A process which attempts to include all points of view. Participants are able to express a range of opinions from complete agreement with the decision in question to complete disagreement - in which case it is modified until hopefully an outcome is reached which everybody involved can live with, even if total agreement doesn’t prove possible. Whilst this kind of process has clear advantages over others such as voting, it is still open to manipulation by the most articulate and persuasive members of a group.

Direct Democracy A form of organisation in which everybody participates directly in decision making. It differs in this respect from parliamentary forms of democracy in which representatives are chosen to act

and to make decisions on the behalf of others.

Facilitator A person delegated to structure meetings so that decisions can be made effectively, to make sure that discussions are not dominated by individuals and to help keep discussions focused. This role is usually rotated.

G7 / G8 The G8 is the ‘Group of Eight’ rich industrialised nations: the USA, Britain, Japan, France, Canada, Italy, Germany and Russia. Discussions and economic policy making take place at yearly meetings which waste millions of dollars wining and dining the rich and powerful.

Globalisation Commonly used to describe free trade, the free movement of capital, the growth in importance of multinationals, international regulatory bodies and institutions, and the creation of a global ‘culture’. Whilst some of these may be new forms of organisation and structure, in essence they are a continuation of what has existed before and are an attempt to intensify capitalism’s grip on humanity. Capital has always been global – in ambition if not in reach.

Haciendas Spanish word for big landowners property.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) A capitalist planning agency created in the post- war period to provide emergency loans for governments to enable them to support their currencies on the foreign exchange markets. Along with the World Bank it devised Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as a response to prospect of mass non-repayment of loans by countries in the ‘Third World’ at the beginning of the 1980s. These forced those countries who wanted any further loans or the rescheduling of payments on existing ones, to take measures such as the privatisation of state industries, cutting of budgets, ending of subsidies and the liberalisation of trade. The result has been mass poverty, misery and resistance.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) This agreement was rejected after massive opposition around the world. It would have allowed nation states and more controversially corporations to challenge laws or

regulations which could be seen as creating a barrier to ‘free trade’ and competition. However similar measures already exist on regional basis, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC).

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) NGOs have mushroomed over the past twenty years alongside the rise of the free-market and cuts in government budgets. They include a wide-spectrum of groups that work on social and environmental issues. While some organise at a grassroots level, many are top-down, paternalistic, depoliticised and waste resources on large salaries for Westerners.

Progressive speaking list A tool used by facilitators to make sure that the same people do not always speak at a meeting. People who have not yet spoken are given priority in the speaking list, and sometimes women are given priority over men.

Spokescouncil Large actions need a forum to discuss actions, enable co-operation and share information between lots of different groups. This process is facilitated by a spokescouncil, where each affinity group delegates a ‘spoke’ to act as a spokesperson to the those meeting. Often, the spokes will form a circle with the rest of the affinity group sitting behind them to feed back info from the affinity group to the larger meeting.

World Bank The World Bank provides loans for specific ‘development’ projects or schemes, the majority of which result in social and ecological damage on a vast scale. Typical examples would be hydro-electric dams, roads etc.

World Trade Organisation (WTO) Most major states have signed up to the rules of WTO. One the main ones is that any national laws or regulations (environmental and labour legislation, for example, or the banning of certain toxic products) which obstruct ‘free trade are open to challenge by the disadvantaged party through the WTO and face the possibility of fines or sanctions being imposed.



You know what everyone's greatest fear is?

It is that all the dreams we have,
all the crazy ideas and aspirations,

all the impossible romantic longings and utopian visions can come true,
that the world can grant us our wishes.

People spend their lives doing everything in their power to fend off that possibility:
they beat themselves up with every kind of insecurity, sabotage their own efforts,
undermine love affairs and
cry sour grapes before the world even has a chance to defeat them.

because no weight could be heavier to bear than
the possibility that everything we want is possible.

If that is true, then there really are things at
stake in this life, things to be truly won or lost.

