

Peoples Global Action - We are Everywhere - [Even Pacifika!]

Worldwide resistance speel about Peoples Global Action

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s11, s26, Anti-MAI, Melbourne, Davos, Prague, Genoa, Anti-Globalisation is all the rage these days, if you have attended workshops on anti-globalisation you may be able to rationalise, why Neo-liberal globalisation sucks ass, and why the diversity of resistance to globalisation is something to be celebrated. These Anti-capitalist coalitions see Greenies, anarchists, indigenous internationalists, socialists, trade unionists, communists, animal rights activists and those who 'defy' labels, working together to take on the evil empire of multi-nationals, their state puppets, and the international mafia rackets of the WEF, WTO, World Bank, and IMF....

There lots of reasons why there is this resistance! But how? what? where did this avalanche of resistance come from?

This story is about an international network of resistance to global capital. Peoples' Global Action (PGA). Due to its diffuse and fluid nature as well as not having any offices, paid staff, funds or bank accounts, the role of PGA and its link between different events has remained obscure. PGA had a hand in events such as the June 18th Global Day of Action which saw London's financial centre shut down, the 'Battle of Seattle', 'the punch up in Prague', and other anti-World Trade Organisation type protests, alongside hundreds of other not-so-(in)famous events. It is a story of resistance, revolution, the uprising of the oppressed, and the celebration of humanity. That story goes a little like this

Capitalism had won; many had declared it was the end of history -it was November 1989, the Berlin wall had just fallen. Travel a mere ten years forward in history... it's November 1999, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), legislators of global capitalism, try to meet in a city reeking of tear gas and paralysed by tens of thousands of demonstrators. A piece of graffiti is painted all over Seattle: "Don't Forget - We are Winning". It was clear that history had a lot further to go.



Whether you were on the streets of Seattle that day dodging the rubber bullets, or following the hundreds of bullock carts converging on the Narmada dam in India, or marching with trade unionists in Manila, or in London trapped by the £3m police operation, or mocking the stock exchange in Buenos Aires, carnivalling against capitalism in Wellington, or even occupying a McDonalds in Milan... one thing was clear to everyone: at the end of the 20th century resistance had become as transnational as capital.

As the state, transnational corporations and their puppets the International Monetary Fund and WTO impose "free market" policies on every country on the planet, putting profit and economic growth above all else, they are unwittingly creating a situation where diverse social movements are able to recognise each others struggles as related and are beginning to work together in new ways. But where did this extraordinary show of international solidarity spring from? It wasn't in the acid mist of Seattle's tear gas that this global movement was born, but in the humid mist of the Chiapas jungle, in Southern Mexico on New Years Day 1994 the day. This was the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, a day when two thousand indigenous peoples from several groups came out from the mountains and forests. Masked, armed and calling themselves Zapatistas, their battle cry was "Ya Basta" - "Enough is Enough". An extraordinary popular uprising, which was to help change the landscape of global resistance, had begun. Using a jungle battered laptop computer and intermediaries to get the discs to an internet connected computer, the Zapatistas were able to bypass the media censorship of the Mexican state and communicate directly. People everywhere soon heard of the uprising.

These masked rebels, from poverty stricken communities, were not only demanding that their own land and lives be given back, neither were they just asking for international support and solidarity; they were talking about neoliberalism, about the "death sentence" that NAFTA and other free trade agreements would impose on indigenous people. They were demanding the dissolution of power while encouraging others all over the world to take on the fight against the enclosure of our lives by capital. "Don't join us - do it yourself" was their message.

The sense of possibility that this uprising gave to millions of people across the globe was extraordinary. In 1996, the Zapatistas, with trepidation as they thought no-one might come, sent out an email calling for a gathering, called an "encuentro"(encounter), of international activists and intellectuals to meet in specially

constructed arenas in the Chiapas jungle to discuss common tactics, problems and solutions. Six thousand people attended, and spent days talking and sharing their stories of struggle against the common enemy: capitalism.

This was followed a year later by a gathering in Spain, where the idea for the construction of a more action focused network, to be named Peoples' Global Action (PGA), was hatched by a group made up of activists from ten of the largest and most innovative social movements. They included the Zapatistas, Movimento Sem Terra, (the Brazilian Landless Peasants Movement who occupy and live on large tracts of unproductive land) and the Karnataka State Farmers Union (KRRS), renowned for their "cremate Monsanto" campaign which involved burning fields of Genetically Modified crops.



The group (who became the PGA convenors committee, a role that rotates every year) drafted a document outlining some of the primary objectives and organisational principles of the emerging network. It outlined a firm rejection of appeals to those in power for reforms to the present world order. A support for direct action as a means of communities reclaiming control over their lives, and an organisational philosophy based on autonomy and decentralisation. In February 1998, Peoples' Global Action was born. For the first time ever the worlds grassroots movements were beginning to talk and share experiences without the mediation of the media or Non Governmental Organisations(NGO's).

This first gathering of the PGA was held in Geneva - HQ of the much hated WTO. More than 300 delegates from 71 countries came to Geneva to share their anger over the current phase of the capitalist project. Attende and Tino Rangatiratanga advocate Waiariki Grace elaborates, "This process moves power from the government to the private sector. This transfer of power to the private sector reduces the role of the government, but does not inherently challenge the statist world, although it does remove much of its monopoly power. The aim behind this is to reduce restrictions on private enterprises to allow them to move factors of production as they wish. The key international institutions which encapsulate and articulate such ideas include, the World Trade Organisation, Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations, World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, reinforced in different areas of the world by their regional offices, this is not about people it is about money"



From the Canadian Postal Workers, and Earth First! to anti-nuclear campaigners, to French farmers, to indigenous peoples with Maori, U'wa and Ogoni peoples, to Korean Trade Unionists, to Reclaim the Streets, to the Indigenous Women's Network of North America, to Ukrainian radical ecologists...all were there to form, "a global instrument for communication and co-ordination for all those fighting against the destruction of humanity and the planet by the global market, while building up local alternatives and people power."

One of the participants spoke of this inspiring event: "It is difficult to describe the warmth and the depth of the encounters we had here. The global enemy is relatively well known, but the global resistance that it meets rarely passes through the filter of the media. And here we met the people who had shut down whole cities in Canada with general strikes, risked their lives to seize lands in Latin America, destroyed the seat of Cargill in India or Novartis's transgenic maize in France. The discussions, the concrete planning for action, the stories of struggle, the personalities, the enthusiastic hospitality of the Genevan squatters, the impassioned accents of the women and men facing the police outside the WTO building, all sealed an alliance between us. Scattered around the world again, we will not forget. We remain together. This is our common struggle."

One of the concrete aims of this gathering was to co-ordinate actions against two events of global importance that were coming up in May of that year, the G8 meeting (an annual event) of the leaders of the eight most industrialised nations, which was to take place in Birmingham and the second ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation which was being held a day later in Geneva. The outcome of the gathering was that three months later in May 1998 for four consecutive days, acts of resistance echoed around the planet.

In Hyderabad India, 200,000 peasant farmers called for the death of the WTO, in Brasilia landless peasants and unemployed workers joined forces and 50,000 of them took to the streets, while over thirty Reclaim the Streets parties took place in many countries, ranging from Finland, to Sydney, to San Francisco, to Toronto, to Lyon and Berlin. In Prague, the biggest single mobilisation since the Velvet Revolution in '89 brought thousands into the streets for a mobile street party which ended with several McDonalds being "redesigned" and running battles with the police. Meanwhile in the UK 6,000 reclaimed the streets blocking central Birmingham as the G8 leaders fled the city to a local manor, to continue their meeting in a more tranquil location. In Geneva the streets exploded: world leaders had congregated there for the WTO ministerial, and to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), the forerunner of the WTO. Over 15,000 people from all over Europe and many from other continents demonstrated against the tyranny of the WTO, banks had

their windows smashed, the WTO Director General's Mercedes was overturned. Three days of the heaviest rioting ever seen in Geneva followed.

It was clear something was happening, something big, and the momentum was becoming unstoppable. A year later an intercontinental caravan of 500 people from the global South toured Europe, directly confronting governments, corporations and banks. On June the 18th the caravan ended in Koln where the G8 was holding its annual meeting. That day carnivals against capitalism took place in financial centres on every continent. The term "anti-capitalist " became common currency in many media reports. Five months later on November the 30th the World Trade Organisation is brought to its knees in Seattle... the rest is history...

At over 100 years old, activist Hazel Wolf has lived through a Russian Revolution, a Chinese Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall. "the thing about all of them is, nobody knew they were going to happen." she says. A revolution, by its nature, hardly seems possible before it takes place; but it may seem obvious and even inevitable in hindsight. But one thing is sure, revolutionary epochs are periods where tyrannical institutions lose their legitimacy. They are eras of convergence, when apparently separate processes collect to form a socially explosive crisis. They are moments when hope is ignited, the hope that everything can be transformed, and transformed quickly. They are times when history speeds up

DISCLAIMER: The people who threw this together would like to reassure you, gentle (and not so gentle) reader, that capitalism isn't really that bad. So pop another Prozac, turn up the TV (to drown the shouts from the street), and if you do have to go out, don't forget to shop like hell. Oh, and don't whatever you do get incited by this product to do anything silly like take control of your life. Or break any laws...