

# **The New Formulation:**

## **An Anti-Authoritarian Review of Books**

**Globalization and its Discontents** by Randall Amster

**Theory of the Anti-Globalization Movement, Part II** by Chuck Morse

**Water/Power** by Lex Bhagat

**Agriculture and Resistance** by Erin Royster

**Insurgent Mexico** by Chuck Morse

**Reply to "Theory of the Anti-Globalization Movement"** by  
Jeremy Brecher



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**Statement to Contributors:**

Contributions are encouraged. This journal is restricted to comparative book reviews. Reviews must examine the failings and virtues of books for a contemporary anarchist theory and politics. Anarchism is understood here as a doctrine seeking the abolition of capitalism, the nation-state, and hierarchy generally, and the creation of a cooperative economy, a decentralized confederation of communes or municipalities, and a culture of liberation. The deadline for the next issue is December 1, 2002.

Each review must treat at least two books and one must have been published in the previous two years. In some cases, reviews of works in other media (such as a film) will be accepted.

Reviews of two books should be between 2,500 to 3,000 words and reviews of three should be 3,500 to 4,000 words.

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## Program

Welcome to *The New Formulation: An Anti-Authoritarian Review of Books*. This biannual journal contains comparative book reviews examining the value of recent publications to the development of a contemporary anarchist theory and politics.

The purpose of this journal is to help clarify the distinctness of an anarchist approach to social affairs, to provide a forum for the integration of new works and insights into the anarchist project, and to give authors struggling to redefine the tradition a setting in which to share their research and reflections.

Although the anarchist movement is currently enjoying a renewed influence on social movements and political life generally, there is a compelling need to clarify the principles, goals, and strategies that constitute the anarchist perspective. This is a precondition of the movement's ability to become genuinely revolutionary and we hope this journal, and other sympathetic projects, can help facilitate this clarification.

Contributions are welcome. All book reviews must examine the failings and virtues of books for a contemporary anarchist theory and politics. Anarchism is understood here as a doctrine seeking the abolition of capitalism, the nation-state, and hierarchy generally, and the creation of a cooperative economy, a decentralized confederation of communes or municipalities, and a culture of liberation. The deadline for the next issue is December 1, 2002.

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Randall Amster

## Globalization and Its Discontents

*The Battle in Seattle: The Story behind and beyond the WTO Demonstrations*

By Janet Thomas

Golden, Colo: Fulcrum Publishing, 2000

*Tearing down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy*

By Jeff Ferrell

New York: Palgrave, 2001

In the not-too-distant past, anarchy (or anarchism, for those of us with more effete sensibilities) suffered from something of a negative image problem, often being construed as a mere synonym for chaos, violence, and terrorism. While this definitional taint hasn't entirely fallen away, it is apparent that images of anarchy are undergoing a mild yet perceptible transformation that has even begun to appear in more mainstream treatments of political theory and social action. As such, a new set of problems for the anarchist movement have arisen, often taking the form of a version of "anarchist chic" that has reinvigorated black T-shirt sales and moved the circle A symbol from the recesses of history onto suburban backs across North America.<sup>1</sup> In a sense, anarchism may be on the road toward becoming a victim of its own success, and those concerned with the direction and ultimate fate of the movement face a burgeoning set of challenges that appear to have more to do with co-optation and commodification than perceptions of violence and bomb throwing.

In distinct but not incongruous ways, both Janet Thomas's *The Battle in Seattle* and Jeff Ferrell's *Tearing down the Streets* confront these issues of the changing perceptions of anarchy. In exploring these themes, I

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1. As one critic observes, the recent resurgence of "protest culture" is typified by "feel-good anarchists" who generally have "little patience for theory" and are "too frenzied to worry much about serious alternatives," representing "a revolt of the affluent" by way of a "connection to youth culture" that has kept anarchism "hip and current" (Franklin Foer, "Protest Too Much," *New Republic*, 1 May 2000, <http://www.thenewrepublic.com/050100/foer050100.html>). While I do not share much of the writer's opinion in this regard, his reading of the emerging sense of "anarchist chic" is not without merit.

recently used both books for a course on social movements, where they received a warm reception and positive reviews from the students in the class. Nevertheless, while each text has certain advantages of perspective and analysis, it is equally apparent that both suffer some serious limitations as well. In each case, however, on balance the positives surely outstrip the negatives. With that in mind, I offer the following critical rendering.

If we are to believe our own press clippings, a dynamic movement was born in late November of 1999 on the streets of Seattle. Converging on the hallowed halls of global capitalism, a diverse and unprecedented array of progressive leftists and radical anarchists blocked WTO delegates, clogged street corners, smashed a few corporate windows, and generally created mischief and mayhem of a sort that had not been seen in North America for decades. While the mainstream media might be forgiven their ignorance of historical trends and international movements, it is harder to be so kind to chroniclers on the Left who ought to know better. What happened in Seattle, while certainly impressive, was neither unprecedented nor unpredictable. To construct it as such is to ignore prior events in Europe, Chiapas, and the myriad anarchist nodes that have been in local operation across the United States—not to mention the historical lessons of the Paris Commune and Spanish Civil War.

To an extent, Thomas's celebratory tome essentially validates the implicit hypothesis that radical politics and anarchism in particular were invented (or at least, had their public debut) on the streets of Seattle in 1999. In typically hyperbolic language, Thomas asserts that the "WTO week in Seattle was a global tailspin at the end of the century, a fly in the face of the new millennium, an elephant in the ointment. It was an unruly uprising of the masses, a divine intervention, a traffic nightmare, a human rights activist's dream."<sup>2</sup>

Now, on its face there is nothing inherently wrong with idealizing a moment that indeed possessed magical potential and revolutionary grace. The problem, though, arises most acutely when the role of anarchists in the movement is explored in greater detail. In what is an incredibly thin yet not altogether unsympathetic rendering, Thomas manages to condense the whole of anarchist praxis to a two-page inset

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2. Janet Thomas, *The Battle in Seattle: The Story behind and beyond the WTO Demonstrations* (Golden, Colo: Fulcrum Publishing, 2000), 10.

box—an oversimplification that she acknowledges with the proviso that “there were so many forms of anarchy at large during WTO week that clustering all the meanings of the word into the phrase ‘Eugene anarchists’ is like saying there is only one shade of green.”<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, despite its limited scope, the definition Thomas posits for anarchism is largely positive and sympathetic: “The anarchism that happens when regular people act to do for one another what governments, and corporations, refuse to do—feed, clothe, shelter, and provide health care, fair labor practices and human rights—is deep, compassionate, and sustaining. One could say that these days anarchism is at the heart of civil society.”<sup>4</sup>

Whereas Thomas’s primary concern is to unpack the nascent anti-globalization movement, and only to assess the relative merits of anarchism as a secondary phenomenon, Ferrell’s work is explicitly anarchistic both methodologically and substantively; indeed, *Tearing down the Streets* is graced with the subtitle, *Adventures in Urban Anarchy*. Thus, one might expect a richer depiction of anarchist theory and practice as well as a deeper historical contextualization of the movement’s roots and potential. On both fronts, Ferrell consistently delivers the goods, framing the inquiry at its most basic yet revolutionary levels: “In confronting authority in all of its manifestations, anarchists have for centuries fought not just the attempts by outside authorities to control shared public space, but also the insidious encoding of authoritarian arrangements in public life itself. In embracing instead autonomy, spontaneity, and playful uncertainty, anarchists have long sought to unleash these unregulated dynamics in the spaces of everyday life, and to build emergent communities out of their confluence.”<sup>5</sup>

Well versed in both historical and contemporary trends in anarchism, Ferrell weaves together an impressive litany of grassroots anarchy-in-action, ranging from homeless advocates to pirate radio broadcasters to urban graffiti artists.<sup>6</sup> Ferrell’s central theme is that radicals in general

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3. Ibid., 44.

4. Ibid., 45.

5. Jeff Ferrell, *Tearing down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 20.

6. Readers should be apprised of the fact that I am quoted in *Tearing down the Streets* as one of those homeless advocates and “anarchist troublemakers” that form the foundation of the text as well as the point of departure for Ferrell’s thesis.



and anarchists in particular have long been concerned with struggling to maintain and reinvigorate “public spaces” (or “the commons”), a trend that has experienced a resurgence as regimes of local gentrification and global corporatism have stepped up their processes of spatial privatization and cultural colonization. By focusing his analysis at the level of intensely local direct action, Ferrell specifically excludes the macroscopic appearance of events such as the WTO demonstrations, admitting that his work doesn’t “even talk much about that little anarchist action that went down in the streets of Seattle in 1999.”<sup>7</sup>

While *Tearing down the Streets* intentionally avoids much discussion of the global components of recent anarchist action, it cannot avoid implicit connections to the larger frame. In a recent *New Left Review* article, for example, Naomi Klein observes that the core of the new(est) social movements is “a radical reclaiming of the commons. As our communal spaces—town squares, streets, schools, farms, plants—are displaced by the ballooning marketplace, a spirit of resistance is taking hold around the world. People are reclaiming bits of nature and of culture, and saying ‘this is going to be public space.’”<sup>8</sup> Such formulations indicate that local and global levels of analysis may not be as dichotomous as they are sometimes taken to be.

Indeed, where Ferrell fails to sufficiently account for macro-revolutionary tendencies in the movement, *The Battle in Seattle* downplays the intensely localized nature of resistance that both frames and supports the wider anti-globalization effort. As Klein laments, “Too often, these connections between global and local are not made. . . . On the one hand, there are the international anti-globalization activists who may be enjoying a triumphant mood, but seem to be fighting far-away issues, unconnected to people’s day-to-day struggles. They are often seen as elitists: white middle-class kids with dreadlocks. On the other hand, there are community activists fighting daily struggles for survival, or for the preservation of the most elementary public services, who are often feeling burnt-out and demoralized.”<sup>9</sup> Taken together, *Tearing down the Streets* and *The Battle in Seattle* fill in each others’ gaps and smooth over their respective shortcomings, suggesting a potential vision for the future that is echoed in Klein’s plaintive call for new directions:

7. Ferrell, *Tearing down the Streets*, 34.

8. Naomi Klein, “Reclaiming the Commons,” *New Left Review* 9, May–June 2001, <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR24305.shtml>

9. Ibid.

“What is now the anti-globalization movement must turn into thousands of local movements, fighting the way neoliberal politics are playing out on the ground: homelessness, wage stagnation, rent escalation, police violence, prison explosion, criminalization of migrant workers, and on and on.”<sup>10</sup>

In Ferrell’s lexicon, the macro-movement is always already grounded in intensely localized struggles, exemplified by his invocation of homeless advocates, graffiti artists, skate punks, anarchist biker gangs, pirate radio stations, BASE jumpers, Critical Mass bicyclists, and “buskers” (it should be noted that Ferrell himself dabbles in many if not all of these anarchistic pursuits—a quality that lends integrity and credence to his work even as it undermines his stature in traditional academic circles). For her part, Thomas implicitly acknowledges this cobbling together of various localized efforts to form a larger movement through her identification of “at least 700 groups [that] were represented at the WTO demonstrations in Seattle,” although the specific actions undertaken by such groups are left for the reader to discern.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the central issue for the new (anarchist) social movements is the question of the tactical use of violence. In *The Battle in Seattle*, for instance, Thomas quotes numerous sources and informants who specifically blast the anarchists for their window-smashing forays and perceived hogging of the media limelight, observing that “what the media reflected back to us was a culture of hatred and stupidity in which none of us could recognize ourselves. . . . This sense of betrayal might be the most powerful thing that happened on the streets of Seattle. . . . The answers all came down to a televised continuous cartoon loop of property damage. A broken window became more profound, more telling, more compelling, more valuable than all of us put together.”<sup>12</sup> Taking pains to make the point crystal clear, Thomas notes that “the anarchists exposed others to hazards that they themselves were very careful to avoid,” and that “not one of the so-called anarchists responsible for the property damage in the city was arrested.”<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Thomas acknowledges the double-edged nature of

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10. Ibid.

11. Thomas, *Battle in Seattle*, 66–67.

12. Ibid., 209.

13. Ibid., 46, 14.

spectacular episodes of property destruction, wondering: "Would the WTO protests have received as much worldwide attention if anarchists hadn't done their thing in Seattle and if the media hadn't focused on it?"<sup>14</sup> Despite her criticism of the anarchists, moreover, Thomas does intimate a sentiment expressed elsewhere that "the only truly violent parties were the police," and specifically refers (without discussion or analysis) to "the difference between violence against property and violence against people."<sup>15</sup> Expanding on the point in the *New Left Review*, David Graeber concludes that "after two years of increasingly militant direct action, it is still impossible to produce a single example of anyone to whom a US activist has caused physical injury. . . . [Anarchists have been] attempting to invent a 'new language' of civil disobedience, combining elements of street theatre, festival and what can only be called non-violent warfare—non-violent in the sense adopted by, say, Black Bloc anarchists, in that it eschews any direct physical harm to human beings."<sup>16</sup>

Where Thomas's take on the anarchists is largely critical, and her analysis of tactical violence far too facile, Ferrell evidences a much more sympathetic and cogent perspective on these matters. Affirming Bakunin's dictum that "the destructive urge is a creative urge, too," Ferrell maintains that "the destruction launched by these groups aims directly at restoring humanity, human relations, and human communities, not at destroying them. It suggests that one way to disentangle the dehumanizing conflation of property and people, to confront the confusion of consumption with community, to dismantle the hierarchy of commodification by which law and property stand above people and places, is to assiduously destroy the former while affirming the latter."<sup>17</sup> Still, despite such sympathies, Ferrell does not sufficiently define the moral parameters of tactical violence in a manner that is likely to persuade skeptics such as Thomas.

There is a subtle irony lurking here that merits a moment of brief exploration. As part of his critique of the mutually reinforcing processes of corporate colonization and crusty-punk criminalization, Ferrell

14. Ibid., 46.

15. David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13, January–February 2002, <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR24704.shtml> and Thomas, *Battle in Seattle*, 214–15.

16. Graeber, "The New Anarchists."

17. Ferrell, *Tearing down the Streets*, 234.



debunks the “broken windows theory” favored by law enforcement agencies as a justification for cracking down on low-level, “quality of life” offenses such as panhandling, sidewalk sitting, and trespassing. The theory essentially holds that such offenses inexorably lead to more serious crimes, and that the appearance of homeless people or other marginalized and/or radicalized groups in spaces of consumption represent the first wave of “broken windows” on the slippery slope to full-on anarchy and chaos. In a fashion that I had not considered previously, it might be argued that the window-smashing anarchists in current vogue have taken this theory literally and to its logical extreme, hoping that a few broken windows are indeed the first step on the road to anarchy.

This serves to raise a final point that was alluded to in the introduction to this review. There appears to be something of a terminological conundrum regarding the usage of and distinction between the concepts of “anarchy” and “anarchism.” In one sense, it might be contended that anarchy functions as a kind of verb-noun, often representing images of action and praxis in a positive sense, while conjuring critiques of “lifestyle” and anti-intellectualism when viewed negatively. Anarchism, on the other hand, generally is taken to signify the theoretical, more scholarly wing of the movement—frequently seen positively as a crucial source of foundational philosophy, but negatively conceived of as perhaps too ideological in its meta-narrative implications. While it can be important and desirable to avoid such binary constructions, it is equally useful to consider the subtleties of language that often mask larger rifts and conflicts within a movement.

In fact, being an ardent admirer of Ferrell’s body of work myself, it becomes eminently clear why he chose *Adventures in Urban Anarchy* for his subtitle: it is an expression of solidarity with the anarchism-in-action sense of anarchy, representing an attempt to conceive the simultaneous realization of freedom in the here and now (that is, means) and provide a glimpse of what an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian future could be like (that is, ends). Indeed, Ferrell takes pains to develop a synchronous vision of means and ends, and one need only glance at the book jacket and table of contents to get a sense of his willingness to embrace certain “do-it-yourself” attributes of spontaneous “cultural self-invention,” replete with phraseology such as “Wild in the Streets” and “We Want the Airwaves” in presenting a

compelling argument “for a disorderly urban culture in place of the Disneyfied city.” These qualities also indicate an admirable openness in terms of displaying his affinity for and personal connection to the anarchist phenomena he studies as well as describes in *Tearing down the Streets*—a trait that more scholars of Ferrell’s magnitude ought to strive to emulate.

In the end, both *The Battle in Seattle* and *Tearing down the Streets* are enjoyable and informative works that should find their way onto radical reading lists everywhere. In particular, when taken together, a picture begins to emerge of a global movement grounded in local struggles for which “anarchism is the heart . . . its soul; the source of most of what’s new and hopeful about it.”<sup>18</sup> Despite critics’ frequent allegations of a movement lacking ideological coherence and moral centering, Ferrell and Thomas each point out in their own way that precisely the opposite is true: that the movement “is not opposed to organization. It is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology. Those new forms of organization are its ideology. It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy.”<sup>19</sup>

If there is one glaring omission in both texts, it is perhaps the failure to significantly elaborate this vision of what a decentralized network of autonomous communities might look like in actual practice. Then again, anarchists have generally avoided specific blueprints, on the theory that such are likely to become new regimes of authoritarian control, instead favoring emerging designs in which the means of struggle are already ends of liberation and dignity in themselves. As Ferrell concludes, “Anarchism offers no clear avenue . . . only the conviction that the spirit of revolt remains always a pleasure, that the revolution is in some ways won as soon as you begin to fight it.”<sup>20</sup> For those concerned about learning from the past, revolutionizing the present, and imagining the future, this ought to serve as a timely and much-needed reminder that the primary path to freedom lies simply in the act of living freely.

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18. Graeber, “The New Anarchists.”

19. Ibid.

20. Ferrell, *Tearing down the Streets*, 243.

Chuck Morse

## **Theory of the Anti-Globalization Movement, Part II**

*On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-capitalist Movement*

By various authors

London: One-Off Press, 2001

*The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*

Edited by Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton Rose

New York: Soft Skull Press, 2002

What was remarkable about the movement that erupted in Seattle 1999 was not so much that previously adversarial sides of the progressive opposition—the “teamsters and turtles”—had started working together or that old revolutionary flags were flying once again. These things had happened at various times in recent history to no great effect. What was extraordinary was the dialogue that emerged between members of the revolutionary, ideological Left (anarchists and communists) and activists whose primary interest lay in pragmatic, bread-and-butter reforms. These two tendencies have long been divided and often regarded one another suspiciously, but somehow the anti-globalization movement created a political space in which they could come together and jointly imagine a movement that is utopian and yet faithful to the demands of day-to-day activism.

The challenge was to figure out how to hold these dimensions together in one more or less unified movement—how to be realistic *and* demand the impossible—and activists across the world confronted this challenge with a vigorous campaign of education from below. They held teach-ins, Internet discussions, and sponsored countless other activities designed to flesh out the contours of this compelling new movement. Although their work helped raise the level of discourse among activists immeasurably, the movement’s common principles remained embodied in a sensibility and shared activist experience rather than in clear political statements.



Thus the significance of *On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-capitalist Movement* and *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*. These anthologies attempt to constitute the anti-globalization movement as a coherent project. They draw upon its history and culture to elaborate its internal cohesiveness, identify its continuities and discontinuities with other political tendencies, and clarify its problems. They reveal a movement that is exciting and dynamic but also struggling with difficult theoretical and political questions. In fact, the future of the anti-globalization movement will be determined to a great extent by our response to many of the issues raised by these books.

*On Fire* is a short (141 pages) collection of sixteen accounts and analyses of the July 2001 demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa, Italy. The essays were written by members of the most militant, confrontational wing of the protest, and the book's purpose is "to encourage debate about theory and tactics so as to empower us to take on those who currently are ruling this world."<sup>1</sup> Although the anthology has no "About the Authors" section (and many essays are signed with only first names), political references in the articles indicate that most of the writers are European (particularly British).

*The Battle of Seattle* presents a sweeping account of the anti-globalization movement as a whole. The anthology is divided into five parts: the first provides historical and political background on the movement that leapt to world attention in Seattle 1999; the second explores debates that unfolded during and after the Seattle protests (especially over tactics and organization); the third considers the relationship between the protest movement, left-wing advocacy groups, and right-wing anti-globalization tendencies as well as examines the question of racial diversity within the movement (which is also treated in articles throughout the book); part four contains accounts of post-Seattle actions (in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Prague, Genoa, among other places); and part five examines the convergence of diverse theoretical and political tendencies within the movement. *The Battle of Seattle* shares a distinctly militant orientation with *On Fire*, yet unlike *On Fire*, it has deeper roots in the movement's direct action faction than its explicitly anarchist wing. The majority of the authors in this book

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1. Introduction to *On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-capitalist Movement*, ed. various authors (Edinburgh: One-Off Press, 2001), 5.

are from the United States and some are well-known (such as Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein), although most have little reputation outside activist circles. Surprisingly, there is little repetition or academic jargon in either *On Fire* or *The Battle of Seattle*, and almost every contribution offers something unique. These books are also well edited and attractively designed, containing ample photographs and illustrations (and not the same ones that have been floating around the Internet for years).

### *On Fire*

While the stated aim of *On Fire* is to promote discussion about the tactics and ideas of the anti-globalization movement's most militant sector, the book could more aptly be described as a defense of this camp rather than an attempt to initiate analysis per se. Of course, the selection of the Genoa protest as a platform upon which to make this defense is not accidental: the demonstration devolved into terrifying, chaotic riots during which the police assassinated one protester, and injured and arrested countless others. Some argued that these events proved the futility of militant protest actions, whereas the contributors to *On Fire* want to show that they are not futile but, in fact, sustainable and desirable.

They do this in two ways. First, virtually all the accounts of the protest insist that the tremendous state violence unleashed on activists undermined neither their humanity nor their indignation against the G8. Indeed, many passages read like therapeutic writing exercises designed to encourage recovery from a terrible trauma:

I stopped in the crowds to see what was going on, but everyone was running past me, knocking into me, away from the police—I suddenly saw what looked like something out of star wars, a huge grey tank thing, driving straight at the crowds, and right behind this huge thing were cops in armored vehicles. I started running.<sup>2</sup>

After a period of being gassed, you became immune. The panic dropped. The eight-inch-long canisters were pumped through the air with such regularity that you could watch them coming

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2. Diego Jones, "Shooting Blanks," in *On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-capitalist Movement*, ed. various authors (London: One-Off Press, 2001), 14.

and run accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

Entries such as these, which explore the fear and confusion experienced by thousands, reveal that it is possible to persevere amid the savage cruelty that the system imposes on those who resist. Activists show that they were not conquered simply by writing about these traumatic experiences and linking them to larger patterns of social conflict.

The second major point of *On Fire* is to justify the black bloc's aggressive tactics, which were often blamed as the source of the police terror. On a practical level, multiple authors give examples of vicious police assaults on nonviolent, unarmed, and sometimes sleeping protesters, thus refuting the claim that the black bloc provoked the police's sadistic frenzy. They underscore the obvious point that the police initiate violence against those who threaten the powerful, not those who break the law.

Furthermore, in broader terms, numerous contributors contend that the profound existential rage at the system expressed by the black bloc is a constructive, eminently creative part of the movement. As one writer explains, protester violence "illustrates the depth of our discontent, it demonstrates the fact that we reject the state's ideological policing of our political activity, it indicates that we recognize the fact that unfortunately some level of violent confrontation will have to be had with the wealthy elite if we are going to achieve our goals of a different world to the one they currently control."<sup>4</sup> In other words, the urge to destroy is also a creative urge.

*On Fire* demonstrates that activists will not recoil when faced with state terror and that militant rage is a positive contribution to the movement against global capital. They refute those who indict the Black Bloc and redeem its antagonism toward the system as such. They show that despite all the chaos, the Battle of Genoa was a positive moment in the broader project of shaping "a protest movement into a social movement into world revolution for global human community."<sup>5</sup>

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3. Adam Porter, "It Was Like This Before," in *On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-capitalist Movement*, ed. various authors (London: One-Off Press, 2001), 76.
  4. Jazz, "The Tracks of Our Tears," in *On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-capitalist Movement*, ed. various authors (London: One-Off Press, 2001), 88.
  5. *Ibid.*, 99.

### ***The Battle of Seattle***

*The Battle of Seattle* is a more ambitious attempt to constitute the anti-globalization movement as a political project. It does this principally by analyzing the movement's history, its internal identity (including debates and differences with other political tendencies), and its possible future challenges. The historical essays seek to show that the 1999 explosion in Seattle was not a freak, isolated event but rather something with roots in much more universal social processes. For example, George Katsiaficas places the anti-globalization movement in the context of Third World rebellions against structural adjustment programs, such as the 1989 uprising in Venezuela against IMF-imposed austerity measures, during which the state killed more than three hundred and arrested more than two thousand. Jaggi Singh explores anti-globalization protests in India and Manuel Callahan shows how the Zapatistas helped set the preconditions for the Seattle protests through the movement they launched in 1994. These essays are complemented by detailed chronologies of anti-globalization protests—such as Andrea del Moral's "Direct Action Convergences 2000," which describes twenty-nine demonstrations from New Zealand to Canada in the year 2000 alone—and there is even a map drawn by James Davis and Paul Rowley that depicts "demonstrations, riots and events that are specific responses either to SAPs [structural adjustment programs] or summits/fulcrums of capitalist globalization."<sup>6</sup> This book illustrates that the novel political phenomenon that is the anti-globalization movement extends through time and space as well as across diverse cultural divides.

Treatments of the movement's internal norms and debates attempt to clarify some of the driving issues within the movement, whereas those exploring its external alliances try to sketch out its differences with the official progressive opposition and parallel movements on the Right. Expressions of the movement's internal identity can be found in essays throughout the book, although the articulation of this theme tends to be more diffuse than others (which makes sense, given that the collection's purpose is to constitute the movement). Nonetheless, one of the best takes on this question can be found in Eddie Yuen's introduction. He emphasizes the movement's commitment to direct democracy and

6. James Davis and Paul Rowley, "Internationalism against Globalization: A Map of Resistance," in *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*, ed. Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton Rose (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2002), 25.

practice of militant direct action, and points out that the movement draws (demographically and culturally) from an overwhelmingly white activist milieu. Efforts to make distinctions between the anti-globalization movement and parallel groups on the Left-liberal spectrum are weaker, although Jim Davis's essay, "This is What Bureaucracy Looks Like: NGOs and Anti-Capitalism," is notable for its sharp exploration of the conflict between NGO reformism and the aims of the movement's more radical wing. Regrettably, there is no critique of the Democratic Party, destructive communist sects like the International Socialist Organization, or academia (*On Fire*, on the other hand, contains a valuable essay titled "Trots and Liberals," which focuses on the United Kingdom's largest authoritarian socialist group, the Socialist Worker's Party). The treatment of the uncanny parallel between some right-wing groups and the anti-globalization movement is developed most fully in James O'Connor's essay, "On Populism and the Antiglobalization Movement," which elaborates the differences between left- and right-wing populism.

Summaries of the movement's development thus far and attempts to identify its future challenges revolve around a number of related issues. There is a consensus that the movement needs to diversify its membership (particularly in ethnic, but also economic terms) and develop a positive relationship with communities of color that are facing and fighting the weight of the "New World Order." The anthology not only does a good job of stressing the need for such transformation but also scrutinizes many of the concerns that have emerged during attempts to accomplish it. For instance, Andrew Hsiao discusses efforts made by the Mobilization for Global Justice to reach out to communities of color before the April 2000 protests against the World Bank and IMF in Washington, D.C. (their only paid staff person was directed toward this work), but he also underscores the inadequacy of "outreach"—as opposed to active solidarity—especially considering the striking resurgence of activism among young people of color in recent years around issues such as police brutality, juvenile justice, and the death penalty. Colin Rajah looks at the conflicted relationship between communities of color and the anti-globalization movement, emphasizing paternalistic and "in-group" behavior among white activists, yet frames the discussion in terms of the challenges faced by activists of color. Pol Potlash offers a harrowing account of the unique brutality visited on activists of color by police and fascists alike in his

excellent "Infernal Pain in Prague."

There is also widespread agreement that the movement needs to grow beyond its focus on large, international protests and engage in sustained, transformative community work. The general divide between these two types of organizing is expressed in Juan Gonzalez's "From Seattle to South Central: What the Movement Needs to do Next," which highlights the broad disconnect between the anti-globalization movement and the struggles of poor communities in places such as the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles. Several essays mention the student anti-sweatshop movement as a positive example of long-term, non-protest-oriented activism, including Naomi Klein's "The Vision Thing" and Lisa Featherstone's "The New Student Movement." These articles, however, were less than satisfying: the anti-sweatshop movement wants to reduce, but not abolish capitalist exploitation, and hence expresses presuppositions shared by only one part of the anti-globalization movement. Besides, even a decent paying job at the Gap or Nike would be an exercise in alienation: no one should ever have to spend their days making sneakers or T-shirts for rich First Worlders.

Finally, there is a consensus that the movement needs to clarify its relation to politics and the social and political alternatives it advances. Some argue that this clarification should take the form of an avoidance of the big questions; Klein, for one, suggests that the movement's "true challenge is not finding a vision but rather resisting the urge to settle on one too quickly."<sup>7</sup> Yuen cautiously disagrees in his post-September 11<sup>th</sup> prologue to the book: "The prioritizing of tactics over politics must, it seems to me, be reversed at least for the time being."<sup>8</sup> But others are not hesitant at all; for example, Barbara Epstein points out that the "question of what demands the movement should make . . . has important consequences."<sup>9</sup> And Stanley Aronowitz states that "while I would not want to see the incipient alliance adopt a sterile ideological framework. . . . I would want to see a vigorous debate over *ideas*. If anti-capitalism is the leading edge, what are the

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7. Naomi Klein, "The Vision Thing," in *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*, ed. Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton Rose (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2002), 317.
  8. Yuen, introduction, 4.
  9. Barbara Epstein, "Not Your Parents' Protest," in *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*, ed. Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton Rose (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2002), 54.



alternatives?"<sup>10</sup> These articles underscore the importance of the political questions for the movement; unfortunately, they are only touched on rather than thoroughly examined.

### Conclusion:

These two collections reveal a movement that has erupted against global capital in a profoundly democratic, confrontational way. This movement has not only radicalized public discourse about the global economy but has also given untold numbers a feeling of a shared oppositional project and a sense of hope in revolutionary transformation. There really *is* a movement.

But these books also reveal that the movement is unified primarily around a tactical commitment to big protests against organizations such as the World Bank and the use of participatory activist structures. Clearly, this movement does not possess sharply defined political principles, and many of its participants hold deeply contradictory views about how the world should work (from Green Party social democrats, to Marxist-Leninists, to anarchists, to whomever).

Regrettably, these books do little to flesh out political differences in the movement, and in fact, seem designed to cultivate a sense of a common project *despite* the differences. Both share a focus on demonstrations and this necessarily orients the discussion toward tactical instead of political differences (that is, methods instead of principles). For example, *On Fire* contains an ample defense of the black bloc, yet virtually no analysis of the anarchist movement's substantive goals. *The Battle of Seattle*, which provides a much more sweeping picture of the movement, only touches on the big issues. Indeed, neither anthology contains a serious discussion of the most compelling divide: the division between those who want to democratize global capital and those who want to abolish capitalism as such.

This movement has grown so quickly and become so popular partly because it has embraced a political style that facilitates the evasion of tough political questions. After all, social democrats, anarchists, communists, and various others all agree on the need to build a popular protest movement against global capital. For some, these protests prefigure a larger revolutionary movement; for others, they are merely a

10. Stanley Aronowitz, "Seeds of a Movement," in *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*, ed. Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton Rose (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2002), 200.

form of lobbying. Yet everyone agrees that the protests are a good thing.

Doubtlessly, the anti-globalization movement's capacity to hold together contradictory political tendencies in a shared project has produced a fruitful discussion among members of the Left that have communicated too infrequently in the past. The dialogue between practical reformers and utopian revolutionaries has been especially productive: the revolutionaries have learned to be more concrete and the reformers have learned to be more far-reaching, and as a result, everyone has developed a richer sense of the possibilities.

Nevertheless, this movement cannot grow unless it confronts the big questions about the social order. For instance, contributors to *The Battle of Seattle* assert that the movement must diversify its composition, engage in community organizing, and clarify its demands. This is all true, but how should the movement diversify? What type of community organizing should it initiate? What convictions will frame its demands? These questions cannot be answered in a vacuum; they require clear commitments and political principles.

This suggests that the movement is in a contradictory position in which the source of its popularity prevents it from growing and therefore realizing the potentials that made it so popular to begin with. In fact, I think the movement is destined to shrink, and the pertinent question is not whether it will shrink, but how? It can avoid the big political quandaries and degenerate into a marginal and bourgeois clique (perhaps like the Greens). Or it can clarify its political vision and transform its constituency. Should this happen, the revolutionaries will leave if it becomes explicitly social democratic and the social democrats will depart if it becomes explicitly revolutionary. Either way, it will become a smaller though more focused movement.

There is no doubt that the movement has already expanded political discourse and introduced millions to a deep sense of revolutionary possibility. This is a tremendous achievement. However, it is also clear that the movement must confront many difficult questions to sustain and build upon its accomplishments. In many respects the hard work has only just begun.

Lex Bhagat

## Water/Power

*Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*

By Vandana Shiva

Boston: South End Press, 2002

*Reflected in Water: A Crisis in Social Responsibility*

By Colin Ward

London: Cassell, 1997

*Ripples of the Society: People's Movements in Watershed Development in India*

Edited by Prem N. Sharma

New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1998

*It used to be free, now it costs you a fee.*

Mos Def, "New World Water"

We turn the faucet or open the spigot, filling a glass or jug. We turn the cranks at the well for hours or hear the sputtering of a diesel engine by the pump, filling tanks. We collect pails after a summer storm. We drink. We bathe (and some of us wash our cars). We give water to our plants. We wash our food. We sing in the rain. We contemplate by the ocean or picnic by the river. We make journeys to waterfalls. Every living thing, every day, needs, finds, and consumes water. Its fluidity passes through us, making all life on earth possible. There is something special about water.

So it is alarming to hear Vandana Shiva state: "Although two-thirds of our planet is water, we face an acute water shortage. The water crisis is the most pervasive, most severe and most invisible dimension of the ecological devastation of the earth. In 1998, 28 countries experienced water stress or scarcity. This number is expected to rise to 56 by 2025."<sup>1</sup> Currently, more than a third of the world's population does not have access to clean drinking water and predictions indicate that the figure will rise. These forecasts of scarcity explain the oft-quoted statement of World Bank Vice President Ismail Serageldin: "If the wars

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1. Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit* (Boston: South End Press, 2002), 1.

of this century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water." An undeniable crisis presents itself, then, to this generation, in forms as varied as the methods of water collection. For those suffering dehydration, or dying of cholera because their community's drinking water is fed to suburbs or lettuce fields, the call is clear. But it is just as clear for those working toward sustainability (in agriculture, technology, or economics), or for peace and social justice, that as in the twentieth century there was a pressing need to implement radical alternatives to petroleum hegemony, in the twenty-first century we must implement equitable solutions to the water crisis.

Shiva's *Water Wars* and Colin Ward's *Reflected in Water* are global, expansive considerations of the contemporary water crisis. Both are informed by a conviction that water has been and must remain a commons, and that proposals to further tie water into market relations offer no solutions to water scarcity. On the contrary, it is marketization that creates scarcity in the first place. As Shiva claims, "The water crisis is an ecological crisis with commercial causes but no market solutions. Market solutions destroy the Earth and aggravate inequality. The solution to an ecological crisis is ecological and the solution for injustice is democracy. Ending the water crisis requires rejuvenating ecological democracy."<sup>2</sup> Or as Ward sadly notes, "Responsible water use depends not on pricing the poor out of the competitive market, but on following the elementary principle of fair shares for all, a concept that every child learns from infancy until it is driven out by the political realism that determines that might is right."<sup>3</sup> This is an essential point, which they both firmly state—one that is unheeded by the mouthpieces of marketization who reduce water scarcity to an expression of overconsumption due to overpopulation and "luxuriant lifestyles."

While both books are written from different yet complementary perspectives, and Ward's work draws heavily from examples in the British Isles and Shiva's from South Asia, both cover many of the same topics and share much common ground. Both authors touch on the development of modern municipal water works; hydroelectric dams of the mini and mega variety; impacts of climate change on the world's

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2. Ibid., 15.

3. Colin Ward, *Reflected in Water: A Crisis in Social Responsibility* (London: Cassell, 1997), 130. Ward is a longtime contributor to *Freedom* magazine, London's anarchist bimonthly, and the author of *Anarchy in Action*, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*, and many other works.

waters; disturbances to the hydrologic cycle by sprawl, industrial forestry, the Green Revolution, and mining; international law regarding water rights, and conflicts over shared water resources; the theoretical foundations of privatization—"prior appropriation" and Garrett Hardin's thesis of "the tragedy of the commons"; the exploits of major water service corporations, especially Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux and Thames Water; and peoples' movements dealing with specific manifestations of the crisis.

Ward's *Reflected in Water* is a slim volume of twelve essay-like chapters that could each stand on their own in a classroom or study group setting. Each essay is a succinct description of the issue in historical context, well referenced for further research. The book does not aim to make a particular argument or support a singular thesis; rather, "it simply seeks to give a short and simple account of the immense social issues raised locally and globally by our universal need for water, and by the various water crises now facing the world."<sup>4</sup> Instead of making a central point, Ward presents a wealth of information colored by an emphasis on decentralism, commons, and local control. The decentralist perspective is tied to concrete instances. For example, a discussion of the impacts of cotton plantations and golf courses in Africa leads to the contention that "old fashioned imperialism is dead, but has been replaced by a far more efficient economic imperialism, which obliges the poor world to destroy its precarious economy and environment, to benefit the consumer economy of the rich world. Water which could be managed to provide a local livelihood is squandered for the sake of a highly competitive export market or for the tourist industry."<sup>5</sup> Or to contrast, remarking on British public conservation campaigns in 1976 and 1995, Ward observes:

The public response [in 1976] was even more interesting.... [The National Water Council wrote that] "the potential for voluntary savings by the public and by industry during a water crisis was vast. *The Save It* publicity campaigns during the drought cut water demand by 30% in some areas."

By the time of the drought of 1995, the climate had changed. The public placed the blame on the water companies and the companies blamed the public. The Secretary of State for the

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4. Ward, *Reflected in Water*, ix.

5. *Ibid.*, 113.

Environment, John Gummer, advised people to follow the precepts of 1976 and recycle washing-up water on the garden and put a brick in the [toilet tank.] My local newspaper, hardly a radical journal, pointed in a leading article to the difference between then and now: "But then, water was public property. We have since been re-educated by Mr. Gummer and his Cabinet colleagues to think of water not as a natural resource, but as a capitalist product. Newly-privatised water companies have sought to justify exorbitant profits by telling us what a vastly improved service they are providing. . . . Are we not entitled to expect that, as long as we pay our bills, we should be able to use just as much of the stuff as we like? And should it matter to the profit-centered water companies whether we choose to use it for watering our gardens or flushing the loo? Isn't the buyer entitled to use it as he likes—just like any other commercial product? Of course, such attitudes do not fit in well with conservation, but if conservation had been properly considered at the time, perhaps privatisation would not have seemed such a good idea."<sup>6</sup>

Which leads to one of the fundamental differences between Ward's and Shiva's books. *Reflected in Water* abounds with the sensibilities of municipalism and regional planning. For instance, the history examined in the book faces its first great rupture in the appearance of the industrial city, which required the creation of large mechanisms for water provision and sewage systems. There is no question of whether large sewers and aqueducts will exist, but of how they will be managed: for private gain or the common good? By means of central authorities or local councils? The book is never ideological, and its realist history sadly presents privatization almost as an inevitable process (a throwback to Marx's stages?). Municipal waterworks transformed water as commons harvested by private labor at the household or village well to a product provided by public authorities. This first transformation makes possible its further transformation into a commodity, which was held off for two centuries by "a water ethic" that viewed water as "a necessary common good [rather] than as a commodity."<sup>7</sup> Throughout the book, alternatives to privatization are presented as superior for people and essential for survival, but privatization is also depicted as a process nearly complete, and no exits are referred to.

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6. Ibid., 112–13.

7. Ibid., 4.

Where Ward's book aims to inform and is written for the enlightened citizen, planner, community organizer, or local politician needing an account of the issues from a decentralist perspective, *Water Wars* is penned in an activist voice, containing both a call to arms for the global justice movement and forceful arguments against capital's theoretical framework for privatization. Shiva's assertions in *Water Wars* are these: that the water crisis is produced by capitalist development; and that water wars are not coming, they have been with us.

The argument on capital and crisis is made succinctly in the chapter "Converting Abundance into Scarcity" by examining the disturbance of the water cycle through mining, industrial forestry (in particular, eucalyptus and pine monocultures), and the Green Revolution with its monocultures of water-hungry crops and introduction of IMF-financed tube wells. Her claim of water wars rests on the numerous conflicts she traces, beginning with the water war of Los Angeles in 1924, where the farmers of Owens County, California repeatedly blasted the aqueduct that would bring their water to Los Angeles, until armed guards were stationed along the structure. She also addresses disputes that have not been characterized as water wars because they have been couched as ethnic or sectarian conflicts, such as between Israel and Syria over the National Water Carrier Project, and Israel and Palestinians over the West Bank, and India and Pakistan over Punjab. And she deals with state repression to defend agribusiness's water rights. The sinister quote of an Indian politician sums up the inhumanity of capital: "We will not give one drop of water from sugarcane; instead a canal of blood will flow. Cane and sugar factories are the glory of Maharashtra."<sup>8</sup> California agribusiness has waged a colder war against the native communities of the Colorado River Valley and the people of Arizona since the inception of the Hoover Dam. The great unnamed water war of today is between finance capital and communities, to privatize what commons they have not yet appropriated.

And it is a war that Shiva seeks to document here, providing an inspiring answer to the question: How can one resist? In page after page, she looks at a WB/IMF/McState agenda for a project, the ecological critique of it, and the popular opposition to it. For example, in discussing the problems of salinization due to irrigated monoculture, Shiva observes:

The shift from rainfed food crops to irrigated cash crops like

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8. Cited in Shiva, *Water Wars*, 125.



cotton was expected to improve the prosperity of the farmers. Instead, it has led to debt. . . . The total loans taken by farmers increased from [U.S.]\$104,440 in 1974 to \$1.1 mil[lion] in 1980. While farmers were struggling with unproductive land, banks were making payment demands. At the same time, irrigation authorities levied a development tax on water, known as a betterment levy. The latter increased . . . from 38 cents to over a dollar/acre for cotton. A fixed tax of 20 cents/acre was effective with or without water use.

In March 1980, the farmers formed the Malaprabha Niravari Pradesh Ryota Samvya Samithi (Coordination Committee of Farmers) and launched a non-cooperation movement to stop paying taxes. In retaliation, government authorities refused to issue the certificates needed by the farmers' children to enroll in school. On June 19th, 1980, the farmers went on a hunger strike in front of a local official's office. By June 30, 10,000 farmers gathered to support those on hunger strike. A week later, a massive rally was held at Navalgund, and farmers went on another hunger strike. When no response came from the authorities, the farmers organized a blockade.

About 6,000 farmers gathered in Navalgund, but their tractors were damaged and the rally was stoned by authorities. The same day, angry farmers seized the irrigation department, and set fire to a truck and 15 jeeps. The police opened fire, killing a young boy on the spot. In the town of Naragund, the police opened fire at a procession of 10,000 people, shooting one youth. The protesters responded by beating a police officer and constable to death. The protests rapidly spread to . . . other parts of Karnataka. Thousands of farmers were arrested and 40 were killed. In the end, the government ordered a moratorium on the collection of water taxes and the betterment levy.<sup>9</sup>

The book recounts many struggles such as this, in which popular movements confront violent state authorities. The popular movements organized against the Narmada River Project are especially well documented and complement Ward's survey of mega-dams. Missing from Shiva's work, however, are examples of sustainable hydropower

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9. Shiva, *Water Wars*, 113.

projects—which Ward brings into the discussion by drawing from cases in Scotland and Nepal—leaving a taste of activist negativity in the mouth. Completely missing is any consideration of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the utopian regional planning project in the southeastern United States, which Shiva merely mentions in passing as the model for the Krishna Valley Authority. But Shiva is not out to celebrate utopian schemes or machinations of development. She aims to validate traditional water systems that hold the keys to resolving the current crisis and to applaud the spirited defense of the commons currently being waged on the margins of capital's appropriation of water.

Since ancient times, water was recognized as a usufructuary resource, outside of property relations, and thus its appropriation by capital is an event of historic significance. What type of culture could enable the privatization of water? Ward does not answer this question directly but merely traces the process as it unfolds, thereby unwittingly presenting it as an inevitable by-product of industrialization. Shiva, on the other hand, notes a beginning of privatization in the doctrine of prior appropriation, or as she calls it, "Cowboy Economics": "It was in the mining camps of the American West that the cowboy notion of private property and the rule of appropriation first emerged. The doctrine of prior appropriation established absolute rights to property, including the right to sell and trade water. . . . Champions of water privatization, such as Anderson and Snyder of the conservative Cato Institute, not only acknowledge the link between current privatization efforts and cowboy water laws, but also look at the earlier western appropriation philosophy as a model for the future."<sup>10</sup> The circumstances that created this doctrine are, of course, capital's favorite form of "primitive accumulation": the opportunity to create something from nothing by pirating the resources of an other—in this case, seizing water from the Indians and ecosystems of the western United States. It is helpful to indicate a beginning of a historic event in order to conceive of its end.

Cultural considerations are prominent in both books and present challenging questions for anti-authoritarians, such as: What is the culture of the commons? Ward, tracing British history, interprets the cultural values of various periods as "reflected in water." These are quite useful for anyone living in the North. Shiva, drawing many of her examples from India, overwhelms the reader with cultural details and

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10. *Ibid.*, 22.

references. Sadly, this is one of the striking problems with the book. India is a vast land, with many languages and peoples. Shiva's attempt to be so all-inclusive is destined to fail. The indigenous water systems that she describes are inspiring, but she provides insufficient context for the barrage of names, traditional terms, and exhaustive reference to local geographies.

This is certainly not meant to suggest that local knowledge and solutions are irrelevant but so many local solutions run across the reader like an eroding flash flood instead of the deep and broad river that local expertise is. A greater problem is presented by the superficial way in which Hindu spirituality pops up here and again in the book. (Her final chapter, "The Sacred Waters," is a thankful exception to this problem.) I highly recommend Shiva's book for activists engaged in global justice struggles, but for readers piqued by the numerous examples she culls from India or interested in a deeper consideration of the culture of the commons, I recommend a slim, splendid, well-illustrated, and eminently readable volume edited by Prem N. Sharma of the Gandhi Peace Foundation called *Ripples of the Society*.

*Ripples of the Society* is a book that comes from the grass roots, and it has much to offer communities and NGOs engaged in resource planning as well as anti-authoritarians involved in ecological struggles. While Ward's and Shiva's works are anti-capitalist and communitarian in their approach, Sharma's book presents an explicitly anti-statist perspective on the origins and solutions to the water crisis—a perspective the other authors seem too tepid to advance. As *Ripples* states, "The people lost their resources while the governments gained bureaucratic control. The process of recording, settlements, adjudicating, administration and politics played havoc with the commons and community. This was largely due to the fact that the operational values of the post-Independence state were a combination of both privatization and statization within a bureaucratic vision of a paternalistic welfare state, disinvesting the people of their own eminence, worth and identity, along with the resources which had been the domain, wealth and capital of indigenous communities. This system aided and abetted private manipulation, encroachment, allotment and plunder of natural resources—the common pastures, forest lands, water bodies, tanks, ponds and flouted the traditional modes and rights of people."<sup>11</sup>

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11. Prem N. Sharma, ed., *Ripples of the Society: People's Movements in Watershed Development in India* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1998), 12.

*Ripples of the Society* analyzes water crises, specifically in India, and presents them as the inevitable result of the destruction of traditional water cultures. It describes the process of participatory watershed development wherein traditional knowledge is mobilized and needs are addressed through a directly democratic process. It supplies ten case studies of projects throughout India with deep historical, geographic, and cultural detail. The case studies are drawn from diverse regions with extremely different water cultures and ecological imbalances. In the studies, specifics of ecological devastation, direct democracy, empowerment, and spiritual renewal are laid out in a way far more nourishing than in Ward's or Shiva's books. Sharma's work also offers a broad account of the Gandhian critique of industrialism and a spirituality integral to sustainability—both fertile issues for debate in the global ecology movement. As well, it provides Indian examples of concepts familiar to advocates of direct democracy: *guni* (traditional expertise) and the *Gran Sabha* (village council).

The Gandhian critique springs from the social damage of imperialism and the carry over by modern, independent states of imperial values that condemned "most of the indigenous communities of master craftspersons as illiterate, unskilled members of wage laborers, with no identity, respect or place in modern society. The wave of technology has reduced many of these *guni* powers into 'untechnical' manpower and [placed] the *nayaks* [master craftspersons] at the head of expert teams emasculated to the end of the social and professional ladder."<sup>12</sup> The Gandhian critique recognizes the vitality of the village along with traditional knowledge, techniques, and life-ways as key to political self-determination and social development. This valorization is what has held many Indian revolutionary tendencies askance from Western or Asian tendencies that maintain an uncritical relationship to the marxist valorization of the proletariat and industrial development.<sup>13</sup>

Sharma is not reluctant to step into spirituality, myth, symbolism, and theology. Again, the context provided is quite valuable, and Shiva's work pales by comparison. *Ripples's* forays into the spiritual realm are quite potent material for consideration for leftists informed by a

12. Ibid., 10.

13. Conversely, this valorization of the village is what also puts the Indian Left in such an awkward position regarding the city itself, explaining the paradoxical example of the Communist Party in West Bengal, and making the current work of groups such as Sarai in New Delhi ([www.sarai.org](http://www.sarai.org)) so important.

Frankfurt school rationalism and lost “seekers” caught up in New Age mysticism. “The traditions and cultural manifestations of the people had been too ‘folk,’ part of superstitious religious beliefs, for the neo-literate modern society to appreciate or comprehend . . . but it survives [for] the meaning and purpose of the notions of the sanctity of trees, animals, water bodies, earth, sky, provide crucial links in the reinforcement of the will of the community in its relationship with the commons.”<sup>14</sup> It is foolish to think that the ancient institutions of the commons can survive without their cultural support. Of course, the equation can be flipped: it is foolish and contemptible to focus on the sanctity of all life when one participates in a system that alienates people from nature and each other.

In all, the book is realistic and proactive, describing and advocating directly democratic solutions to ecological problems. Many issues of interest for anarchists in *Ripples* were already mentioned above, such as informing the global justice movement, the idea of a culture of the commons, state repression, and resource struggles. There are a few areas of additional interest to anarchists presented by these three books, though.

For theory, Shiva’s and Ward’s treatments of Karl August Wittfogel and his theses on hydraulic society are intriguing.<sup>15</sup> Wittfogel’s 1957 volume *Oriental Despotism* argues that ancient empires such as China and Egypt “were built upon central control, though a vast bureaucracy, of the waters of great rivers.”<sup>16</sup> Ward traces the interesting manipulations of Wittfogel’s theses that gave him a canonical place in the ideology of mega-dams. Yet Shiva and Ward both firmly refute his basic assumptions about irrigation, centralization, and empire with contemporary and historical examples, including marsh Arabs of southern Iraq and the decentralized management of ancient Chinese irrigation systems. This is a blow to the discourse in which Wittfogel is a mainstay, such as the ideology of mega-dams.<sup>17</sup>

14. Sharma, *Ripples of the Society*, 13.

15. Refutations of Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* can be found in the section “Decentralized Water Democracies” in Shiva, *Water Wars*, 122–24; and in the chapter “Hydraulic Society and Regional Hopes” in Ward, *Reflected in Water*, 31–46.

16. Cited in Ward, *Reflected in Water*, 32.

17. Interestingly, Wittfogel also appears in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s celebrated “Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine.” In the passage explaining the relationship of what they call “nomad science” or “Archimedian science” to “State science,” Deleuze and Guattari embrace Wittfogel in passing

There is also a striking *critical embrace of the traditional*. Each of these books in a way reflects what Paolo Friere called progressive postmodernism, a spirited renunciation of much of the ideological foundations of modernism and an active translation of traditional knowledge into contemporary society. This progressive postmodernism is summed up in simple terms in *Ripples*: "It is time that we . . . change [the] yardstick of measurement. It is imperative to abandon the schools of thought which make the past appear backward, underdeveloped, obsolete, or just the opposite: viewing it through rose-tinted glasses of glorification, placing it on a pedestal. . . . What is required is a cathartic effect on the present system, a catharsis in approach, to unlock the hidden interiors."<sup>18</sup> An essential contribution to radical movements here is the resurrection and reformulation of the ideas of conviviality and the postindustrial epoch, promoted by Ivan Illich and the appropriate technology movement in the 1970s. Given the scope of the crisis, this reformulation necessitates a wider terrain than it did in the 1970s, demanding a political focus on the level of towns, counties, and cities rather than remote villages, homesteads, and semi-autonomous communes as a counter-space to capitalist development.

For praxis, the water crisis presents an opportunity for activists working in the North to nourish a directly democratic political sphere, and these books supply a theoretical framework for proceeding there. It is conceivable that activists in progressive towns or counties could create democratic and participatory water boards to administer local resources. But democratic water councils in a world where the consumer society and North-South axis are left intact is never implied in any of these books. The crisis must be resolved, and will be addressed by capitalist or democratic means, both of which will demand major social restructuring. One involves further alienation and the fortification of the rich, as the poor are further dispossessed and repressed, as glaciers melt and deserts grow. Another entails a major upheaval in ideas about property and politics, facts of territory, agriculture, eating habits, settlement patterns, and urban form.

The crisis will be dealt with one way or another: we all need to drink.

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hyperbole: "There is no going back on Wittfogel's theses of large-scale waterworks for an empire" (*A Thousand Plateaus* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987], 362-63).

18. Sharma, *Ripples of the Society*, 29.

Erin Royster

## **Agriculture and Resistance**

*Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance: Transforming Food Production in Cuba*

Edited by Fernando Funes, Luis Garcia, Martin Bourque, Nilda Perez, and Peter Rosset

Oakland, Calif.: Food First Books, 2002

*Urban Wilds: Gardeners' Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*

Edited by Clea

Oakland, Calif.: Water/Underground Publications, 2001

Debates about biotechnology and biodiversity, environmental racism and environmental justice, urban quality of life, the degradation of rural environments, and the loss of rural communities have led many activists to conclude that it is necessary to radically transform the dominant agricultural practices. Indeed, activists and farmers around the world have tried to create new approaches to food production and distribution based on the principles of ecology and social justice. Their successes and failures offer rich lessons to anyone who wants to build a new society literally from the ground up.

Curious about the nature and relevance of some of these new approaches, I chose to study the stories of activists in this country working on food and agriculture issues, and in comparison, the story of post-revolutionary agricultural reform in Cuba. I selected two books; the first, *Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance: Transforming Food Production in Cuba*, is a comprehensive study of the changes in Cuban agriculture following the 1959 Cuban Revolution and during what is known as the Special Period of the 1990s, the era following the collapse of the Communist Bloc in Europe. The second, *Urban Wilds: Gardeners' Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*, is a collection of articles written by organizers of community garden projects, interviews with participants, how-to guides, and analytical pieces about the current agro-industrial system. The stories are compiled largely from the travels of the editor, Clea, and other North American activists to various urban centers where both public and covert gardening



projects are taking place.

### *Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance*

In *Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance*, various authors—mostly Cuban scientists and researchers working in government ministries or universities—describe the history of Cuban agriculture before, during, and after the Cuban Revolution, as well as the specific structural, technological, social, and cultural transformations that have taken place in agricultural practice. Although the authors provide technical details, scientific explanations, and case studies, of most interest are the discussions of the social and political causes and consequences of the structural changes in Cuba's agricultural economy and ecology. Throughout the book, readers will find reference to "the triumph of the Revolution," and the key factors in the development of a sustainable Cuban agriculture—a highly educated population along with a political and cultural climate open to the changes necessary for survival during the Special Period of the 1990s. The authors also look at the limiting factors in making this transition—the beliefs and practices developed and held over from the era of dependence on production for export, the Green Revolution paradigm of progress adopted after the Cuban Revolution, and the creation of strong economic ties with Europe's Communist bloc. The authors, however, never mention authoritarian state control as a limiting factor, and given that the Cuban government controls the flow of information into and out of the country, it is essentially impossible to verify what is presented in this book.

Agroecology, the methodology that has transformed not just Cuban agriculture but its education and research practices as well, is defined by editor Luis Garcia as a "new paradigm [that] views the farm as an ecosystem, and blends the technological advances of modern science with the time-tested and common sense knowledge of traditional farming practices."<sup>1</sup> Government and university extension under this paradigm is characterized by popular education—style farmer-to-farmer workshops and outreach, a variety of both accredited and informal learning opportunities that encourage a well-educated farm population, the participation of farmers in research and technological development, and the inclusion of farmers in setting regional agricultural production

1. Luis Garcia, "Agroecological Education and Training," in *Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance: Transforming Food Production in Cuba*, ed. Fernando Funes, Luis Garcia, Martin Bourque, Nilda Perez, and Peter Rosset (Oakland, Calif.: Food First Books, 2002), 90.

quotas. According to the authors, the wide-scale reorganization of land tenure also aided the wide-scale adoption of agroecological farming techniques. Following the “triumph of the Revolution,” agricultural land was redistributed in a diversity of forms, from production cooperatives granted by the state in perpetuity and held in usufruct (meaning that farmers have rights to the land as long as they use it, although no one actually owns it in the traditional sense), to large state farms, to individual holdings under private ownership.<sup>2</sup> The individual farms are also organized under Credit and Service Cooperatives. The Cuban Constitution lays out express governance principles that the cooperatives must conform to, and defines the government’s role in providing services and supplies and purchasing agricultural goods produced in a quota system.

According to the authors, research conducted since the 1990s shows that small, cooperative units of production function more efficiently and have been better able to respond to shortages of imported inputs during the Special Period than the larger industrial-scale state farms developed during the revolutionary period, from 1959 to the 1990s. With a shortage of fossil fuel, agricultural pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, and machine parts, the Cuban government was able to reorient agricultural policy, education, research, and development toward a new paradigm of low-input, high-efficiency agriculture that has been able to meet the needs of the Cuban population, despite the severe drop in food imports. The large state farms were broken up into a new form of production cooperatives, putting a total of 42 percent of agricultural land under cooperative, usufructuary arrangements, with another 52 percent being organized under Credit and Service Cooperatives in 1998. The reeducation of Cuban farmers and citizens about agroecological methods of food production occurred largely through participatory, farmer-to-farmer outreach as well as the refocusing of agricultural curricula in Cuban universities to favor agroecological methods.

What is impressive about this shift is that the Cuban government has seemingly been able to accomplish gains that go far beyond what most food and farm activists in the United States can even envision. As the

2. For an account of the Cuban anarchist movement’s opposition to the Castro regime’s agricultural program, see Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: the History of a Movement* (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 2001), 85-86. This book contains a thorough history of anarchism in Cuba and a withering critique of Castro’s campaign against revolutionary tendencies on the island. —Ed.

authors describe, these achievements include: an extreme reorganization in land tenure favoring small farmers and cooperatives governed by democratic principles, the incorporation of urban farming and gardening as a legitimate and encouraged contribution to the country's food production, and the wide-scale adoption of ecological farming techniques. Perhaps the most tremendous advance is signified by the adoption of agroecology as the guiding perspective in agriculture, rural development, and the adoption of new technologies. Agroecology's view of nature as a whole system of interrelated functions, all of which are integral to the healthy functioning of farm and human ecosystems, is in sharp contrast to the capitalist view of land as a property and resource whose sole value is monetary. Thus, Cuba has apparently been able to transcend the development paradigm guided only by capitalist motives that causes a disharmonious dichotomy between people and the land, while maintaining the socialist goals of equitable income distribution and access to food, jobs, and health care for all.

Yet during the Special Period, with the loss of favorable trading partners in the Communist bloc, free market mechanisms were introduced to allow for a greater availability of food to the population than was possible under a purely state-regulated economy and to encourage increased production efficiency in agriculture. The ability to sell excess produce in farmers' markets gave farmers an economic incentive to produce more food, more efficiently. While the authors can justly claim that any production system must be economically as well as ecologically viable, the introduction of free market mechanisms suggests that this viability depends on an essentially capitalist development paradigm. Although several contributors hail the diversity brought on by the introduction of market incentives, foreign investment, and regulated private and foreign enterprises as a sign of greater economic stability and flexibility, they fail to reconcile this with their faith in socialist values. Having studied the way that capitalism has entrenched itself in agriculture in the United States, I am reluctant to believe that an ostensibly socialist state can resist the penetration of capitalism and the demands of the free market once they are incorporated into the national economy.

On a more fundamental level, one has to question how the collectivist, democratic principles attributed to the land redistribution and development process play out in reality. What is the relationship

between form and content? While Cuba has obviously created structures that appear collectivist and democratic, do they embody these concepts in a real and substantial way? If one looks at who, in reality, sets the policies and practices as well as defines the values that supposedly underlie the Cuban system, it becomes clear that it is not a participatory process. The development paradigm in Cuba, while seemingly guided by principles of ecology and socialism, is controlled by the Cuban Community Party. If there is no opportunity for political dissent, then Cuban social and ecological policies will never be truly egalitarian in form or content.

Unfortunately, this book sheds no light on this concern. While the authors show that farmers, researchers, scientists, students, and government agents work together on many different levels, they appear to gloss over the difference between governance and administration. Although the agricultural cooperatives have a degree of autonomy over the administration of their own farms, the state ultimately determines what and how much is produced, coordinates processing and distribution, and dictates the exact structures of "democratic" management that must take place in each cooperative. The authors do offer a critique of the problems posed by farms recently transferred from state to cooperative ownership: as they are transferred, the farmers must transition from state employees, with relatively little responsibility and decision-making power, to self-employed, cooperative farmers. The authors relate that the carry over of dependency on and subordination to state officials and agencies experienced by state-employed farmers hinders the transition to a smoothly operated cooperative farm. In addition, it is likely that this "problem" in the transition also maintains a parent-like relationship with the state well after the transition has been made, facilitating the state's control over production and distribution.

It would add depth and relevance to this book if the authors were clearer about where political power is concentrated in Cuba, and to what degree farmers truly have autonomy in both the new and old forms of cooperative production and land use. Making *some* decisions democratically does not produce a democratic, egalitarian society. Rather, all decisions that affect each person must be made democratically, from setting policy to carrying it out. To assess the degree to which a particular agricultural form of organization can impact overall social change, it is necessary to have an explicit

understanding of the power relationships that inform and control it. In other words, a critique of ecological practices cannot be separated from a critique of political practices: a critique of humanity's relationship to nature must be complemented by a critique of people's relationship to each other. Although the economic hardships and historical context that led to the development of a sustainable agricultural economy in Cuba are well explained here, one would need more information about Cuban politics than this book affords to examine whether those agricultural social forms contribute to or embody the values of a free and rational society.

What can be learned from this book, if taken at face value, is that it is possible to restructure an economy against the grain of free market capitalism. We can define values, like freedom, cooperation, ecology, and rationality, and apply them to one of the most basic requirements of human life: food. Even though the Cuban Revolution may not embody the anti-authoritarian, anti-statist, and anti-capitalist values that I might envision for an ideal society, it has gone a long way in demonstrating what can be done outside the bounds of capitalist thinking. Unfortunately, this book also demonstrates the limitation of these possibilities in a world that remains largely and increasingly dominated by global capital and the hegemony of state authoritarianism.

### *Urban Wilds*

*Urban Wilds* tells a quite different story of agricultural "resistance." The basic premise of the book is indicated in the first article, written by Clea, the editor: "While gardens aren't a cure-all to the problems of economic racism and environmental injustice, unequal access to resources and an exploitative profit system, they can help us get by a little easier, give us space to breathe, to learn from the earth, and to begin to reweave relationships based on respect for the land and for the people around us."<sup>3</sup> Immediately I wonder if this is too big a task to assign a plot of land with some plants growing in it.

But, as many of the subsequent articles illustrate, gardens can indeed be an avenue for changing human relationships. Many gardeners and activists quoted in this collection argue that urban neighborhood gardens give people a chance to connect with their neighbors, talk about

3. Clea, introduction to *Urban Wilds: Gardeners' Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*, ed. Clea (Oakland, California: Water/Underground Publications, 2001), 8.

problems, and collectively find solutions. In poor, inner-city neighborhoods where city officials, garbage trucks, and even grocery stores can be a rare sight, if the residents don't help themselves, no one will. The challenges of gardening in an urban neighborhood often force people to find resources and allies they would not otherwise have sought out, and this goes well beyond the particulars of gardening. As Cordelia Gilford from the South Bronx Gardeners explains, "We are resources. I know who to speak to if your heat's been turned off, where to go if you need help with this or that. We share information and help each other get by."<sup>4</sup> Many articles also reveal the connections formed between people, communities, and organizations across class and color lines.

Giving people the tools to help themselves is enormously important for any revolutionary struggle. While the gardeners in the South Bronx may not have explicitly revolutionary goals for their gardens, any experience is heartening that leads people to believe they have some power to make decisions about what they want their lives, neighborhoods, and maybe even a future society to look like. Given the pervasiveness of urban gardens tucked into communities of color across the United States, the people who started these gardens probably know a lot more about creating their own means of survival than those who see alternative institutions primarily as a form of political dissent. But how do we move from alternatives necessary for survival to those that actually threaten the status quo? There is much evidence in the garden stories presented in *Urban Wilds* that people recognize the failures of the present society to meet people's needs, and that they are proposing alternative ways to meet those needs, but there is little proof that these garden projects as they are now could replace the existing system or that they illustrate to the broader public that the dominant system should and could be replaced.

This is not to say that there aren't plenty of garden projects represented here with an expressly political focus. The Victory Garden Project (VGP) of Athens (Maine), East Orange (New Jersey), and Boston was founded in 1996 by New York 3 political prisoner Herman Bell and environmentalists Carol Dove and Michael Vernon as a way "to bridge the divide between oppressed urban and rural communities, while

4. Bronx United Gardeners, "Gardens Grow Healthy Communities: South Bronx, NY," in *Urban Wilds: Gardeners' Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*, ed. Clea (Oakland, California: Water/Underground Publications, 2001), 10.

merging the struggles for black liberation and earth liberation.”<sup>5</sup> VGP gardeners, volunteers, and activists are exposed to the political critique articulated by the Black Panther Party’s survival programs, and do much more than just garden. The project, connected to anti-prison activism, creates networks of rural and inner-city food distribution that lie outside the cash economy while encouraging community organizing and education about the global economy and struggles for liberation.

Unlike many other contributors to this collection, Errol Schweizer writes explicitly about how VGP is linked to the struggle for liberation and runs counter to corporate agribusiness and capitalist globalization. “The key to understanding globalization, poverty, and the prison boom is by looking at both rural and urban areas. Urban people of color fill the prisons which are built in rural areas,” states Schweizer. Cofounder Dove explains that due to “globalization, rural areas have been scoped out for prison construction because the better jobs are gone and people have to get service industry work. Their self-esteem drops; their integrity is diminished. The system sets up barriers for the low-income people to battle amongst themselves. But if people rose up against the system and supported each other, the system would fall.” Cofounder Vernon is also quoted, explaining, “I really see that freedom is connected to responsibility. So if you want to be free then you have to be responsible for yourself and your surroundings. And taking responsibility for those things, although it’s really difficult in a lot of different ways, is liberating and it’s hard to imagine an argument for liberation and freedom that doesn’t include those things [producing your own food, shelter, and clothing].”<sup>6</sup>

The values projected in this article can be compared to those embodied by Cuba’s agricultural project. On the one hand, the VGP represent a grassroots network, mostly of volunteers, who are committed to distributing food outside the corporate agribusiness that monopolizes the U.S. food supply, and who envision a future society free of corporate or state control, where communities are empowered, self-sufficient, and make their own decisions. On the other hand, while Cuba has made significant advances in the practice of agroecology and

5. Errol Schweizer, “Free the Land! The Victory Gardens Project MayDay 2001,” in *Urban Wilds: Gardeners’ Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*, ed. Clea (Oakland, California: Water/Underground Publications, 2001), 53.
6. All cited in *Urban Wilds: Gardeners’ Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*, ed. Clea (Oakland, California: Water/Underground Publications, 2001), 53–54.



development of appropriate technologies, it is unlikely that Cuban farmers feel the same sense of empowerment and hope for freedom under the strict administration of the Cuban government. The political and cultural climate of the United States simultaneously limits what people think is possible, and pushes them to hope for and envision a better future. To what degree is this true in Cuba, where the state maintains a monopoly on what is considered “revolutionary”?

The diversity of articles presented in *Urban Wilds* is amazing, inspiring, and sometimes dizzying. Due to poor editing and organization, the collection at times becomes impossible to navigate, with unclear section headings, ambiguity about who is speaking, narrating, or writing, and even long sentence fragments that make little sense. Despite this, one can glean something of importance about the nature of gardeners’ struggles for land and justice in the United States; the approaches as well as the intent and ideologies behind them are many and varied—a diversity that will hopefully strengthen rather than divide the movement. The main point of contention that ran like a thread through many, though not all of the articles was the tendency to glorify the garden’s capacity to alter the present reality, and to romanticize the earth itself as an entity that we not only need to “feel breathe” but that also holds all the secrets that we need to know to rectify all current problems.

As one author, Heather Humus, puts it, “The inherent problem with a ‘community’ approach to sustainability is that it is rooted in anthropocentrism. . . . Humans are not going to teach each other what we need to know about how to live sustainably on planet Earth. This information is free and available to any who seek it; it is in the soil and in the plants that spring from it. We must place the plants before ourselves in order of importance, and proceed in this manner.”<sup>7</sup> Yet seeing the earth as above or before humans in “order of importance” is completely regressive and not helpful in the least. In fact, if people are going to learn anything about how to live “sustainably,” then it will have to be within human communities, teaching and learning from each other. That is not to deny the importance of an understanding and respect for the ecology, but to place it above or before humanity is to deny that humans are a part of that ecology and can have a place in it

7. Heather Humus, “Avant Gardening for Fun & Nutrition,” in *Urban Wilds: Gardeners’ Stories of the Struggle for Land and Justice*, ed. Clea (Oakland, California: Water/Underground Publications, 2001), 65.

that is both harmonious and mutually beneficial. It is, for instance, hard to interpret what the earth has to teach humanity without listening to those who have studied it extensively, using things like science and technology. Cuba gets major points here—fundamental to the agroecological method advanced by the authors of *Agriculture and Resistance* is an appreciation of nature as a whole system of interrelated parts in which humans can interact positively to benefit the nonhuman agricultural ecosystem, right down to microscopic soil organisms, and that humans need to eat, have meaningful work, and a nondegraded environment to live in.

These two books provide an interesting comparison in examining agricultural structures and organization and their role in a resistance movement. They offer compelling examples of the role that agriculture can play in supporting a revolution or social movement, but also the different spectrums of possibility for creating change under a socialist versus capitalist state (although I realize that can be a false distinction). While the Cuban case embodies certain aspects of life that I see as part of my ideal future society, I also believe it has severe limitations. No society can be free of capitalist hegemony until every society is free of it, simply because capitalism's inherent logic is to extend and transform itself ad infinitum. No society can be free of authoritarianism and oppression until all people have equal political power in a culture of freedom, respect, and commitment. The examples in *Urban Wilds* provide inspiration as well as insight into what people truly need and want their communities to look like. Growing and distributing food, producing guerrilla solar power, restoring native habitat in city parks, and teaching urban youth about ecology and their ethnic agricultural heritage are all important contributions to creating a different culture (and agriculture) than we presently have. But in order to take the next step toward a society free of capitalist and otherwise oppressive factors, it is necessary to extend these local projects into an entire network of farmers and gardeners, educators, activists, craftspeople, and citizens, forming a confederation that will grow to meet everyone's everyday needs and desires, and beginning to work through the details of governing a society truly from the roots up, in a direct democracy.

Chuck Morse

## Mexico Insurgent

*Mexico under Siege: Popular Resistance to Presidential Despotism*

By Ross Gandy and Donald Hodges

London: Zed Books, 2002

*Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico*

By Bill Weinberg

New York: Verso, 2000

Everyone knows that Mexico has a long and vibrant revolutionary tradition. This fact is easy to discover, whether you read Wall Street preoccupations about Chiapas or crack open any given left-wing magazine.

What is more challenging is to understand the inner logic of the tradition, both historically and in its contemporary manifestations. It is also essential: U.S. activists need to develop a substantive grasp of this tradition to build meaningful alliances with comrades south of the border as well as a movement in the United States that embodies the best aspects of the political traditions brought by the millions of Mexican immigrants.

Ross Gandy and Donald Hodges's *Mexico under Siege: Popular Resistance to Presidential Despotism* and Bill Weinberg's *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico* provide excellent points of entry into this topic. Both books offer a comprehensive introduction to the Mexican revolutionary tradition and thus should be read by all U.S. activists seeking to develop a more international perspective. Their problems are also helpful because they indicate some of the difficulties we will face while envisioning a revolutionary movement in the Americas.

These books should be especially attractive to anarchists given that the authors all share a genuine connection to the anarchist tradition. Weinberg is a longtime participant in New York's anti-authoritarian milieu, and Gandy and Hodges have their own links to the movement; for example, Hodges is the author of *Mexican Anarchism after the*

*Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), and Gandy describes himself as a participant in anarchist collectives (among other things) in the "About the Authors" section of *Mexico under Siege*.

***Mexico under Siege: Popular Resistance to Presidential Despotism***

*Mexico under Siege* chronicles the popular opposition to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the party that governed Mexico through a web of violence, corruption, and deceit for seventy years under the pretense of democracy. (This mix of authoritarianism and democratic fiction led Mario Vargas Llosa to label the PRI's Mexico as the "perfect dictatorship."<sup>1</sup>) *Mexico under Siege* can be read profitably as a companion to Gandy and Hodges's *Mexico, the End of the Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), which analyzes the course of the Mexican Revolution from its beginning in 1910 to its disappearance from the political scene as marked by Vicente Fox's election in 2000.

The Mexican Revolution was one of the most far-reaching revolutions of the twentieth century, and its victory heralded major conquests for economic and political democracy. Mexico's 1917 Constitution promised government support of popular movements for social justice, the nationalization of economic resources, the formation of cooperatives, and the spread of collectivism against capitalism. It offered land reform to the peasants as well as the right to unionize, strike, and share in employer profits to the workers. In other words, from the ruins of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship and bitter years of civil war, a new social contract emerged between the people and state guided by a joint movement toward democracy and equality.

Yet this social contract disintegrated quickly, and people came to understand that the government was not an ally of the revolution but its opponent; *Mexico under Siege* tells the story of those who rose up in revolt. It describes the emergence of movements against the status quo along with their strategies and personages, and evaluates them comprehensively. Its introduction is structured around the revolutionary novels of B. Traven—a German anarchist who settled in Mexico after fleeing a death sentence due to his participation in the 1919 Bavarian soviet—and, from there, describes post-revolutionary resistance

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1. Vargas made this comment at a televised conference in Mexico City in September, 1990.

movements up to the contemporary period. It chronicles the militant labor protests of the 1940s, the revolutionary peasants' movements of the late 1940s and 1950s (which provide the link between Emiliano Zapata and the guerrilla movements of the 1990s), the massive teacher and railroad workers' strikes of the late 1950s, the guerrilla movements of the 1960s, the student movements of 1968 and 1971, the radical labor and peasant movements of 1970s, and of course the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas.<sup>2</sup>

This book has no parallel in English or Spanish. Although there are many works on specific movements in Mexico and some on particular aspects of the Mexican Left's broader trajectory—such as Barry Carr's *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* and Jorge Castañeda's *Utopia Unarmed: the Latin American Left after the Cold War*—this is the first comprehensive treatment of Mexican popular resistance movements as a whole. Although this is a small book (256 pages) and thus overlooks important movements as well as crucial aspects of the movements that are considered, Gandy and Hodges demonstrate a consistent and evolving legacy of opposition. They do so not only by examining the historical evolution of the movements but also by providing a feeling of the organic continuity between them (wherein different tendencies and individuals interacted with and influenced one another). They also supply biographies of many of the leading activists and offer some unprecedented documentation to the historical record; for example, included in the appendix is a translation of *The Plan of Cerro Prieto*, a program distributed by peasant revolutionary Rubén Jaramillo before an uprising he led in 1953. This translation is based on the sole surviving mimeograph of the original document.

Gandy and Hodges's panoramic study of the opposition ends on a sober note: the Mexican resistance failed to realize its primary goal of breaking the PRI's stranglehold on political power. Although it is true that the PRI was dislodged from power through (relatively) clean elections in 2000, they point out that this was not an achievement of the popular resistance but primarily the result of many different forces and

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2. Anarchists are not a factor in the popular movements examined by Gandy and Hodges. Although a mass anarchist movement existed in Mexico for many decades, anarchists became marginal in the 1930s. For a discussion of an attempt to revive the anarchist movement, see Chantal López and Omar Cortés, *El Expreso: Un Intento de Acercamiento a la Federación Anarquista del Centro de la República Mexicana (1936–1944)* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Antorcha, 1999).

pressures (including pressure from the Right).

***Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico***

Weinberg's *Homage to Chiapas* is an excellent complement to *Mexico under Siege*. While Ganay and Hodges analyze the Mexican popular resistance, as shaped by the legacy of the Mexican Revolution and in engagement with the state, Weinberg provides a topical exposition of the social dislocations and revolutionary movements that have emerged with Mexico's integration into the global economy (particularly as represented by NAFTA). *Homage to Chiapas* and *Mexico under Siege* overlap in many key areas, but Weinberg's work is much more international and contemporary in focus.

Although the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas frames the book, Weinberg's work is really more than an "homage to Chiapas." His book, which also begins with a Traven quote, is divided into five parts. The first describes the long history of exploitation and indigenous resistance in Mexico generally and Chiapas in particular (from colonization, to the Mexican Revolution, to NAFTA). The second section ("A War Cry from Chiapas") shows how this history exploded to produce unfathomable suffering as well as a revolutionary movement that has inspired millions in Mexico and across the globe. The remaining three sections (roughly the latter half of the book) place the first two in a much broader context: they analyze peasant movements throughout Mexico and the circumstances that have catalyzed them; the insidious confluence of political corruption, violence, and crime (especially drug trafficking); and the connection between misery in Mexico and the miserable schemes hatched by U.S. elites.

Weinberg is a journalist (for *High Times* magazine and *Native Americas*) and he wrote this book in a journalistic style. His analysis is not shaped by academic debates or concerns; for instance, he does not contest prevalent theories of social movements or speculate on the meaning of ethnicity in the twenty-first century. On the contrary, his goal is to tell the story—in a straightforward, entertaining way—of the various crises and historical trajectories that have pushed Mexico into a maelstrom of distress and revolt. And he is remarkably successful at this task. Weinberg not only does an excellent job of tracing the sometimes obscure (and sometimes not so obscure) forces and personalities that have shaped the present but also skillfully weaves this together to depict a country torn between five

hundred years of colonization, militant indigenous resistance, and new forms of conflict that are radically transforming the social and ecological fabric.

Weinberg's journalism is clearly a form of activism for him, and his commitment to radical social and ecological reconstruction gives him a sensitivity to issues that are often invisible to others. For example, he is exceptionally attentive to the ecological dimensions of Mexico's current crisis: he illustrates how anti-ecological and anti-democratic practices come together to create a desperate present for the poor, and knowledgeably describes the very different relationship between nature and culture found among indigenous people. Likewise, his anti-authoritarian commitments are reflected in his ability to portray social movements that have radically democratized community life and to distinguish these from movements that merely claim such priorities. As strong as his commitments are, however, he completely avoids the temptation to sanctify the opposition or gratuitously demonize elites. For instance, he conveys Subcommandante Marcos's charismatic genius, but also represents him as a bit of a playboy. Similarly, he shows the heinous role of many individuals and groups, but does not saturate them in derogatory adjectives. Weinberg's restraint, willingness to be critical, and desire to let the facts speak for themselves renders his work much more compelling than it would be otherwise.

### Critique

*Mexico under Siege* and *Homage to Chiapas* offer a broad picture of the Mexican resistance in its past and present-day forms. They do so on the basis of original historical research and express a genuine enthusiasm for popular revolutionary movements. Nevertheless, these books both have instructive limitations for those who want to build on their accomplishments.

Although *Mexico under Siege* studies popular resistance to the Mexican state, it is unfortunately not anti-statist enough. There are three reasons why this is the case.

First, *Mexico under Siege* is very much a political history of the leaders, organizations, and programs that guided the resistance to PRI and *not* a history of the emergence of oppressed classes or groups into historical subjects. For instance, their chapters on the 1958 teacher and railroad worker strikes focus on the organizations and leaders, not on changes in

the constitution of the Mexican working class. Likewise, their chapter on the Zapatistas focuses overwhelmingly upon Marcos—his history, political style, and so forth—instead of the development of a revolutionary identity among indigenous people in Chiapas. Although such a political history needs to be told—and certainly the leadership and organizations are important—this approach has a tendency to diminish the political subjectivity of the very people the opposition claims to represent (and who give these organizations meaning).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the treatment of the organized opposition in isolation from the classes or groups they represent tends to enable those in power to define the key moments in the history of popular resistance. In other words, if the emphasis is on the evolution of a revolutionary class consciousness among workers or an insurgent sensibility among peasants, then events of historical significance occur when this group's radical identity is either fortified, diminished, or transformed. For example, Gandy and Hodges cite an interview with Marcos in which he discusses the moment when the Zapatistas substantively joined the indigenous community of Chiapas: this was an enormously portentous event for Chiapas, and yet completely invisible to the state and its local agents. But what is a historically crucial event for the organized opposition when it is understood outside of its relation to oppressed classes or groups? In many cases, the state is permitted to define what is or is not significant: that is, the movement becomes important when the state decides it is worth repressing. Unfortunately, this approach is evident in *Mexico under Siege*, which can be read as a long list of clashes between disenfranchised people and the system. But, really, what kind of history do we want—a history of us standing up or them beating us down?<sup>4</sup>

3. For a different approach, see John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). This book explores the tradition of resistance and independent organization among urban poor and workers in Mexico City from the 1910 revolution into the early 1920s. It also has valuable commentary on anarchist activity during this period, particularly that associated with the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker).
4. An emphasis on popular self-organization would draw attention to the massive earthquake of 1985. This disaster killed more than ten thousand people and ruined vast portions of Mexico City. The state's response to this calamity was profoundly inept and often cynical, whereas self-organized citizens' groups emerged to play a vital role in the rescue. The combination of state incompetence and popular self-activity dealt a withering blow to the legitimacy of the PRI—with more lasting consequences than many of the Left groups examined in *Mexico under Siege*—and ignited a militant urban movement. Bill Weinberg comments on this by noting that



Finally, the isolation of the organized opposition from those it claims to represent tends to diminish the centrality of ideological commitments—particularly a commitment to democracy—in the resistance. This question simply loses significance when the people are not theorized as historical actors. Unfortunately, this problem is also evident in *Mexico under Siege*: Gandy and Hodges treat democratic movements and Marxist-Leninist movements as more or less continuous with one another, despite the fact that there is a vast difference between groups that want to impose a dictatorship of the proletariat and those fighting for popular self-organization. This distinction is vital for members of the opposition as well as the state being opposed because movements that want to democratically reconstruct political life pose a much greater challenge to the state than those that merely want to confront it. Indeed, this is revealed in the history of two movements treated by Gandy and Hodges: the student movement and the Zapatistas. The student movement sought to radically democratize political life with its counterculture and advocacy of participatory democracy and, even though the movement has passed into history, the state is still burdened by its legacy in the form of an enduring political sensibility and ongoing inquires into its repressive actions against the movement. The Zapatistas have also made crucial attempts to radically democratize political life (through their autonomous municipalities and democratic *consultas*, for instance) and of course their uprising has troubled the state for more than eight continuous years. By contrast, the Marxist-Leninist groups have utterly disappeared from the political scene and their memory does little to trouble those in power.

These problems with *Mexico under Siege* illuminate the vast difference between fighting the state and empowering the people, and underscore the necessity (and potential) of integrating this difference into theory.

If Gandy and Hodges can be criticized for some theoretical failings in their conception of the opposition, Weinberg dispenses with theory altogether by choosing a journalistic approach to the subject. As a journalist, his job is to report the facts and tell a story, and as such, he is not permitted to leave the realm of facts. While Weinberg is good at his trade—his book is both entertaining and exhaustively documented—his profession prevents him from speculating on the deeper logic of events

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since the calamity, "Mexico has seen a renaissance of popular movements linked to neither the ruling nor opposition parties" (*Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico* [London: Verso, 2000], 202).

or making assertions about the character of social institutions as such. In this sense, even the worst theory is more ambitious than the best journalism, for at least it endeavors to grasp the underlying principles that organize social affairs. And this is an important difference for anarchists: we need to be able to say not only that the Mexican state (for one) is barbaric and irrational but also that these are essential characteristics of states as such. Weinberg's work provides great raw material for such arguments, yet he does not and cannot make them.

## **Conclusion**

These books' problems are related: Gandy and Hodges employ a theoretical structure that does not encompass the breadth of the movements they treat—implicitly, they step away from the history of popular self-organization in Mexico—whereas Weinberg avoids theoretical questions entirely. Even though both books offer nuanced and unprecedented studies of a much neglected history, our collective imaginations will need to be pressed further to grasp the fullness of the revolutionary tradition that has unfolded south of the border.

On the one hand, the demands of theory cannot be avoided. The emergence of a common movement among Mexican and U.S. radicals requires the ability to make claims about the social order—claims that do more than indict a particular story of a particular injustice. And indeed, to incorporate the lessons of the Mexican resistance into U.S. radical movements, one needs to be able to grasp what is universal about its accomplishments.

But the history of the Mexican resistance also needs to be understood in a way that emphasizes the centrality of ordinary people in the process of social change, whether they have risen up in arms or simply tried to keep food on the table. In short, our theoretical premises must (and can) be as radical as our political convictions.

These books provide valuable material for understanding the full breadth of the Mexican radical tradition—a tradition far deeper than normally indicated by the mainstream or Left media—and their contributions and shortcomings indicate some of the challenges we will face while envisioning a new revolutionary movement in the Americas.

# Reply to Chuck Morse, "Theory of the Anti-Globalization Movement"

by Jeremy Brecher

I thank Chuck Morse for his critical review of *Globalization from Below*—I consider a good critic to be one's best friend.<sup>1</sup> The book's prime objective was to provoke discussion about the goals and practices of what's often referred to as the anti-globalization movement, and in this case we clearly succeeded. In the interests of continuing the discussion, I'd like to respond at three levels: clarifying what I advocate; responding to Chuck's specific critiques; and adding my two bits to the questions of revolution and utopia.

In what follows, I'm not interested in proving that I'm right, let alone that Chuck or anyone else is wrong. I'm interested in finding ways to work together with other people so that we may all survive and thrive.

## My Perspective

We are living in the midst of a concatenation of catastrophes: The basic underlying processes that support the biosphere are threatened along with virtually every microenvironment on the planet. Devastation by war, waste of resources by militarism, and the potential of omnicide become more threatening day by day. Control of the world's wealth by conflicting power centers is causing lethal levels of impoverishment for the majority of the world's people. The effort to maintain and expand such control is strengthening authoritarian forms of social control all over the world. The burden of these catastrophes falls most heavily on the least powerful social groups, further exacerbating already existing inequalities of race, gender, and ethnicity.

I believe the necessary condition for countering these catastrophes is a global movement that links the interests of the great majority of the world's people in reversing them. I see the movement that our book calls "globalization from below" as a starting point for that effort.

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1. This article expresses my own views and not necessarily those of the book's coauthors, and refers to the book review by Chuck Morse, "Theory of the Anti-Globalization Movement," *New Formulation* 1, no. 1 (November 2001): 22–31. Due to space limitations, I have not been able to address all of the concerns raised in the review.

Globalization from below is not a single movement but rather a convergence of many different movements and social interests that are discovering they can only fix their particular problems by a joint effort to change underlying structures and dynamics that are causing them all.

The result, I anticipate, is not a single type of social organization but rather the opening of social space that will allow people a far greater freedom to experiment with diverse solutions to their problems. I cannot imagine that this result can be achieved in the framework of a global economy based on competitive accumulation for private gain (aka capitalism) but I expect that were the constraints of the present system reduced, people would probably experiment with a wide range of alternatives.

I'm afraid this perspective doesn't fit very well into either a conventional "reformist" or a conventional "revolutionary" perspective. As a result, some people might conclude, as I think Chuck does, that it isn't revolutionary and therefore it must be reformist. I'll return to the question of revolution, but for now I'd just like to propose that my view is less well described in the dichotomous categories of "reformist" and "revolutionary" than it would be in the category "other."

### **Chuck's Critiques**

Most of Chuck's criticism concerns what is left out of *Globalization from Below* (in brief, the revolution), but he makes two specific criticisms of its approach to social change, which as he aptly summarizes, is based on people's organized withdrawal of cooperation with dominant arrangements, which prevents the reproduction of the social order and therefore enables the movement to impose its own norms on society as a whole.

The first problem Chuck raises with this is that we "do not explain why a people may develop norms that contradict the status quo, and thus cannot explain why they would want to withdraw their consent from the prevailing social relationships in the first place." While a fully adequate explanation would require interpreting the whole of human history, I'll just do it quick and dirty.

People have interests, like not being killed by bodies of armed men, not being incinerated by nuclear weapons, not having their biosphere

destroyed, and not having the world's resources monopolized by a fraction of one percent of the world's people. Such interests may first be perceived by individuals, but individuals are unable to actualize them alone. So they communicate with other people and try to formulate their interests as common interests, aka values. To realize their interests, they need to get people to act in ways that realize these values. So they define norms (standards of behavior) that would realize their values. In short, the reason "a people may develop norms that contradict the status quo" is to help implement interests that contradict the status quo.

Chuck's second criticism is: "Their assertion that society is always defined by a truce between the powerful and the powerless could characterize any social formation from the birth of society to the end of history, and thus lacks any historical content. However, if we wish to retain this transhistorical principle, then we must conclude that social movements can only strike a new balance of disempowerment at the very best."<sup>2</sup>

If we actually wrote that "society is always defined by a truce between the powerful and the powerless," I would now agree to put on a dunce cap and go sit in the corner. But what we actually wrote is, "At any given time there is a balance of power among social actors."<sup>3</sup> We add, "When the balance of power is changed, subordinate groups can force changes in these rules and practices."<sup>4</sup>

I don't see, and didn't intend, anything here that establishes a limit on how far those changes can go, given agreement on objectives and adequate mobilization. I don't think there is anything in this

2. Chuck is right that this formulation "lacks any historical content." Its function is to refute the dominant ideology that tells people they are powerless and empower them by explaining that the whole of society depends on them.
3. Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, *Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity* (Boston: South End Press, 2000), 23. This is an exception to Chuck's usually scrupulous summarizing of what we say. Another exception is his statement: "They want to build a world less dominated by the culture and values of global capital, even if it is still constrained by them." This passage (*ibid.*, 122) is actually not about what kind of world we want to build but rather about the potential benefits of "participation in the movement." In both cases, the distortion seems to result from an effort to fit our views into a concept of "reformism" that is produced by Chuck's dichotomous construct, rather than by the content of our position.
4. *Ibid.*, 23.

formulation that would contradict, for example, the abolition of private property or the state or the introduction of direct democracy.<sup>5</sup>

### Revolution

Chuck wrote, "Above all we must link the anti-globalization movement to a broader revolutionary project in a way that is coherent, concrete, and irrefutable."<sup>6</sup> I understand his central criticism to be that we fail to do so.

I'll freely admit that making such a linkage was not the goal of *Globalization from Below*. As it happens, the book I'm working on right now could be described that way, although I would put its goal more modestly. I have to confess that I find it an awesome task.

Hoping to purloin some ideas from others, I wrote Chuck (who I didn't know before receiving his review) and said I'd like to read anything that made such a link. I was struck by his reply: "I am unsatisfied with attempts that I have encountered to link the anti-globalization movement to a broader revolutionary project and can only advance speculations of my own. Above all, I am not sure what constitutes a revolutionary project these days: certainly the socialist tradition (in its communist as well as anarchist variants) has been a massive failure according to its own standards and, even if this were not true, it seems necessary to reinvent the project in light of the massive social changes we are living through." I was disappointed that there wasn't somebody somewhere who had figured all this stuff out, but I was also relieved to learn that I am not quite alone in my failures.

I agree entirely with Chuck's excellent summary of the problems of

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5. I realize in retrospect that a confusion may arise from the way I use the term "limit." I often say things like, "The movement's goal is to limit the drive for capital accumulation." This could be read to mean it's okay with me for the drive for capital accumulation to continue as long as it is limited. Actually, I intend the term "limit" to be interpreted in its mathematical sense, in which the limit could be zero. Similarly, a "balance" could be at zero. The abolition of slavery produced a balance of power between slaveowners and slaves in which slaveowners had zero power over slaves. (Unfortunately, the balance of power between ex-slaveowners and ex-slaves was far from zero.) I'll try to avoid this possible confusion in the future.
  6. Chuck also wrote, perhaps a bit harshly, that our "basic theoretical commitments are fundamentally antagonist to the goal of revolutionary transformation," and that the authors "do not want such a transformation."

developing a conception of revolution for today. With that in mind, rather than defending my own failures, let me contribute a few thoughts for the ongoing discussion.

Chuck notes that the word "revolution" "has been subject to considerable and ongoing debate." He indicates two interpretations as normal in Left discourse: "a sweeping change in political, economic, and cultural relationships," and "the moment when one historical epoch gives birth to a totally new landscape of historical experience through a process of contradiction, collapse, and renewal."

There are some other common definitions as well:

- A change in what class dominates and organizes society.
- A discontinuity in the state in which a different social class or other group takes control of political power.
- The liberation of a social group from oppression (for example, abolition of slavery or wage slavery).
- A change that realizes the hopes of a social group that seemed impossible under previous arrangements.

There is also considerable variability in what might be considered a "moment." The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 took about three days. The replacement of feudalism by capitalism in Europe took about five centuries. Both are frequently and not inaptly referred to as revolutions.

Let us start by agreeing that the present world needs a change that is really big. I mean really, really big. In fact, just to provide for the future survival of the earth's biosphere, the elimination of the threat of military omnicide, a redistribution of wealth that allows basic biological health for all the members of our species, and basic human rights as defined in such a mainstream document as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, will require change more profound than the Bolshevik seizure of power, the rise of the bourgeoisie, or any of the other changes typically described as revolutions. The term "revolution" is hardly adequate to indicate the scale of change that we need.

That raises the question of whether the historical events generally referred to as revolutions provide us with good models for thinking about how to achieve such changes. The rise of the bourgeoisie in

Western Europe and the replacement of feudalism by bureaucratic state tyranny in the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe are not very good models for what we need today. I would think such doubts would be particularly strong from an anarchist perspective: It is hard to recall any revolution that did not have the ultimate effect of establishing a stronger state power.

There is another reason that "actually happened" revolutions are problematic as a model for today. Despite the internationalist rhetoric and intention of some revolutionaries, in fact revolution has been overwhelmingly a national phenomenon. In 1848 and again in 1917, there was some tendency for revolution in one country to inspire movements elsewhere, but these were nothing like a "world revolution." I've been looking recently at the post-World War I global crisis, trying to glean lessons for the global movement of today. But what I've discovered is that while the one attempt to link these, the Third International, started with a vision of world revolution, by 1920 (!) it was already opposing revolutionary movements on behalf of the emerging state interests of the Soviet Union. So there was never really a "world revolutionary movement" from which we can learn lessons for the era of globalization. Globalization from below is way ahead of previous "internationalists" in creating a truly global movement.

The dominant Left tradition for conceiving of social change is based on the idea of an organized group, usually a political party, that wins state power and then implements changes. This perspective is shared both by the revolutionary Leninist and the reformist social democratic traditions. But there is another tradition, in which I would include (with some ambiguities in each case) Albert Parsons, the IWW, Rosa Luxemburg, Anton Pannekoek, George Sorel, Gandhi, the original (pre-parliamentary) Greens, and the Zapatistas. In this tradition, the basis of social change is self-organization of the oppressed and their taking control of their own activity. That process leads to conflict with those in power, whose means of power (such as the state) need to be dismantled. The result is that power is not further concentrated in the state but rather absorbed by the self-directing self-organization of the formerly oppressed.

Those in this tradition have had a variety of ideas about how people should organize themselves: The IWW's industrial unions, Pannekoek's



workers' councils, Gandhi's self-sufficient villages, the Zapatista's indigenous communities. Most of them include forms of direct democracy, but most of them also recognize the need for some kind of larger-scale coordination.

I'd throw out, as a hypothesis, that models for such a development today might involve forms of direct democracy such as have emerged with the Zapatistas, the recent unemployed and neighborhood councils in Argentina, the affinity groups of the anti-globalization protests, municipal councils and budgets a la Porto Alegre, etc.<sup>7</sup> These are all forms we should be studying, discussing, and experimenting with. I'd also hypothesize that the various forms of transnational social movement networks that have developed as part of globalization from below might be the kernel of large-scale social coordination, playing something of the role envisioned for the IWW's industrial unions or Pannekoek's workers' councils in earlier theories.

Such a process might be called "revolutionary" because of the scale of change it entails. But it might be called non-revolutionary because it does not necessarily involve "the moment when one historical epoch gives birth to a totally new landscape of historical experience through a process of contradiction, collapse, and renewal." It just doesn't fit very well into a conventional dichotomy of "revolution" and "reform."

These ideas are not spelled out in *Globalization from Below*. But that doesn't mean they are in some way contradictory to it. As we wrote in the introduction, the book was not meant to be "a universal guide for social change."<sup>8</sup> And as we said in the book's final paragraph, "Ultimately, the problem is not to 'solve' globalization. The problem is to develop social practices that can address the evolving challenges of life on Earth. We envision globalization from below eventually melding into a more general movement for social change."<sup>9</sup>

### Transformation and Utopia

Chuck criticizes our work for lack of a utopian vision. I freely confess that *Globalization from Below* does not present a utopia. Neither does the anti-globalization movement, aka globalization from below, as a

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7. The emergence of these councils in Argentina is discussed and welcomed in the new edition of *Globalization from Below* (Boston: South End Press, 2002).

8. Ibid., xiii.

9. Ibid., 122.

whole. As we wrote, the movement's vision "is not a shared utopia. Images of the good society range from a realization of the positive aspects of modernity in a democratic, scientifically and technologically developed, ecologically sound, and socially just world order to a return to the life patterns of indigenous peoples, with many others in between."<sup>10</sup> Acceptance of that diversity is crucial if the movement is to maintain the unity necessary to act effectively.

Fortunately, envisioning an ideal society ("utopia") is only one possible method for developing thought about social change. An alternative is to take existing reality, including its contradictions, and envision a future produced by a sequence of transformations of what currently exists. Concrete interests, for example in eliminating war or providing resources for those who need them, can motivate action to achieve such transformations. Grounding in concrete interests rather than an image of an ideal society doesn't mean that such transformations aren't real or deep.

There's nothing wrong with elaborating utopias as a heuristic stimulus to thinking about social change. But there is a problem with a utopian methodology that tries to realize a perfected whole whose character is envisioned before the process of creating it begins. Such a methodology has no means of developing our understanding of what the end should be through an open process of discussion and experimentation. And it has no way of proceeding through a sequence of actions that allow us to use trial and error to correct our mistakes. We should keep in mind that in the past the Left has made some whoppers.

Fortunately, another way is possible. It is expressed in the beautiful phrase of the Zapatistas: "Asking we walk."<sup>11</sup>

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10. Ibid., 62.

11. Cited in John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 215. Holloway in his provocative new book comments on this phrase, "The openness of uncertainty is central to revolution. . . . We ask not only because we do not know the way (we do not), but also because asking the way is part of the revolutionary process itself" (Ibid.).

## Notes About Contributors

**Randall Amster** is an instructor of Peace Studies and Social Thought at Prescott College in northern Arizona. His research interests and activist endeavors focus upon anarchism, ecology, utopia, resistance, homelessness, public space, globalization, peace movements, radical pedagogy, and community building.

**Lex Bhagat** is an artist and writer living in Grafton, New York. He is currently working on a book, *Sound Generation: Recording – Tradition – Politics*, to be published by Chronoplastics in late 2002.

**Chuck Morse** founded the Institute for Anarchist Studies, teaches at the Institute for Social Ecology, and lives in Mexico City.

**Erin Royster** teaches workshops connecting capitalist economics to agricultural development at the Institute for Social Ecology in Plainfield, Vermont. She also works with the Institute's Development Office as well as coordinates its Community Food Project and its residential program in Sustainable Design, Building and Land Use.

## Books Received:

- Michael Albert, *Moving Forward: Program for a Participatory Economy* (Oakland: AK Press, 2000, 160 pages)
- Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Political* (Oakland: AK Press, 2000, 173 pages)
- Daniel and Gabriel Cohen-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Oakland: AK Press, 2001, 239 pages)
- Dark Star, *Beneath the Paving Stones: Situationists and the Beach, May 1968* (Oakland: AK Press/Dark Star, 2001, 120 pages)
- Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 2001, 149 pages)
- Ann Hansen, *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla* (Oakland: AK Press/Between the Lines, 2002, 493 pages)
- William Herrick, *Jumping the Line* (Oakland: AK Press, 2001, 279 pages)
- Harry Willson, *Freedom from God: Restoring a Sense of Wonder* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Amador Publishers, 2002, 213 pages)
- John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002, 215 pages)

## Magazines Received:

- *Autonomia* (Spring 2002): Donceles #80 2o. piso, Col. Centro, cp 06000 México DF México. For subscription information write: [periodicoautonomia@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:periodicoautonomia@yahoo.com.mx).
- *Discussion Bulletin* (March-April 2002): P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, USA Subscriptions: U.S.: \$3 Individual; \$5 Library, Non-US sub \$5 Individual; \$10 Library)
- *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory: The Biannual Newsletter of the Institute for Anarchist Studies* (Spring 2002): IAS, P.O. Box 482, Amherst, MA, 01004, USA Subscriptions: \$5 Individuals, \$10 Institutions.
- *Slingshot Newspaper* (Spring 2002): 3124 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94705, USA Subscriptions: \$1 in the U.S. and \$2.50 International.

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