

RESISTANCE AND ALTERNATIVES

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Herbert Marcuse said: the success of the dominant ideology is to make the possibility of alternatives unthinkable. We are here to disprove joyfully and creatively that terrible idea! This conference is only one of many gatherings the world over that will witness the growing resistance movement. And I do not mean PROTEST: Resistance is a positive force as we work against aggression and globalization, we work towards creating “another world is possible” as the World Social Forum says.

Let us start by celebrating that another world already exists in all corners of the world.

As Maria Mies has written, there are many examples of successful subsistence communities to study. My friend Karen Hamdon says that people in Palestine are not waiting hopefully for peace, she says there are 1500 organizations of Palestinians and Israelis working together peacefully in all aspects of life. As we work together in social movements, our daily actions, the small ways in which we unite with commitment, compassion and civility, are the foundations of equality and cooperation which create that other possible world.

The big events – Seattle, Genoa, Quebec etc. are all important. They show the globalizing war makers that we have both vast numbers and a large number of skilled organizers and workers. We really do scare them; they don't know how we organize or where we turn up next. We have made the private, public; we make them answerable to the world. These events would not be possible without the “grunt work”, as Walden Bello calls it, on the local level. It is the often unglamorous grass roots work, local, consistent and focused that changes the hearts and minds of people and moves them to massive social action. Every forum like this one, like all the regional and special World Social forums, has an empowering ripple effect. We share our knowledge and inspiration and go home nourished and ready to work!

I would like to talk about boycotts – a highly successful way to influence markets and change policies. Since consumption is at the very heart of the corporate ideology, any move to challenge consumption is seen as dangerous and subversive, particularly as boycotts are often successful! Since January I have been involved in “Boycott USA”. We in British Columbia (BC) have spread this concept around the world. We encourage people not to shop at USA chains or buy USA products or brands, which not always easy for those of us who live next door. Equally important, we urge Canadians not to visit the USA, to boycott its entire mainstream media, TV, movies etc. This way we help rid ourselves of USA cultural domination and create space and time for Canadian and international culture – particularly independent media. We are heartened to see how this boycott has spread throughout Europe and Asia. And in the USA activists are boycotting any products of companies that produce military supplies. Let's keep it up! A key part of boycotting is focused on buying less and buying locally. For those of us addicted to tea and coffee, organic fair trade products of many kinds are gaining in minority world sales while majority world producers get fair prices and help in community development and self-sufficiency.

While individuals are acting in daily life on this personal scale, there is a major macro- level of boycotting USA. There is a major divestment by rich foreign investors as they pull their money out of the USA. It is very significant that oil producers – Iran, Venezuela, Russia, maybe Indonesia are trading for Euros. The dollar is losing its global pre-eminence. People are shocked when I say the war against Iraq was partly a war against the European Union. The EU is more dependent on

Western Asian oil than the USA. It was vital for the USA to gain control of Iraqi oil and trade it in dollars and teach the EU a lesson. So Europeans, watch your oil supply and your Euro – right now your combined GNP is greater than the USA – you are the only threat to USA hegemony. So I think you must be very careful what politicians you chose!

In another boycott - against World Bank bonds which raises 80% of its funding by bond sales, USA cities, universities, churches etc. are not buying these bonds as an act of resistance to WB policies in the majority world.

Brazil is full of wonderful acts of resistance – a country with 20,000 free radio stations, a landless movement of millions that has endured murder and violence from the ruling elite to gain land and settle hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers – and help elect a president. A country where a frail, sickly woman, an illiterate servant from the Amazon, who learned to read and write as an adult, is now the Minister of the Environment and is determined to save the biodiversity of her rich homeland – Marina Silva. I recently learned that slaves in Brazil used to disguise self-defence in music and dance – slavery has ended but the style and art of self-defence endures as *Capioera*.

Across the world in Kenya, the Green Belt Movement has been heralded for its work in planting millions of trees and working to save parks and ecosystems while empowering women on the community level. Its founder has been jailed, beaten and tortured, but never gave up. Now she, Wangari Maathai, is Minister of the Environment in a new Kenyan government!

Art can be an act of resistance, so important that the world watched in horror when Butros Butros Ghali announced the UN war on Iraq in 1992 in front of a tapestry of Picasso's *Guernica*. In 2003 we saw that it was covered when this year's war was announced by USA leaders. The connection between the horror of *Guernica* and that planned in Iraq was too obvious, even for the barbarian military leaders. Expressing resistance in art allows our creativity to bloom and take seed in our many projects of resistance. Poetry, music, theatre can all be integrated into a life where we no longer accept art as a commercial commodity to be passively consumed.

In much of our resistance we are not aware of the dangers of GATS lurking behind privatization, service cuts and government deals. But I come from the city where the MAI was first leaked and where resistance to the MAI began. When I get home I will work to increase awareness of GATS.

In the struggle against GATS and trade agreements, we see coalitions of teachers, students, parents and community groups working together to save schools in Canada. Teachers in Mexico who have publicly opposed the lack of government support for education have been attacked, jailed and 150 teachers have been murdered – but still they resist and now seek coalitions with Canadian and USA teachers who face the threats of GATS and privatization. Parents in the USA have already organized commercial-free schools and have gotten rid of advertising in schools, even though and they lose the “donated” equipment as well! While the USA government promotes a free video game in its schools about joining the Army, one school in Vancouver, BC, encourages kids to turn in war toys and violent material and gives them books in exchange!

A young friend of mine used her last paycheck when she was cut by Ministry of Health to buy 500 stickers with one word CAMPBELL (the name of the BC Premier) on it and spent one whole night in Victoria with her friends sticking them under the word STOP on stop signs!

Seniors, nurses, unions and citizens are joining together in BC to organize widespread “Days of Defiance” in many communities. They use many creative ways to distribute information about the threat to our health care and all our social services. BC is bidding for the Olympics in 2010 – a fancy Davos-style resort out side Vancouver – Whistler – where incidentally the next DAVOS World Economic Forum is rumoured to be happening. The government has promised over \$60 million just to rebuild a highway, and that is the tip of the iceberg of taxpayers’ money being given to the corporate world. So a campaign called HEALTHCARE BEFORE OLYMPICS has been started by senior citizen groups! Like thousands of others, we have a sticker on our car proclaiming that slogan.

In Australia a No-Borders support group for refugees pulled down the barricades at a detention jail and many refugees were set free. Movement of peoples fleeing war, oppression, poverty and displacement are a little recognized result of globalization, but in every receiving country, solidarity groups of citizens and refugees are growing.

I could go on for hours with success stories and it is important that we share them – to inspire and encourage us in our own work. The work of democracy building is not one mass struggle – but a myriad of richly varied responses to different situations, but we all share the same commitment for justice in peace, and community in health.

Beside everything else- a recent study at UK University of Sussex says that social action is good for your health and happiness! The effect of activism makes one less prone to physical illness and more confident and empowered by acting in a supportive group with a common goal! My young friends say it is good for the love life too! That figures!

Resistance is the secret of joy, as Alice Walker says! We knew it all along!

There are several issues I want to reflect on. As I said yesterday we have learned from our recent resistance to the USA-UK war on Iraq, that the work for peace and democracy are one. The role of social movements is to bring awareness, analysis, inspiration and organized action to our societies – to offer the opportunity to be agents of change in a community of like-minded and like-hearted people. We are growing in strength everywhere.

One of the most important roles we have is to nourish and expand our communication networks. The internet –which we still have- has been crucial to our exchange of information and strategies – list serves, messages, websites and on-line media like the Indymedia movement. Print magazines and papers must be supported – we have many in Canada, a small spread out population needs its own press. There are also independent radio stations – which are really important in the majority world too. Activist-made videos, books, leaflets, meetings, music, poetry and art are all essential. Rosalie Bertell says “we can be our own media” and we are doing a good job of it! We have yet to have our own TV. A young Italian activist at WSF told me, we have to tax ourselves to afford TV networks and stations – most people get their news in our part of world and increasingly in majority world straight from TV – it has the appearance of authenticity and reality no other media has. He is right – and I am still trying to figure out how to do it!

In Canada we are faced with the situation – particularly in BC where a right-wing government says to us – you elected us with a large majority- in our system of parliamentary election, the person with most votes takes the seat. In BC we have 77 members from the Liberals and only 2 in the opposition, Social Democratic Party, which is struggling in almost in oblivion. So we resist as an

“irresponsible” social movement against an implacable duly elected government which is selling off and giving away our rights, our resources and our commons –this is democracy as they see it.

What is the relationship of social movements to political parties? In order to change these neoliberal policies we have to change the government. Do we want to continue to try to effect from the outside, by making a particular policy too expensive or unpopular for the government? Or are we willing to consider getting rid of the collaborators by creating our own creative political base – beyond reaction? I do not have any answers – I am not in a political party but I do support those I can, and I have felt let down by the governments of those parties I supported. For Europe with representational voting it is easier to get a voice in government for a small party. But you too have felt betrayed by parties you worked in.

So we need to think and talk about this. But if we really want change we have to think about bridging the gap between social activists and partisan political activists. In Brazil and Venezuela the two worked together on an agreed minimum platform of mutual support, and elected new governments. In Argentina, in spite of incredible grassroots reaction to economic crisis, an old - style government stays in office. Can we consider working with or transforming a party or developing a new better political party, even joining and working in it, to see our dreams and goals become part of a legislated reality? I know we sometimes see politicians as opportunists and sell-outs; they see us as unaccountable or flaky. But how do we change policies without gaining power? Starting at the local level may be the best entry to the power of change. Local results of neoliberalism are easier to see and explain. In Canada, people often do not want to be bothered with local issues – like sewage and water- but these are some of the issues that need our attention today.

As my dear friend, the late Canadian activist, Kay Macpherson said: When in doubt, do both. Maybe that is the answer and the solution to the existing dichotomy.

I want to talk about what is closest to my heart – building and maintaining social movements. I feel deeply that we have to change the values of our society at both the local and personal level. Rosalie Bertell says we have changed many core values in our society – from values about homosexuality to animal rights. We have to change our core belief in the power and the glory of materialism and militarism, that are central to our acceptance of military pacts, trade agreements, and consumption based media that promote greed and aggression. And we need to be clear that life depends on it. At the same time we need to live a life of joy, solidarity and, dare I say it, love, and be the model for a new way of living with each other and the world around us.

That is why we need our own organizations, meetings and communication or media, but also we need to preserve our commons – our universal health care, schools, resources, utilities and to keep knowledge in the public realm and to retain our sense of human community. As the poet T.S. Eliot said: “There is no life except that of community.” We need to expose the deadly fallacies of material growth and military might, state terrorism and constant competition that are incorporated in government policies and agreements. While we do this we work in solidarity, side by side, creating the better possible world, together. This slow work – quietly away from the mass rallies and peace walks – I feel strongly is very important but I also feel the pressure of time.....running out as our world changes around us! So let’s get to it!

In the words of Irene Fernandez...WHO TAKES CHARGE? WOMEN TAKE CHARGE!

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