

Part Four: “Globalization From Below”

MOUNTAIN VOICES (from *Sing Out*)

Paradise

When I was a child, my family would travel
Down to western Kentucky where my parents were born
And there's a backwoods old town that's often remembered
So many times that my memories are worn.

■ - G D / - - A D *ff*

And Daddy won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County
Down by the Green River where Paradise lay?
Well I'm sorry my son, but you're too late in asking
Mr. Peabody's coal train has hauled it away.

Well sometimes we'd travel right down the Green River
To the abandoned old prison down by Adrie Hill
Where the air smelled like snakes & we'd shoot with our pistols
But empty pop bottles was all we would kill.

Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovel
And they tortured the timber & stripped all the land
Well, they dug for their coal 'til the land was forsaken
Then they wrote it all down as the progress of man

When I die, let my ashes float down the Green River
Let my soul roll on up to the Rochester Dam
I'll be halfway to heaven with Paradise waiting
Just five miles away from wherever I am.

- John Prine

@ 1971 Walden Music, Inc. & Sour Grapes Music. Used by permission. All rights reserved. - Paradise was an actual town in E. Kentucky before the area was completely demolished by the Peabody Coal Co.'s stripping operations.

HUGGING THE TREES

The Story of the Chipko Movement

THOMAS WEBER



PENGUIN BOOKS

higher mountain valleys. By the middle of the decade an improved system of floating logs down the Ganga's tributaries extended timber harvests into the mountains of Tehri Garhwal State, and by the 1850s district officials were reporting that the lowland forests had already lost their best timber and even in the higher valleys some of the prime *sal* and *deodar* tracts had been cleared of marketable trees.⁵

This destruction was soon to increase dramatically. From the 1850s onwards the railways in India experienced phenomenal growth, calling for ever increasing supplies of fuel and timber for sleepers. Much of this requirement was met from the Uttarkhand Himalaya.

In the British-controlled areas, up to the passing of the *Indian Forest Act* of 1865, no system of conservation was in force and consequently the most valuable forests were wantonly destroyed by government contractors. Following the passage of the *Indian Forest Act* of 1878, more measures to protect the remaining forests were implemented and gradually most of the forests were brought under the control of the State Forest Department.⁶ Forests were classified as 'reserved' and 'protected'—the difference revolved around the degree of control exercised. Especially valuable areas were declared 'reserved' because of their vital role in the national economy. Only well-defined and limited private rights were recognized. In protected forests private rights were upheld and restrictions were only imposed in the interests of the right-holders themselves.⁷ These forests were regularly inspected by officials and general principles of management were laid down.

In Tehri Garhwal State, between 1840 and 1885, the forests were leased out to contractors for exploitation. After that date they reverted to the State which established its own forest department.⁸

The local people in both areas resented these encroachments on what they considered their traditional rights. Not only were the local economies heavily dependent on the forest and forest produce but, prior to the advent of outside management, they had absolute rights over the forest. The inroads on these immemorial rights created a sense of insecurity and indignation among the people.⁹ Forest department officers were increasingly hated and feared as they came to be seen as oppressors by the hill population.

The excessive logging and then the severity of the new laws were

to lead to two striking consequences. First, village economies which were previously dependent on forest resources were almost totally destroyed. This resulted in an exodus of able-bodied males to the plains in search of work. Secondly, the reactions of the angry and politically powerless villagers led to further depletion of the remaining forests. Out of resentment, people started destroying forests indiscriminately. They cut trees whenever they could and stopped taking protective care (for example against fire) of forests from which they had been excluded.¹⁰

In 1906 public resentment boiled over in Tehri Garwal State. On the morning of 28 December, 200 villagers armed with sticks descended on a camp of officials who were inspecting a forest surrounding the Chandrabadni Temple near the town of Tehri. The Conservator of Forests was attacked, his tent destroyed and his gun broken. He was lucky to have escaped with his life.¹¹

In British areas too, resentment grew and people resorted to burning forests. The strength of this movement led to a declaration by the Governor of the United Provinces, at the Bareilly Durbar in 1907, which said that the Government was taking over the hill forests for their protection rather than for the purposes of commerce. In 1916, 24,300 hectares were burnt out around Nainital in Kumaon. Five years later, in another outburst, 317 fires were deliberately lit in Kumaon division affecting nearly 830 square kilometres of forests and destroying over one million trees.¹²

During the Civil Disobedience campaign against British rule, launched by Gandhi's historic march to the sea-shore at Dandi (to defy the Government laws concerning the tax on salt), eventually laws other than the oppressive salt law, were also contravened. Protestors stopped paying land revenue and other taxes and various laws, including the forests laws, were openly defied. The resistance against these arbitrary rules was meant to be strictly non-violent; however, as Gandhi and other leaders of Indian National Congress were imprisoned, some moments of indiscipline crept into the campaign. Forest fires were again lit in protest in the Siwalik hills.

The protests were not confined to Imperial India. On 30 May 1930, people gathered at Tilari in Tehri Garhwal State to protest against the forest policies. The State's army surrounded the protestors on three sides and fired. Seventeen were killed and many seriously wounded.¹³

The forest departments were better at enforcing their orders than at educating the people to the value of their forests. There was no grassroot-level rapport between the foresters and the villagers. The local nationalist politicians could therefore, in the words of one commentator, 'misconstrue the British motive for conservation and harp the tune that the Government was encroaching upon the indefeasible and innate rights of promiscuous felling of trees. As a sequel, forest burning and forest uprisings became an important aspect of the political movement in the U.P. hills up to 1947'.¹⁴

The British and the rulers of the princely states were primarily interested in maintaining their profits. To do this they had to usurp the rights of the locals and consequently even the conservation measures they undertook backfired and the reactions of the local population caused irreparable damage to the Himalayan forests. The destruction of the ancient village forest-based economies and the political struggles that centred on the forest laws reduced the once respected status of trees to that of a commercial commodity and political weapon.

In 1931, the forestry advisor to the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal, Franz Heske, lamented that, 'Normally every approach to enforce regulations against the century-old reckless exploitation causes the immediate resistance of the indigenous population. In some cases known to me, government officers in charge of the enforcement of the forest-regulations have been manhandled in the most atrocious way, and escaped death with sheer luck. The manner of thinking of the native man, pressed down by the load of a hard-earned livelihood since generations and not educated in school, does not move beyond his own ego and to this day he considers the forest to be free and worthless and made only to attribute to his own comfort. No thought is spent on the future generation, although everybody experiences every day the interdependence of agriculture and forestry'.¹⁵

Organized pressure greatly increased on the forests of the Himalaya during World War II with the massive wartime demand for timber products. Following the war the Forest Department, in a review of its work, arrived at three conclusions: (1) With carefully timed rotation cutting Government forests had not been permanently damaged; (2) private forests, which were not covered by systematic plans, had been decimated; and (3) that consequently the forest laws had to be amended to give the

Government control over all forest lands.¹⁶ Following Independence, the 1948 U.P. *Private Forests Act*, and the 1952 National Forest Resolution largely accomplished this goal.¹⁷

The task of 'nation-building' required an increase in timber production to meet the rapidly expanding national market for pulp and building timber. This was at a time by which no large timber stands remained on the Gangetic plains of north India and the burgeoning urban centres faced shortages in fuelwood.

The fate of the Uttarkhand forests was perhaps finally sealed in October 1962. Following the brief Indo-China war, development in the border areas was accelerated, roads were cut, towns grew, workers arrived from the plains. Road construction caused severe problems of local landslides and soil erosion, while the exploitation of Himalayan timber was greatly aided by road-building programmes that pushed motorable roads into previously inaccessible areas and opened them to logging operations. Road-building brought some employment opportunities to the economically devastated hill communities, but the influx of outsiders and the growth of roadside tea-stalls and eating places placed further pressure on the forests in the form of increased demand for timber and firewood. The roads were justified in the name of national integration. However, as Sarala Devi pointed out, from the point of view of national defence, 'In border areas the main defence measure is a satisfied and prosperous local population'.¹⁸ The increased development left the population dependent on a money-based economy in which the men became menial labourers or went to the plains in search of work. The feared invasion had come from the Indian south not the Chinese north.

The Gandhian Connection

From 1930 onwards the mountains of Uttarkhand experienced campaigns against the forest laws as part of the anti-British struggle. While sometimes these actions turned violent, with the burning of forests, they were generally conducted peacefully in the name of the Gandhian struggle for independence. Gandhi, in his thirty plus years in India, following his return from South Africa in 1915, up to his assassination in January 1948, visited the Himalayan foothills on many occasions. He went to Hardwar, Kangri, Nainital, Dehradun, Mussoorie and Almora. In 1915, during a visit to Rishikesh, he remarked that he 'was charmed with the natural scenery' and 'bowed my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in Nature, and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of nature with a religious significance'.¹ As many devout Hindus do, he also often referred to the Himalaya as a possible place for retirement if he was ever to turn his back on the hurly-burly of political life. But he never actually penetrated into the hills of Garhwal or Kumaon.

Two of Gandhi's best known Western disciples, Mirabehn and Sarala Devi, however, not only visited but also settled in the hills and their presence helped to shape the Chipko movement.

The Disciples in the Hills

In 1923, Madeleine, the thirty-one year old daughter of British Admiral Sir Edmund Slade, left London for Paris. The young socialite felt her life to be somewhat meaningless. She moved from interest to interest without any deep commitment. Then she met the famous Swiss author Romain Rolland who told her that he had a book on Gandhi in press. That book changed her life. 'I bought a copy', she later recalled, 'took it to my lodging and began to read. I could not put it down. I read and read, and as I read the dawn in my heart glowed brighter and brighter, and by the time I had finished, the Sun of Truth was pouring his rays into my soul. From

that moment I knew that my life was dedicated to Bapu [lit. 'father', an affectionate title for Gandhi]. That for which I had been waiting had come, and it was this'.²

On November 6, 1925, she arrived in India and a day later she was at Gandhi's ashram on the outskirts of the city of Ahmedabad. During her first meeting with the Mahatma, Gandhi welcomed her with the words, 'You shall be my daughter'. Soon thereafter he gave her the name 'Mira', after one of India's great legendary mystics who was a dedicated devotee of Krishna despite ridicule and torture by her husband. The suffix 'behn' means 'sister'.

She was with Gandhi over much of the next two decades,³ accompanied him to England for the 1931 Round Table Conference, and was arrested with him during the 1942 'Quit India' agitation. Following her release, despite the fact that 'the Himalayas were calling', she decided to put all her energies into khadi (handspun, handwoven cotton) work. And cotton does not grow in the mountains. The compromise was to find a spinning and weaving area within sight of the Himalayan snows. She settled on the plains between the towns of Roorkee and Hardwar close to where the river Ganga flows from the mountains.

In 1947 she set up 'Pashulok' ('Animal World'), a centre for cattle development, at Rishikesh. The land was literally at the foot of the mountains. It was covered with great forests and teemed with wildlife. Here Mirabehn became aware of the devastating floods which emanated from the catchment area of the Ganga deep in the mountains to the north.

In mid-1947 she travelled into the mountains for the first time when she visited Uttarkashi, high in the Garhwal Himalaya. Her concern over the damaging floods led her to undertake further journeys to investigate the areas north of Rishikesh. She stayed for a while at Pratapnagar on a 2150-metre-high mountain ridge overlooking the town of Tehri and, in 1950, she finally moved into the mountains proper. Forty-odd kilometres beyond Tehri, where the motor road then ended, she leased two acres from the Forest Department and set up an ashram in the midst of a pine forest. A tiny cottage, a cowshed and another building with kitchen and living quarters for guests made up Gopal Ashram.

Here she concentrated on the forest problem. She listened to the recollections of elderly villagers and examined the condition of the forest areas. She sent detailed reports and photographs of her findings to Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of

independent India and an old acquaintance from the long years they both spent close to Gandhi. Discussions with Forest Department officials followed, but changes for the better did not.⁴

For the following ten years she lived in the Garhwal and Kashmir Himalaya. Although, when directed at those in high places, her voice remained a cry in the wilderness, it was heard by village women and some earnest young *sarvodaya* workers.

In 1958, before her return to Europe the following year, she wrote an insightful article entitled "Something Wrong in the Himalaya" for the *Hindustan Times*.⁵ The connection between the decline in forest health and floods on the plains was finally being explained to the public:

'Year after year the floods in the North of India seem to be getting worse, and this year they have been absolutely devastating. This means that there is something radically wrong in the Himalaya and that "something" is, without doubt, connected with the forests. It is not, I believe, just a matter of deforestation as some people think, but largely a matter of change of species.

'Living in the Himalaya as I have been continuously now for several years, I have become painfully aware of a vital change in species of trees which is creeping up and up the southern slopes those very slopes which let down the flood waters on to the plains below. This deadly changeover is from Banj (Himalayan Oak) to Chir pine. It is going on at an alarming speed, and because it is not a matter of deforestation but of change from one kind of forest to another, it is not taken sufficiently seriously. In fact the quasi-commercial Forest Department is inclined to shut its eyes to the phenomenon because the Banj brings them no cash for the coffers, whereas the Chir pine is very profitable, yielding as it does both timber and resin.

'But what are these crores of revenue worth if all, and more than all of that amount of money, has to be spent each year on trying to repair the damage caused by floods? I say "trying to repair", because year by year the destruction gets worse, and takes many forms which are incalculable in terms of money.

'Let me now explain in more detail, and with the help of some illustrations, why the Banj is so much better than the Chir pine for holding back the waters of the monsoon rains.

'The Banj leaves, falling as they do, year by year, create a rich black mould in which develops a thick tangled mass of undergrowth (bushes, creepers, and grasses), which in their turn

add to the leaf-mould deposit and the final result is a forest in which almost all the rain-water becomes absorbed. Some of it evaporates back into the air and the rest percolates slowly down to the lower altitudes, giving out here and there beautiful sweet and cool springs. It would be difficult to imagine a more ideal shock-absorber for the monsoon rains than a Banj forest.

'The Chir pine produces just the opposite effect. It creates with its pine needles a smooth, dry carpet, which absorbs nothing, and which at the same time prevents the development of any undergrowth worth the name. In fact, often the ground in a Chir pine forest is as bare as a desert. When the torrential rains of the monsoon beat down on these southern slopes of the Himalaya, much of the pine-needle carpet gets washed away with the water, and erosion invariably takes place because these needles, being non-absorbent, create no leaf-mould, but only a little very inferior soil, which is easily washed out from the rocks and stones.

'One very important point must be remembered in this respect, and that is that when monsoon rain-waters rush down and create floods, they run to waste and are lost to the cultivator. Whereas when they pass down slowly deep into the soil, they replenish the springs and river sources which are of such vital importance to agriculture in the dry season.

'But why are the Banj forests disappearing so fast? It is not merely that the Forest Department spreads the Chir pine but largely because the Department does not seriously organize and control the lopping of the Banj trees by the villagers for cattle fodder, and as I have mentioned, is glad enough from the financial point of view to see the Banj dying out and the Chir pine taking its place. When the Banj trees get weak and scraggy from overlopping, the Chir pine gets a footing in the forest, and once it grows up and starts casting its pine needles on the ground all other trees die out.

'It is no good putting all the blame on the villagers for the overlopping. In every form of human society, where the population figure is high and economic stress, is felt by the people things of value have to be protected. The villagers themselves realize fully the immense importance of these Banj forests, without which their cattle would starve to death, the springs would dry up, and flood waters from the upper mountain slopes would devastate their precious terraced fields in the valleys. Indeed all these misfortunes are already making their appearance on a wide

scale. Yet each individual villager cannot resist lopping the Banj tree in the unprotected Government forests. "If I do not lop the trees someone else will, so why not lop them, and lop them as much as possible before the next comer". And each villager, when you talk to him on the subject, will say: "Oh! it is bad! These precious forests are getting lopped to death. Nobody listens, what is to be done?" And he has, as likely as not, himself been lopping the heads off half-a-dozen young Banj trees that very morning.

"That question of his "What is to be done?" is the all-important one. The problem is not beyond solution, for, if trees are lopped methodically, they can still give a large quantity of fodder, and yet not become weak and scraggy. At the same time if the intruding Chir pines are pushed back to their correct altitude, and the Banj forests are resuscitated, the burden of the present trees will, year by year, decrease, and precious fodder for the cattle will actually become more plentiful. But all this means winning the trust and cooperation of the villagers, for the Forest Department, by itself, cannot save the situation. Nor can it easily win the villagers' trust, because the relations between the Department and the peasantry are very strained, practically amounting to open warfare in the Chir pine areas. Therefore, in order to awaken confidence in the people, some non-official influence is most necessary.

"With the aid of local constructive workers, it should become possible to organize village committees and village guards to function along with the Forest Department field staff which should be increased, and also given special training in a new outlook towards the peasantry. In this way it should be feasible to carry out a well-balanced long-term project for controlled lopping, and gradual return of the Banj forests to their rightful place by systematic removal of Chir-pines above 5,500 feet altitude to be followed by protection of the young Banj growth. The Banj forests are the very centres of nature's economic cycle on the southern slopes of the Himalaya. To destroy them is to cut out the heart and thus bring death to the whole structure.

"The forests of the Himalaya are the Guardians of the Northern Plains, which, in their turn, are the Granary of India. Surely such guardians deserve the utmost care and attention that the Government can give them."

Sunderlal Bahuguna reported that when he visited the aging Mirabehn in Austria in 1981 she was overjoyed when she heard about the Chipko movement. She had written to the late Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi requesting an end to the commercial exploitation of the Himalayan forests and protection for the remaining stands of oaks. On her final day, in July 1982, the almost unconscious Mirabehn again had two callers. When Indian Ambassador Dalal came to convey to her Mrs. Gandhi's assurances that her wishes would be fulfilled, she opened her eyes, smiled and said in a faint voice 'very kind'. Her final visitor was again Bahuguna, spokesman for the Chipko movement, who assured her, one of the movement's chief inspirations, that her work in the Himalaya was to continue. Close to death, she allegedly managed a smile.⁶

Just eleven days before the death of Mirabehn, Gandhi's other disciple in the Himalaya had passed away. Sarala Devi (Catherine Mary Heilman)⁷ was born of German parents in London in 1901. She learned about Gandhi from Indian students in 1928 and in 1932 she came to India to teach at an experimental school in Udaipur. In 1936 she joined Gandhi at his Sevagram ashram in central India to assist with the Mahatma's experiments in basic education. The excessively hot climate troubled her and so, in 1941, he sent her into the Kumaon hills at Almora for a year of rest. During the 'Quit India' movement, the Gandhian ashram at nearby Chanauda was closed by the police and the workers arrested. Saralabehn immediately went to see Acton, the Commissioner of Kumaon, and challenged him over the high-handedness of his actions. Acton replied, 'I want to hang all the Ashramites'. Saralabehn took up the fight. Dressed in hill clothes, she went from village to village helping the families of political prisoners. Her activities naturally did not endear her to the British Raj and finally she too was behind bars. On her release she continued her work with the families of arrested activists.

From her experiences she came to admire the strength of the hill women and after independence she decided to settle among them. She started an ashram for the education of hill girls along Gandhian lines and soon she had collected a band of dedicated young women social workers around her. Her disciples brought a new awakening to hill people, especially the women, through their campaigning for prohibition. One of these disciples was Vimala Nautial who later married Sunderlal Bahuguna.

Saralabehn strove to create environmental awareness by publishing numerous articles and books on ecological problems. In 1961 she created the Uttarkhand Sarvodaya Mandal to work for

the uplift of the population and the protection of the hill environment. In January 1982 she established the Parvatiya Paryavaran Sanrakshan Samiti (Hill Environment Protection Society), dedicated to environmental protection, and donated all her belongings to aid the new institution in its work.

A believer in nature cure she refused allopathic medicines and after a year of ailing she finally died in Almora on 8 July 1982. Her last words were 'Two Trees'. By this she meant the broadleafed walnut and oak trees which she saw as the solution to the ecological crisis in the mountains. She had long fought against the commercial management of hill forests and especially monocultures of Chir-pines and eucalyptus. Two saplings were planted in the ground where her body was cremated.

Ironically the first anniversary of Saralabehn's death was marked by the planting of 100 pine saplings, supplied by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, to make an existing Chir-pine forest more dense. Saralabehn had long held that one of the main causes of poverty among the hill population was the deliberate policy of planting commercial mono-cultures, mainly pines, in place of the natural forests. This policy initiated the process of soil deterioration and erosion. She had pleaded tirelessly for the restoration of the mixed forests that existed before the organized management of the forests was undertaken by the British.⁸

The Sarvodaya Philosophy and Gandhi's View of Swaraj

For Gandhi, Indian *swaraj*, or Independence, meant far more than merely an India without the British. It meant a certain sort of India and a certain type of Indian. Until they were achieved, he believed, there was no complete independence. 'If India is satisfied with the mere attainment of political independence and there is nothing better for me to do', he claimed, 'you will find me retiring to the Himalayas leaving those who wish to listen to me to seek me out there'.⁹

Gandhi's vision of independence was summed up in the word 'Ramarajya', the 'Kingdom of God', where there were equal rights for princes and paupers,¹⁰ where even the lowliest person could get swift justice without elaborate and costly procedures,¹¹ where inequalities which allowed some to roll in riches while the masses

did not have enough to eat were abolished,¹² and where sovereignty of the people was based on pure moral authority rather than on power.¹³

To achieve this end a new movement was needed. The day before his death on 30 January 1948, Gandhi wrote, in what was to become known as his 'last will and testament', that the Indian National Congress in its present form had outlived its use. The Congress had been set up to achieve political independence; with that goal accomplished the emphasis had to shift to the social, moral and economic independence of the rural masses. With this in mind Gandhi proposed that the Congress organization be disbanded to allow Lok Seva Sanghs, organizations for the service of the people, to grow in its place.¹⁴

The workers Gandhi was seeking to carry out this task were to be khadi-wearing teetotallers who believed in inter-communal harmony and were against the practice of untouchability. The workers were to have equal respect and regard for all religions and belief in the equality of opportunity and status for all, irrespective of race, creed or sex. The job of these workers was to organize villages so as to make them self-supporting through their agriculture and handicrafts while educating the villagers in sanitation and hygiene.¹⁵ The *sarvodaya* (lit. all rising, good of all) worker was to be an idealist, an example and a teacher.¹⁶

The type of rural economic system that these workers were to help bring into being was one based on intensive small-scale farming where manure was returned to the soil as fertilizer, where a proper balance of animal, human and plant life was achieved and where both human and animal power were protected against the onslaught of machinery as the price of social justice. Cottage crafts were to be developed as an ancillary activity to agriculture.¹⁷

Forest and vegetation cover had to be maintained to control water run-off from the ground and subsistence farming was to be conservation farming. Gandhi firmly believed that the earth could satisfy the needs of all as long as the needs were kept simple. He commented that 'I have heard many of our countrymen say that we will gain American wealth but avoid its methods. I venture to suggest that such an attempt, if it is made, is foredoomed to failure'.¹⁸

The basic needs of the village were to be met by the village. This meant that villages were also to be responsible for small-scale industries. These industries were not meant to industrialize the

villages but to complete a self-sufficient village-based economy, to provide needed employment and to revive old skills. If things could be made at the local level they should be: Gandhi was against the large-scale production of any commodity that could be produced at the village level without difficulty.¹⁹

Gandhi had always believed that *satyagraha*, his method of non-violent struggle, was only one side of a coin. The other side was what he called the 'constructive programme'. It involved future leaders in the struggle against exploitation (in all its forms) by putting them in contact with the masses while helping to bring about the India of Gandhi's dreams.

The programme, in its original context, dealt mainly with remedying the ills of society²⁰ by providing the kind of work which the poor and unemployed could themselves do in an effort to self-respectingly help themselves.²¹ Through constructive work the nationalists were creating the new society while they were busily trying to dismantle the old. This was to ensure that one group of exploiters were not merely replaced by another group with darker skin.

With independence this programme of social reconstruction was to be stepped up. Gandhi, however, was cut down too soon to guide the movement into the new era. Without him the movement lost much of its strength and vitality. Vinoba Bhave, Gandhi's spiritual heir, did continue the experiments however. In the early 1950s Vinoba walked the length and breadth of India from village to village, first requesting landowners to turn their surplus land over to landless peasants (the *Bhoodan*, or landgift, movement) and later he led the *Gramdan* (village gift) movement whereby whole villages pledged to pool resources and labour for the uplift of all the inhabitants.

Even without the Mahatma's presence some took heed of the call in his 'final will' to take up the constructive programme and devote themselves to *sarvodaya* work among the rural poor. Still others were inspired by the efforts of Vinoba Bhave.

Chapter Three

Beginnings

Sarvodaya Work in Uttarkhand

The Gandhian movement in Uttarkhand in the post-independence era concentrated itself on the three central issues of the organization of women's power, the struggle against the liquor menace and the problem of the forest.¹ *Sarvodaya* workers, inspired by Saralabehn, were active in the region from the early 1940s.

In 1947, a young local, Sunderlal Bahuguna, entered politics on a full-time basis and was soon general secretary of the Tehri branch of the Congress party. Under the inspiration of Mirabehn and Thakkar Bapa, one of Gandhi's chief lieutenants in anti-untouchable work, the politician turned his interests towards constructive work. He set up a hostel for poor students catering especially to the needs of the so-called untouchables or Harijans. His work for Harijan uplift and rural reconstruction continued along with political activities until 1956 when he decided to heed Gandhi's last wishes and leave party politics to work directly with the rural poor. Until she left for Kashmir in 1954, Bahuguna often visited Mirabehn and helped with Hindi translations for her autobiography. After his marriage to Vimala Nautial he travelled to Kashmir to seek Mirabehn's advice and the elderly disciple sketched the original plan for Bahuguna's Navjeevan ('New Life') Ashram which was eventually to double as the Chipko Information Centre. The ashram was sited on a ridge just above the Garhwal hill village of Silyara, close to where Mirabehn had lived.

Bahuguna inspired other idealistic youth, including Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a booking clerk for a transport company in Joshimath, to take up *sarvodaya* work and later to establish local industries. At the time cultivable land on the slopes was limited and the hill population was growing rapidly. Under-employment and poverty were rife and most of the villagers were landless or only marginal landholders. In order to achieve economic uplift for

the poor, various local cooperatives were formed.

Bahuguna started a school at his ashram and organized a cooperative aimed at securing road-building jobs for the locals. Nevertheless he retained the skills of a politician; he could stir crowds to action and explain complex issues to simple isolated villagers. His place was then, as it is now, on the road. In 1960, Vinoba asked him to take his message of self-sufficient village republics (*gram swaraj*) to the Himalayan communities. Following Vinoba's directions, Bahuguna and a group of others walked, village to village, from the borders of Himachal Pradesh to those of Nepal.

In 1963, after seeing many naked hills on his tours, he penned an article for the *Hindustan* pointing out that the environmental condition of the Himalaya could lead to floods on the plains. In time his activities became more closely tied to the questions concerning the use of the forest. A memorial was erected to the people killed in Tehri Garhwal State in 1930, and in 1968, 30 May, the anniversary of the killings, was declared Forest Day. On the following Forest Day, Vinoba Bhawe's representative, D.K. Gupta, visited the site and during the ceremony Bahuguna and other activists took a pledge to protect the forests. A manifesto was issued and its message was taken by the *sarvodaya* workers from village to village to raise the awareness of the local inhabitants. The manifesto declared: 'Since time immemorial, forests have remained the socio-economic basis of our lives. Protection of trees is our main duty and we solicit our birthright to get our basic needs and employment in forests and forest products. To maintain a loving relationship with forests, the basis of our happiness, it is essential that the treasure of the forests be used primarily for the needs of the inhabitants of this region. For this the material used in village industry and other daily needs should be made available to common-folk and small industries should be set up in the vicinity of forest for the processing of raw materials obtained there. Cooperative societies of forest labourers should be established and the contractor system should be done away with.'

During the years between 1965 and 1971, however, Bahuguna, his wife and other Uttarkhand *sarvodaya* workers dedicated themselves to working with the hill women to combat drunkenness. By 1971, five out of the eight districts of Uttarkhand had been declared 'dry'. The experiences of these years allowed

the Bahugunas to see the condition of the people and of the environment at first hand. It gave them the necessary background to be able to undertake the work that would soon be required of them and taught them about the power of people to solve their own problems.

The Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh

The poverty in the hills had led not only to despair and drinking among the men but also to the mass migration of many of the able-bodied males to the plains below in search of jobs. The labouring jobs available as lumbermen for contractors, in construction crews for road builders or as porters for tourists, were few and far between. The towns and cities of the plains held out the promise of work and perhaps financial security.

While many young men had left their homes in the Garhwal Himalaya for employment in the Gangetic plain, Chandi Prasad Bhatt had stayed to witness the growing social problems. Coming into contact with local *sarvodaya* activists, Bhatt decided to take up the challenge of community building. He wanted somehow to break the vicious cycle that had afflicted his community, to find occupational alternatives so that the hill youth could survive with dignity in their own homeland.²

The Indo-China war ensured that the border regions were marked for development. The small town of Gopeshwar was to become the official seat of the newly formed Chamoli district and it buzzed with action as the construction of roads and government offices began. The mountain people, however, gained little from this activity. The construction work went to outside contractors who brought in their own skilled and semi-skilled labourers. The locals became menial workers earning minimal wages and enjoying no security of tenure, even in the most limited sense.

Divided, the labourers were open to easy exploitation by the contractors. Bhatt and his colleagues decided to organize them. In 1962 they formed a labour collective with thirty permanent and 700 temporary members. The Malla Nagpur Cooperative Labour Society Committee requested the Public Works Department to award labour contracts to it instead of to outsiders. They bid for and won several contracts to build sections of road, and being non-exploitative the Committee was able to pay double the wages given by contractors.

The organizers decided to also branch into village industries focusing on carpentry and metal work. With the help of the Gandhian Khadi and Village Industries Commission they set up a workshop for making wooden and iron farm implements to meet the local demand. Vested interests saw the Committee as a threat and soon procedural hurdles were placed in its way. Corrupt financial pressure, in the form of the granting of only non-profitable contracts, was applied to the Cooperative. The organization found itself left with only two options if it was to stay in business – to reduce the wages of workers or pay bribe money to officials. The Committee, not surprisingly, could do neither so it decided to abandon its construction activities and concentrate on forest-based work. In 1964, the Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh (Dashauli – the administrative unit around Gopeshwar Village Self Rule Society) was founded with the aim of starting village industries based on the natural resources of the forests.

Again a successful start was made. The availability of timber was through the auction of forest lots by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department. The highest bid acquired the resource. Although the DGSS had no capital of its own it decided to enter the fray. With the goodwill and trust of people it had earned during its earlier incarnation, through interest-free loans from the community and through donations, the capital for a bid was raised.

A contract was won, profits were made and the workers received a far healthier wage than they could have under an outside contractor. By 1968, four sizeable contracts had been secured and membership had increased to in excess of 200 permanent members. This success was again hurting well-entrenched vested interests which decided to destroy the upstart Sangh. Contractors bid high, beyond the value of the wood they were to obtain, and then made up the difference by illegal tree-felling. A Gandhian organization, naturally, could not follow suit. The Sangh protested and turned to the collection of medicinal herbs from the mountains to ensure the livelihood of the workers.

The locals were efficient at finding the plants but the real profit went to the middlemen who marketed the herbs to the drug manufacturers on the plains. A survey of the wholesale markets by the Sangh in 1969 revealed the extent to which it was being disadvantaged. The villagers asked higher prices for the herbs, the contractors refused, assuming that eventually the needy villagers would be brought to heel. The Sangh then took up direct

marketing, taking the herbs to the market in Delhi, the Punjab and even Bombay. Work was ensured and with the cutting out of the exploitative middlemen some badly needed income was provided for 1000 villagers for a period of three years.

During the 1970 monsoon rains, disastrous flooding of the Alaknanda river and its tributaries caused massive damage to stock and property as well as terrible loss of life. *Sarvodaya* workers organized relief operations and slowly the connection between deforestation and the destruction became increasingly obvious. Nevertheless, at this stage, it was realized that the economic viability of local ventures meant that they had to be centred on forest resources. The *sarvodaya* activists of Uttarkhand decided that the time had come to set up small resin and turpentine factories processing *lisa*, the sap of the *chir*-pine. Various Gram Swarajya Sanghs set up eight such factories. One was organized by the DGSS at Gopeshwar.

The distribution of *lisa* was in the hands of the Forest Department and most of the supply was earmarked for the huge Indian Rosin and Turpentine Factory in Bareilly on the plains. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission again helped fund these ventures but the Forest Department was not quite as forthcoming. It only supplied *lisa* to five of the units and even this allocation to the fortunate plants was at a rate thirty per cent higher than that charged to the Bareilly factory in which the Government had a large financial interest. Further, the smaller units received only enough *lisa* to keep them operating for three or four months of the year. The plants which received no *lisa* allocation had to buy at higher prices on the open market.

The discriminatory policies operating in all the areas in which organized village self-sufficiency was being attempted led to widespread dissatisfaction among the local population. In October 1971, villagers demonstrated at Gopeshwar against these policies. They demanded an end to the contractor system, restoration of their ancient forest rights and an equitable supply of *lisa*. Despite the protests nothing changed.

During the following year Bahuguna toured the countryside explaining the injustices and a frustrated Bhatt, with the DGSS plant idle for the past eight months because of a lack of raw material, visited the State capital of Lucknow and Delhi with the grievances of the people. Bahuguna's many contacts and experience as a publicist and journalist opened doors to the world

of the mass media. In November 1972, two large daily newspapers carried reports of the work of the DGSS and the hardships it faced as a result of vested commercial interests and a discriminatory forest policy.³

A campaign of demonstrations was launched. On the site of the 1930 martyrdom of the seventeen forest-dwelling protesters, a rally was held on 11 December 1972. *Sarvodaya* workers explained the exploitative situation with regard to the forest and its produce to the villagers. Demonstrations at Uttarkashi and Gopeshwar followed. The movement was now consciously being taken to the masses in the Garhwal region.

The organizational base of the future Chipko movement had been established by these actions and its rapid spread was ensured by grass-roots efforts of the *sarvodaya* activists and the public awareness that developed as a consequence. As some analysts have pointed out, the Chipko movement is the expression of an old social consciousness in a new context.⁴ That new context was firmly in place by the beginning of 1973.

Chapter Four

The Birth of Chipko

The political unrest in the Garhwali villages that was to flower into the Chipko andolan was centred around economic considerations. The demands were for the cessation of forest-exploiting contracts to outsiders, for the payment of a guaranteed minimum wage to forest labourers, for the protection of ancient village forest rights and the provision of materials to small-scale local industries at concessional rates.

The *sarvodaya* workers had seen the effect of bare hills and experienced the consequences of floods. They knew that the forests were vitally important ecologically but in the late 60s and early 70s even the protection of forests was seen primarily as a narrowly defined economic necessity. Although now he has become an ardent environmentalist of the deep ecology school, in 1967 even Bahuguna was arguing that as forests were the basis for a viable economy in the hills, the people had to be awakened to a sense of responsibility for their protection. The way to do this, he claimed, was to entrust local cooperative societies with the task of handling all forest produce, cutting out the middleman. He called for more forest industry to bring prosperity to the hills.¹

This is exactly what the DGSS and other cooperatives were attempting to do.

The Simon Company and the Mandal Forest Action²

The *lisa* factory of the DGSS was idle and the small unit making wooden implements had not had the raw materials for production for a long time. Now the State Forest Department denied the usual quota of ash trees to the small woodcraft unit. Ash wood was the traditional material for making agricultural implements as it was light and strong. These qualities also made it ideal for the manufacture of sporting goods. If their own needs could be met the villagers did not mind the allocation of wood to sports good manufacturers – in fact their own unit could possibly have benefited by cutting the logs to smaller sizes prior to shipment to

the plains.

This happy scenario was not to be, however. The Forest Department not only refused ash trees to the DGSS but allotted ash trees from the Mandal forest, only thirteen kilometres from Gopeshwar, to the Simon Company, a manufacturer of sporting goods from far-off Allahabad. This was too much for the Sangh. It decided to fight.

In March 1973, as the agents of the Simon Company arrived to supervise the felling of trees, the Sangh offices became the scene of daily war councils. And the events of those days have become the stuff of legend.

According to one version, at one of the meetings of the activists, after it had been decided to prevent the Company from felling even a single tree, the discussion turned to tactics. After some debate Chandi Prasad Bhatt, in a fit of inspiration, announced, 'Let them know that we will not allow the felling of ash trees. When they aim their axes upon them, we will embrace the trees'.³

In another version, during the discussion of plans, an elderly villager stood up and said, 'When a leopard attacks a child the mother takes his onslaughts on her own body.' After a brief silence, another shouted, 'Yes that is it, we'll hug the trees when Simon's agent comes to axe them'.⁴ Whichever version is closer to historical fact, on that day, 27 March, the Chipko andolan was born.

Three days later a public meeting was held in the courtyard of the Sangh office to decide on the form the direct action would take. Besides DGSS workers, another thirty people were present. They included headmen of surrounding villages, leaders of various political parties, journalists and, by coincidence, the agents of the Simon Company who were staying at the local guest house. In good Gandhian tradition, the DGSS was doing nothing in secret (after all Gandhi had claimed that 'I have come to regard secrecy as a sin more especially in politics'.⁵). Many suggestions were put forward, ranging from preventing the Company workers from entering the forest, through lying in front of the trucks as they were about to remove the felled trees, to beating the Company at its own game by felling and removing the trees themselves or even burning the trees so that the Company could not use them.

Finally Chandi Prasad Bhatt declared, 'Our aim is not to destroy the trees but to save them. And we will not accomplish this by burning them or felling them ourselves. And what purpose will it

serve to block the truck's path once the trees are felled? Is it not possible that when these people go to cut them, we cling to the trees and dare them to let their axes fall on our backs?'⁶ The meeting enthusiastically endorsed the idea and drafted a resolution explaining the proposed action, the reasons for it and its objectives. It was sent to Government and Forestry Department officials.

Bhatt was called to Lucknow for consultations and invited to a Government-organized five-day seminar on hill development. He returned to find that the ten ash and twenty-two other trees in question had been branded and the axemen were ready to fell them. On 24 April, as the scene of activity shifted to the Mandal forest, 100 people gathered for further discussions. The lumbermen were already in the forest awaiting their masters. When the agents arrived with their final permits from the Forest Department in Gopeshwar, they were startled by the large gathering.

The trees had already been paid for but it was obvious that felling could not proceed in the face of a people united and pledged to direct action. The Government offered the DGSS one ash tree if the Company could cut its quota. When this proposal was turned down more trees were offered. Eventually the number stood at ten (twice the amount the Sangh had originally requested) but still the Chipko activists refused to negotiate.

On 2 May another meeting was held, this time under the auspices of the Uttarkhand Sarvodaya Mandal. The DGSS activists, now speaking from a position of strength and new-found confidence, demanded the inclusion of local people in the administration and management of the forest and insisted that small and cottage hill industries be given priority in the allocation of forest resources. Bahuguna, Uttarkhand's chief *sarvodaya* worker, praised the resolve of the people and hailed Chipko as an extension of Gandhi's concept of love and non-violence. He also pointed out, however, that the forests had to be protected from poaching and wasteful exploitation by the villagers themselves. On the day following the meeting, with folk singer Ghanshyam Sailani and others, Bahuguna set out to take this message to the villages.

A new Divisional Forest Officer had been appointed to the district. Narendra Singh Negi had a reputation for fairness and understanding (perhaps that is why he was sent to Gopeshwar) and he put out some conciliatory feelers to the DGSS. He informed

Bhatt that the Simon Company's permit for trees from the Mandal forest was being cancelled and that they would be given to the DGSS instead. The Company was now to receive its trees from the Phata forest eighty kilometres north-west of Gopeshwar.

This could no longer satisfy the activists; their aims had widened. The issue was no longer just the rights of the DGSS but the forest rights of all the hill communities in the region. It was not enough to protect the trees in one place at the expense of another.

Bhatt reported on the Forest Department's intentions to *sarvodaya* workers from Phata. The trees had already been marked and were due for felling on 24 June. At a large meeting in Phata on that day, again the determination to hug the trees was enthusiastically expressed, and again Simon Company agents witnessed the preparations. Guards were posted on the roads to the forest to warn of the arrival of the Company's axemen. The vigilance was maintained and a stalemate ensued. After three days, realizing that it would be impossible to move into the forest and work unhindered, the Simon agents returned to Gopeshwar and complained to forest officials. They were told that as their permit was valid for six months they should wait until the unrest had subsided.

For two months Sunderlal Bahuguna had been undertaking a *padayatra* (footmarch) between Gopeshwar and the Okimath area to publicize the need to save the trees and expound the philosophy of non-violent direct action. Now the agents of the Simon Company started their own counter *padayatras*. They went from village to village explaining that they had paid for the trees, and added that the Chipko activists were trouble makers merely after bribes from the Company and that association with them could lead to the villagers ending up in gaol. Meetings and counter meetings followed. On 22 December, at Trijugarayan, the last village on the road north, another large public meeting was held. The villagers had invited the Company's agents to present their case. After listening to all the arguments, a resolution to take Chipko action was put to the vote. All hands went up, the agents had to stand aside.

The contractors were clever and determined and their repertoire of means did not end at talk. As the meeting broke up, the word spread that a film would be screened that night at Guptakashi, twelve kilometres south of Phata. The film failed to materialize and by the time the villagers returned to their homes in the

morning axemen were already at work. As the hastily assembled crowd descended, the workmen fled. Five trees lay on the ground as witness to the lapse in vigilance.

The villagers stood watch over the felled trees and redoubled efforts to guard the forest. On 26 December the Company's agents tried to reenter the forest from a different direction. They retreated when confronted by the Chipko activists. More demonstrations and rallies followed until on 31 December the Company's permit expired.

The Movement Spreads⁷

While Chandi Prasad Bhatt had been organizing the direct action at Mandal and preparing for other local confrontations, Sunderlal Bahuguna became the messenger for the diverse movement. Communications were not good in the hills but as a follower of Gandhi, and especially Vinoba, he walked with the news of what was happening. He was to become the cement in the identity-building process for the *andolan*. Under Saralabehn's leadership the Uttarkhand Sarvodaya Mandal decided to make forest preservation one of its key areas of work. The various forces at work in the Chipko *andolan* were now linked in a recognizable way.

During the lull in the Phata battle, on 25 October, Bahuguna set out on a 120-day *padayatra* in the hill districts. His previous excursion had been a relatively low-key affair but gradually, as young people showed a desire to participate, the *yatras* were transformed into veritable rallies. The youth he inspired during this tour proposed an even more ambitious one for the coming year – and many more were to follow.

In the middle of 1973, as Chipko activism took root, the Forest Department ended its discriminatory policies on the distribution of *lisa*. If it was hoped the gesture would take the wind out of the *andolan's* sails, it was a failure. And the floods of 1973 and ensuing landslides were yet another reminder that considerations other than the purely economic would have to be taken very seriously when the exploitation of forests was considered.

During the first weeks of November 1973 the seeds of the next confrontation were sown. The list of forests to be auctioned in the following year was announced. One forest, near the village of Reni, was high in the catchment area of the Alaknanda and its

tributaries. If it disappeared the floods and landslides of 1970 would be repeated. The auction was set for January 1974 but by then Chandi Prasad Bhatt had made up his mind to save the forest. Plans to survey the catchment area and mobilize the villagers around Reni for action were drawn up.

Women Join the Struggle at Reni Forest⁸

The Chipko activists, led by Bhatt, mounted an intensive campaign among the villages around the Reni forest. They were aided in this work by Communist Party of India activists who had gained some influence in the area. The cooperation worked well in the interests of this forest. On some future occasions tensions were to develop – the means of the Marxists and those of the *satyagrahis* on occasion were to prove fundamentally different at their philosophical cores.

During the preparatory work in the villages the activists would sometimes play the devil's advocate in order to get the villagers themselves to realize what was happening. In one village near the Reni forest Bhatt reminded the inhabitants of the connection between deforestation and landslides, a connection these villagers knew only too well. They had, however, already helped to brand the 2451 trees earmarked for felling and had been paid for their labour. Bhatt told them that they might as well get up and fell the trees immediately. There were loud protests, and when asked why they had carried out the necessary preparatory work the villagers answered that they did what the Government had paid them to do. What other action was open to them, they inquired. When asked if they would then cut the trees if the Government paid them, the villagers answered no, but they could not stop the Government if it wanted to cut the forest.

Bhatt then explained that it was possible to save the forest. It had been done at Mandal and Phata. The trees could be saved by hugging them. Although the task was daunting – the forest was far larger than any where axemen had previously been challenged – the notion that perhaps it could be done gradually sank in. The women sitting at the rear of the meeting at first giggled at the word 'chipko' that was so often used, but they listened keenly: they were after all the chief victims of deforestation, having to trudge ever further for fuel and fodder as the trees vanished. And soon they would become the front-line soldiers of the andolan.

Bhatt went to Dehradun to plead with forest officials to cancel the auctions, to warn the bidding contractors that they would face opposition from the local people and to publicize the issue. Although in a last minute effort to stop the auction, he stood and pleaded at the entrance of the town hall where the bidding was to take place, the forest was sold.

Small meetings were held and the people organized in preparation for a mass demonstration at Reni on 15 March. The demonstration resembled a colourful folk festival with a procession being led by the temple musicians of Lata village. The demands of the villagers were read out and slogans shouted. Bhatt stayed in the main town of the region, Joshimath, for two more days. No move was made by the contractor, but within one day of his departure, on 18 March, their well-provisioned labourers arrived in town.

Forest officials asked to talk to Chandi Prasad Bhatt in Gopeshwar on the 26th. They kept him busy for the day. It had also been announced that compensation was to be paid to all those who had had land appropriated by the army following the Chinese invasion, and to make up for lost trade following the closure of the border. The payments were to be made in Chamoi on 26 March.

While the men from Malari, Reni and Lata villages were thus absent, the axemen moved into the forest. The collusive plan of the Government and contractors had been executed brilliantly, but there was one variable they had overlooked. The busloads of labourers, with their tin windows drawn, had stopped short of Reni village and the workmen took a small trail, that did not go through Reni, into the forest. They were, however, spotted by a small girl who immediately ran to inform Gaura Devi, the head of the local women's circle.

Gaura Devi, a child widow, now in her fifties, quickly gathered some others and twenty-seven women and little girls rushed after the labourers. Some of the men were rude to the women. One, armed with a gun, tried to frighten them. The matronly Gaura Devi pushed herself forward, in front of the gun, and challenged the man to shoot her instead of cutting the trees. She compared the forest with her mother's home. Most of the labourers were also from the hill regions and their shame at having to fight with women and their instinctive understanding of the problems Gaura Devi was explaining to them helped them to decide to withdraw.

The womenfolk stood guard at the path leading to the forest all

night. The men returned the following morning. For four days the villagers stood vigil. The movement's workers camped close to the labourers. They talked to the workers, set them at ease and told them of the need for such actions. On 31 March the biggest demonstration the hills had ever seen was held. The trees of the Reni forest had been saved.

End of the First Phase⁹

On 25 May 1974, the anniversary of the birth of Shri Dev Suman (an inspirational Gandhian freedom fighter of Tehri Garhwal State, who died in prison in 1944), and just two months after the victory of Reni, Bahuguna and several young people started out on the historic Uttarkhand traversing *padayatra*. The marchers walked from village to village from Askot, on the border of Nepal in the east, to Arakot, on the Himachal Pradesh border in the west. They were accompanied by musicians and singers. They entered each new village shouting slogans and singing songs stressing the protection of the forests. The gatherings of curious villagers were asked to attend an evening meeting where the visitors told them of the *andolan* and its message. The following morning, with a letter of introduction from the village headman, they would start off for a new destination. This process was repeated daily for forty-four days. Many such *padayatras* were held – some organized by students, still others by women – and often they called at areas affected by floods and landslides. Sunderlal Bahuguna himself walked 4,200 kilometres between 1973-75 on these tours.

In August 1974, Uttarkhand Sarvodaya Mandal members gathered in Garur in Almora district and demanded a ban on green felling in the catchment areas and a stop to excessive resin tapping which was ruining the pine forests. They demanded an end to the exploitative contractor system and a fair minimum wage for forest labourers. Eventually the Chipko activists made direct contact with the labourers to learn more about the conditions they worked under so they could help them to obtain a better deal.

The action moved to the auction sites where forests were awarded to the highest bidding contractor.¹⁰ At many of these protests Garhwali folk poet Ghanshyam Sailani, the minstrel of many *padayatras*, was present. His inspiring songs helped attract crowds to the demonstrations. At one such demonstration, some

youths entered the auction hall, took over the microphone and announced the cancellation of the auction.

Demonstrations were held against forest auctions in Dehradun, Nainital, Kotdwara, Uttarkashi and Tehri. During the Uttarkashi auction on 3 October, Bahuguna entered the auction hall and made an impassioned plea for the halting of proceedings. When his appeal went unheeded, he retired to the neighbouring Hanuman temple to undergo the penance of an indefinite fast to protest the exploitation of labourers and the indiscriminate felling of trees by contractors in Uttarkhand.¹¹

The pressure on the Forest Department was steadily mounting. Following the Reni struggle, the U.P. Government appointed an official committee, headed by botanist Dr Virendra Kumar, to inquire into the validity of the demands of the Chipko movement. Chandi Prasad Bhatt was a member of this committee. Its work was to be done within two months; in the end it took two years and vindicated the Chipko stand. The agitation at the forest auctions, led the Chief Minister, following discussions with Bahuguna, to set up another committee to undertake a comprehensive study of forest abuse in the entire region. A moratorium on the auction of forests was imposed until this (the Swaminathan) committee brought out its report.¹²

It now appeared that the Government was serious about investigating the ecological sensitivity of the hill regions and about changing the exploitative contractor system. A Forest Corporation was formed by the State Government to commence undertaking felling operations directly without the auction of forest trees to outside contractors. Raw materials were made more readily available to small-scale industries and smaller forest lots were auctioned so that local industries had a better chance of competing where the Forest Corporation had not taken over. In November, minimum wage legislation was also enacted and other welfare measures to improve the lot of forest labourers were implemented.

With these victories the cooperatives flourished. The first phase of activism had come to a close. Nineteen-seventy-five was a relatively peaceful year in the Garhwal and Kumaon hills.

REPRINTED
FROM

Peace News

5 Caledonian Road
London N1 9DX, England

July 1996

Mexico

Protests heat up in Tabasco

A delegation of environmental, human rights, and nonviolent peacemaking groups from the US, Germany, France and Mexico has just completed a visit to Tabasco, Mexico, where the people are struggling nonviolently against both local politicians and multinational oil companies. DAVID HARTSOUGH reports.

There is a significant nonviolent movement going on in Tabasco, Mexico. It is a struggle for survival of the people who live in the area of the Pemex oil installations. Thousands of peasants and fisherfolk whose lands, lagoons and lakes have been contaminated or destroyed by the oil installations are involved in a long-term nonviolent campaign.

The campaign began in 1994 after election results for governor were rigged in favour of the ruling PRI party. At the time Governor Madrazo was to be inaugurated, there was a sit-in at the governor's building which lasted for weeks and remained nonviolent despite a great deal of violent provocation.

Later thousands marched to Mexico City (about 1,000 kms) to continue their demands for free and democratic elections. While they

were in Mexico City, a truck appeared with 14 boxes of documents proving that the PRI had spent \$70 million on the election for governor in Tabasco (a state of about two million inhabitants). Spending \$250 per vote is illegal and also raised questions about where the PRI had got all this money.

Next came the campaign of peaceful civil resistance in which hundreds of campesinos and fisherfolk who live near the oil installations in Tabasco blockaded access to the oil installations for weeks. They demanded that Pemex drill no more oil wells until they paid compensation to the people whose land and livelihood has been severely affected or destroyed by the oil installations.

They organised 12 hour shifts to keep the installations blockaded around the clock. Over 100 people were arrested and held in prison with charges which could have brought each of them over 40 years in prison. The movement demanded that they all be released without charges and that the government seriously consider their demands or else they would resume their campaign of civil resistance occupying the oil wells. After more than a month in prison, and hours before the deadline, all the prisoners were released without charges. They now demand that the seriously address their other demands.

On 17 March there was a march of about

30,000 people — campesinos, fisherfolk, or "grassroots" people of all ages from all over Tabasco to the central square in Villahermosa to show their support and commitment continue this struggle. For them the outcome means life or death for their families as well as life or death for their communities and the planet. They are prepared to research, educate, go on hunger strikes, and fill the jails necessary, to expose the lies of the government about the gross violations of human rights and the extent of the environmental destruction in their communities.

Peaceworkers in the USA are hoping to organise more delegations to Tabasco and find specialists who can spend some time working with local human rights, health, and environmental groups there. We are also looking for people who could accompany the communities in Tabasco during their campaigns of peaceful civil resistance.

Contact: Peaceworkers, 721 Shrader St, San Francisco, CA 94117 (email peaceworkers@igc.apc.org).

Global Exchange, 2017 Mission St, San Francisco CA 94110 (email globalexch@igc.apc.org).

Movimiento Ciudadano por la Democracia Prosperidad 31, Col Escandon, CP 11800, Mexico DF, Mexico (email mdddf@laneta.apc.org).

The Struggle for Life and the Environment in Tabasco Mexico

By David Hartsough and Joe McIntire

In February we visited Tabasco, the second richest state in Mexico in terms of its oil production. However, it is one of Mexico's poorest states in quality of life for its people. We were hosted by members of SERPAJ - Service, Peace and Justice - and visited Villahermosa, Ciudad Pemex, and many other small communities around Comalcalco. Everywhere we went we met campesinos, whose lives had been ruined by the greed of Pemex-Tabasco - the government owned oil company that produces almost 40% of Mexico's oil.

We left Tabasco with a feeling of sadness about the situation, but also encouraged by the courageous people there who are continuing to struggle nonviolently in a very difficult situation. We now have a better understanding of the chain of circumstances that is affecting the situation of the inhabitants of Tabasco, in particular the Chontal people, and have a few ideas how concerned people and groups might be able to help in the future.

The great majority of the folks we met seemed empowered by their solidarity with one another and what we perceived as a very firm commitment to active nonviolence. However, they have not achieved much success in their struggle so far. All recounted critical economic problems including the lack of fixed employment options, the loss of land, and drastic drops in cocoa and coconut productivity. The generalized poverty translates to low attendance of children in primary schools, not even funds for notebooks and pencils, insufficient or absence of secondary schools, unattended health problems (mostly nutritional and respiratory diseases), non-potable water supplies, and miserable homes. People seemed to be stumbling from one day of misery to the next, trying desperately to hold on to their sense of self-worth as they are enveloped in the cruel whirl of neoliberal economic policies.

Tabasco, once a very active fishing, coconut and cocoa producing "paradise" state, is now absolutely dominated by Pemex oil - and the environmental degradation is truly astounding. Everywhere we heard, **"The more oil they take out of Tabasco, the poorer we become."** It is tragic that in one of the richest places of the world in terms of natural resources, the people are unbelievably poor. The people of Tabasco are unwillingly making a very great sacrifice in order that the north American people can drive around in their cars.

The environmental degradation of Tabasco was in evidence everywhere. Formerly rich fisheries had been destroyed. Crops, pastures, and trees were suffering from acid rain caused by burn offs of refinery by-products. Local peasants told of massive spills of crude oil from pipe lines and from containment tanks. Great concern was expressed as well about the increased incidence of leukemias and cancers. It was obvious to even the casual visitor that the countryside was dotted with enormous and noisy oil pumping stations. Land has been taken from the campesinos and rendered unusable for crops because of the complex grid of oil pipe lines and valve stations. The farmers we met told of the inadequate compensation they have received from this take over. They feel they have little redress from the government or the Pemex oil company.

The local people spoke to us of their fear of many gas explosions that have plagued their lives. In one explosion at Las Islas over 100 people were killed. The environmental degradation caused by Pemex in Tabasco is some of the worst we have ever seen. Major above ground gas leaks have been left unattended. Vast extensions of lands have been left fallow because of salt infiltrations. One town we visited had lost its potable water two years ago when Pemex contaminated their wells. The people are still without clean water. The debris of leftover rig drilling operations are an eyesore throughout the land. Pemex has given lip service to treating the leftover sludge contamination. We saw first hand how "cleaned" sites were simply cosmetically treated with a covering of dirt.

Pemex and the state government seem untouchable. Public relations officers run complaints around in circles and then turn a deaf ear to the complaints. "Negotiations" for compensations have been one-sided. The Governor of Tabasco, Roberto Madrazo, spent \$70 million dollars on his re-election campaign! It is commonly accepted that the campaign funds came from Pemex, theft and drug-traffickers. As far as the authorities are concerned, the problems affecting the people and the environment are at "acceptable" levels. It's strange that a resource as valuable as oil, decreed "absolute property of the people" is destroying the environment and lives of so many of its "owners".

SERPAP has four main lines of work in Tabasco: human rights, democratization, environmental issues, and empowerment of local communities to change the situation. Serpaj is committed to developing civil resistance strategies and to working nonviolently. Notwithstanding stories of punitive reprisals, we were amazed at how concepts of active nonviolence have been broadly accepted in the peasant communities where, although they consider themselves "hot-tempered", the Tabascan peasants have traditionally felt inferior to and intimidated by the dominating social structure imposed on them by the authorities and the "outsiders". This commitment to active nonviolence is due in large part to the good work initiated by Raphael Landerreche and others in SERPAJ. People told of incidents of demonstrations, camp-outs, lobbying politicians, negotiating, peace walks, sit-down strikes blocking transit to installations, major hunger strikes, and jail terms. Everyone agreed that these methods had indeed avoided beatings and killings by the authorities! They hope the government will begin to hear their cries of anguish and their need and demand for change.

How can we help?

In terms of how the international community might help we heard several requests that could be classified in the following groups:

- a) Help in the diffusion of information - both nationally and internationally to mount more pressure on PEMEX to provide compensation for past damages and to STOP contaminating the land and water. The Tabascans are very aware that their cause is off the map of national and international public opinion.
- b) Supporting the civil resistance/active nonviolence movement - specifically through training in negotiation skills and support for their work in training in active nonviolence to groups throughout Tabasco.
- c) Financial support to fund development/education projects - in particular we were impressed with projects promoting alternative economic/commercial ventures, for example training and promotion of organic production of cacao.

There was interest expressed in internationals being present in Tabasco for the following purposes:

- to document and convey to the rest of the world the human rights abuses being heaped on the people of Tabasco in the name of "progress".
- through the internet, to update concerned people around the world about the situation in Tabasco and to alert them to specific ways they could be helpful. There are strategy sessions once a month among the various groups in Tabasco. The results of these meetings, action plans, opportunities for international presence, etc. could be shared through the internet.
- for concerned internationals to come to observe and be present as a symbol of international public opinion and conscience during periods of civilian peaceful resistance, and to report to the rest of the world what they see. Many feel that after the elections in July may be a time when there will again be a period of large-scale civilian peaceful resistance in Tabasco.

The contrast between Chiapas where there are so many concerned internationals present and Tabasco where there are almost no concerned internationals present was striking. Hopefully it is not true that the only means to get international attention is through use of the gun. We hope that concerned people in the international community can respond to the call of the people of Tabasco and support their civilian peaceful resistance struggle and their just and peaceful demands for a chance to live their lives in dignity and not be destroyed by the PEMEX oil company.

David Hartsough is the director of Peaceworkers and is a member of San Francisco Friends Meeting and Joe McIntire is a volunteer with SIPAZ. Both have participated in many peacemaking projects and nonviolent movements around the world over many years.

For more information or if you would like to support the nonviolent struggle in Tabasco and/or participate in a short term delegation as an international observer during periods of active nonviolent struggle, contact

PEACEWORKERS 721 Shrader St., San Francisco, CA 94117 em
Peaceworkers@igc.apc.org or SIPAZ International Service for Peace in
Chiapas, Mexico E-mail sipaz@laneta.apc.org
<http://www.nonviolence.org/sipaz>

A Campaign of Peaceful Civil Resistance in Tabasco Mexico
by David Hartsough

There is a very significant nonviolent movement going on in Tabasco, Mexico. It is a struggle for survival of the people who live in the area of the Pemex oil installations, for justice, for democracy, and for saving the environment. Thousands of peasants and fishermen whose lands, lagoons and lakes have been contaminated or destroyed by the oil installations, and other concerned citizens are involved in a long term nonviolent campaign which they call "Resistencia Civil Pacifica." They are committed to stand up for their rights.

There have been several parts of this campaign. One part is political. The election for Governor in 1994 was stolen by the PRI (the ruling party) and the PRI declared its candidate for Governor, Roberto Madrazo, the winner. Many of the people who had voted for the PRD (Partido de la Revolucion Democratica)- the progressive party, and Lopez Obrador for their Governor and who believed their candidate had won, refused to remain silent in the face of this fraudulent election. At the time Madrazo was to be inaugurated, they had a sit-in lasting for weeks surrounding the government building where the governor was to be inaugurated. They remained nonviolent even in the face of a great deal of violent provocation.

Later thousands marched to Mexico City (about 1000 kilometers) to continue their demands for free and democratic elections. Miraculously, while they were in Mexico City, a truck load with 14 boxes of original documents appeared showing that the PRI had spent \$70 million on the election for Governor in Tabasco, a state of about two million inhabitants. (This was more than President Clinton spent for his Presidential Campaign in the entire United States.) The PRI(ruling party) had spent about \$250 per vote which was illegal under the Mexican constitution. This also raises questions about where the PRI got all this money - perhaps illegal drug money?

Next came the campaign of peaceful civil resistance in which hundreds of campesinos and fishermen who live near the oil installations in Tabasco blockaded access to the oil installations for weeks. They demanded that Pemex drill no more oil wells until they paid compensation to the campesinos and fishermen whose land and livelihood has been severely affected or destroyed by the oil installations.

They organized twelve hour shifts to keep the installations blockaded around the clock. Over 100 people were arrested and held in prison with charges which could have brought each of them over 40 years in prison. The movement demanded that they all be released without charges and that the government seriously consider the demands or they would resume their campaign of civil resistance occupying the oil wells. After more than a month in prison and hours before the deadline, all the prisoners were released without charges. They are now demanding that the government show its seriousness in addressing their other demands.

Sunday, March 17 there was a march of about 30,000 people - campesinos, fishermen, and "grass roots" people of all ages from all over Tabasco to the central square in Villahermosa to show their support and

commitment to continue this struggle. For them the outcome of this struggle means life or death for their families as well as life or death for their communities and the planet. They are prepared to research, educate, go on hunger strikes, and fill the jails if necessary, to expose the lies of the government about the gross violations of human rights and the extent of the environmental destruction in their communities and to attain justice. They have now begun another campaign of civilian peaceful resistance at the oil wells to assure that their demands are heard.

Serpaj Tabasco (Servicio, Paz y Justicia or Service, Peace and Justice) part of the network of groups in Latin America committed to working for peace and justice through nonviolent means, is working closely with this nonviolent movement in Tabasco.

They are:

- *offering nonviolent training workshops to strengthen the understanding of nonviolent struggle by the people involved in this movement - for both leaders and grass roots communities in this campaign. The PRD leadership is very committed to Resistencia Civil Pacifica.

- *working with the local environmental and human rights groups to develop support for the campaign of civil resistance to get Pemex to clean up its act and reimburse peasants for the destruction of their lands and livelihood and commit to working in an environmentally conscious way to save the earth and respect the human rights of the people and of planet.

- *supporting the development of an alternative economy through developing cooperative food stores so the campesinos do not have to be dependent on and support the corrupt power structure.

They are also interested in developing a training program for community leaders on nonviolence, the environment and economic survival.

A delegation of environmental, human rights, and nonviolent peacemaking groups from the US, Germany, France and Mexico just completed a visit to Tabasco and hope to develop support in other parts of the world for this important nonviolent struggle in Tabasco.

Peaceworkers is raising money to support this important nonviolent struggle in Tabasco. Contact Global Exchange at 2017 Mission St, San Francisco, CA 94110 email globalexch@igc.apc.org or the Movimiento Ciudadano por la Democracia at Prosperidad 31, Col. Escandon, CP 11800, Mexico, DF, Mexico email mdddf@laneta.apc.org to receive an in depth report on our trip to Tabasco, for more information, or to otherwise get involved in or support this important struggle.

We hope to organize delegations to visit Tabasco, find specialists who can spend some time working with local human rights, health, and environmental groups in Tabasco and people who could go to accompany the communities in Tabasco during their campaigns of peaceful civil resistance.

David Hartsough is the Director of Peaceworkers based in San Francisco and one of the initiators of this delegation to Tabasco. **PEACEWORKERS** 721 Shrader St., San Francisco, CA 94117 em: Peaceworkers@igc.apc.org.

BY JO CLARE HARTSIG AND WALTER WINK

Textbooks tell the "Great History" of societies: their wars, rulers, momentous events. But there is another history that often is ignored and finally, lost: the "Little History" made by the common people, the dissidents, the people on the margins. Up to the last few decades, almost all nonviolent actions belonged to the Little History. Much of the story of those actions has been irretrievably lost. "Nonviolence in the Arena" seeks to save such stories before they are forgotten. You know them, as perhaps no one else does. Send them to: Stories, Fellowship, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960.

Hot Stuff in Tabasco

"In Chiapas, a sector of the indigenous population opted for armed resistance. In Tabasco, we're struggling with the conviction that there is another way to transform the country."

That is the conviction of Rafael Landerreche, a founding member of SERPAJ (Mexico), who has been instrumental in organizing a remarkable movement which has actively opposed exploitation and corruption in Tabasco State since election fraud was exposed there in November, 1994. This movement, which is part political,

part environmental, has faced down violence, mass arrests, and disinformation campaigns designed to thwart its confrontation with Pemex, the national oil company and PRI, the ruling party of Mexico. Yet despite all that, 30,000 farmers and fishermen answered its call for a nonviolent march on the state capital of Villahermosa in March of this year.

The movement was first organized by Manuel Lopez Obrador, the PRD (opposition party) candidate for governor of Tabasco, when he realized that the PRI candidate had stolen the election through a massive purchasing of votes. Lopez Obrador appealed to the people of Tabasco to protest, calling for a new round of elections. As there had already been nearly a decade of consciousness-raising work carried out by the Catholic church and other groups, people were ready. Fraud was no longer something they accepted to bear in silence.

While the movement arose almost spontaneously, it quickly developed a highly disciplined four-stage plan to guide its direction. The first stage was dialogue: the PRD called for the government to mediate the conflict. PRD members did not, however, expect cooperation—and were not surprised when they did not receive it. So they began the second stage: widespread civil disobedience. Plants belonging to Pemex—a notorious polluter—were blockaded around the clock by protesters all over Tabasco.

There were immediate reprisals. "The police operation in Centla was frightening and disproportionate, truly an act of intimidation," Landerreche recalled. "There were about thirty federal highway patrols, many state federal police, three helicopters of the General Police of the Republic, three army trucks—to dislodge a group of fifteen, of which half were at least sixty-five years old!" However, many of the protesters were graduates of Serpaj nonviolence trainings, and they were unmoved by the threat. Eighty protesters from two municipalities were arrested, but the people persevered.

"Some Chontal people from Centla started to arrive at the guards' posts with their small backpacks and their change of clothes," Landerreche reminisced proudly. "A few days later the state police's buses arrived. As soon as they got there, all the indigenous people, with their packs, lined up behind the buses so the police could arrest them. Then the police said, 'We haven't come for you.' And the people said, 'Well, we're

continued on page 15



Raphael Landerreche (left) and farmers inspecting a field destroyed by oil well pollution. Photo: David Hartsough

PEACEMARKERS • JULY/AUGUST 1996

FROM : PEACEMARKERS

FX NO. : 4157510302

Jan. 22 2002 12:04PM F3

ready when you want us.' After this moment, the local government called us back to restart the dialogue."

In the third stage of the resistance, which occurred when the gubernatorial inauguration was scheduled, protesters blocked the door of the Governor's Palace. They posted signs reading, "Brother Policeman, the people are not your enemies!" They even sent coffee over to the police. Finally the police sent notes back saying that they too were badly treated. It was then that slanders began.

Rumors appeared that the protesters were living like pigs in the plaza, creating a filthy mess. The PRI put together marches and petitions demanding that the protesters be removed. And in the end, they overplayed their hand. Anyone could see that the claims were simply false. Eventually even local pro-PRI newspapers headlined, "The PRI Makes Itself Ridiculous."

After that, toughs carrying clubs began to encircle the plaza.

"We were very anxious," Landerreche confessed. "Toward noon these groups began to take the entrances and to attack us verbally. So we gathered together in a group and tried to come up with a nonviolent action. We started by analyzing the political situation. We said, 'We know that Lopez Obrador is in negotiations with the authorities.... If in these circumstances we commit an error, we respond to the provocation and give them an excuse to wash their hands of us, we lose.' So we decided to sit down; what would happen would happen. And at that moment the atmosphere began to change.

"When we disarmed ourselves...we disarmed the enemy. I don't want to say that with that the blows and the curses disappeared, but something calmed down. Extraordinary things happened. Some of the PRI people

who had been inciting the toughs started asking them to act without violence... Others kept coming after us. Others intervened to stop them. There was a moment when someone wanted to drive a truck over us. The driver said to the PRI person who had ordered it, 'You brought me here to clear out the plaza, not to kill innocent people,' and he refused the order."

Eventually a violent attack took place, the police sprayed tear gas, and the protesters had to retreat from the plaza. But there was no doubt who had won the engagement in the public eye: it was "a triumph of dignity."

When interviewed, Landerreche was organizing the fourth stage of the resistance: a campaign to stop paying taxes, as well as to boycott stores owned by PRI members who have financed the repression.

He is quite clear that an end to human misery and environmental devastation in Tabasco will require a solid local economic alternative; that a huge impersonal system of exploitation is his movement's ultimate opponent. But he is also convinced that nonviolence, when it is deeply rooted in all that is most personal, is by far the stronger force. "Our struggle is for Mexico to be democratic and fraternal," he declared. "This is not going to occur by accumulating great quantities of hatred inside ourselves. If we resist, not only without the intention/temptation, but without the desire to respond violently, civil disobedience is invincible." □

(Quotations taken from an interview provided by David Hartsough, executive director of Peaceworkers, and translated by Ken MacLean, Lizzie Brock, Mauricio Klink, David Hartsough, and Jodi Weisz. Compiled by Rabia Harris.)

Keep Laughing . . .



Signs seen along the way

"Live Lobsters / Dancing Nightly" (at a restaurant in Maine)

"The Immaculate Conception Maternity Hospital" (in Manila)

"You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian composers and artists are buried daily except Thursdays" (in a hotel lobby in St. Petersburg near a Russian Orthodox cemetery)

"Big Mama's Jerk Centre" (a restaurant in Ocho Rios, Jamaica)

Book titles we've come across; yes, really!

Jesus, CEO

Proceedings of The Seventh Annual Seaweed Symposium

The Pathology of The Aging Rat

From Harper's Index*

Number of La-Z-Boy recliners delivered to the CIA in January: 50

* Copyright© 1996 by Harper's Magazine. All rights reserved. Reproduced from the June issue by special permission.

CORRECTION: "Vowels to Bosnia" (page 12, Fellowship, May/June 1996) originally appeared in the ONION, Number One in News. <http://11www.theonion.com>



In Brazil: Creating a New Reality

Thousands of displaced Brazilian families are taking back the land, setting up schools, homes, cooperatives, and organic farms—and re-envisioning the future of Brazil

by Michelle Burkhart

"You would never see that in a U.S. classroom," one of the delegates whispered as we left the classroom.

"You would never see that in another Brazilian classroom," our translator, Denise, answered with goose-bumped arms.

Our delegation fell silent as we continued down the hallway. The classroom in the convent-turned-school in southern Brazil had been filled with young members of the Landless Workers Movement

(MST)—one of the most successful land reform movements in the world. I had never seen a group of teenagers so intent on learning and so clear about the value that their education will bring to their lives and communities.

The MST arose 20 years ago out of a desperate need for land redistribution in a country where ownership of arable land is disastrously skewed (see *YES!* Fall 2002). At the root of much of this

Members of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) on a 900-mile march to the Brazilian capital, Brasília, in October 1999

inequality are policies that favor large-scale, export-oriented agriculture and wealthy landowners who fraudulently take land with impunity.

This consolidation of land ownership, sometimes accompanied by violent evictions of working families from the land, led to a major migration. Between 1965 and 1985, half of the Brazilian population streamed into the cities in search of work, and the influx continues today. Giant slums rose around cities, and many families fell into poverty, drugs, and hunger. Today, less than 3 percent of the Brazilian population owns two-thirds of the arable land in Brazil.

For many landless workers, the MST offers a rare path out of poverty and hunger. The MST mobilizes landless people to squat on or near idle land, in MST "camps." Those in the encampments, along with supporters, pressure the government to enforce the Brazilian constitution, which declares that land must be used for its "social function." This means that it must be cultivated for production if it is not being preserved for ecological reasons.

As a result of this massive nonviolent movement, more than 300,000 families have won land, and many are now living in permanent settlements, farming, studying at MST-organized schools, and supporting others who are likewise working to move back to the land.

BELOW: Residents of Camp Monte Pill sing in front of the idle 1,600-hectare farm the MST is trying to recover.

OPPOSITE: Children at the Monte Pill encampment play near the highway



Michelle Burkhardt

But there have also been many casualties; since 1985, more than 1,000 rural workers have been killed in land disputes.

Classrooms for a New Life

The ITERRA Institute I visited with a delegation led by San Francisco-based Global Exchange, is located near Porto Alegre, Brazil. The ITERRA Institute is part of an educational network of more than 1,000 schools that the MST created to teach literacy, sustainable farming, and leadership, and prepare people for professions in such areas as teaching and health care.

The students are MST members who come from impoverished rural and urban backgrounds. At the school, they divide their time between study, work, physical education, reflection, discussion of current events, music, and volunteer work. Non-violence education is integrated into all courses.

Students stay at the school for two months, then travel back to their homes in MST encampments and settlements for several months to use their newly acquired skills. They continue this rotation until graduation.

ITERRA is a boarding school, but most MST schools are located on MST camps and settlements, and many classrooms are simple, open-air shelters.

The students we visited had studied together for three years to become teachers. They listened intently as their teacher explained to our delegation that each ITERRA class creates its own banners, chants, and songs that affirm their purpose as students and citizens. The students stood to sing us their class song about Salete Stronzake, an MST teacher who played a leading role in developing MST's educational system before she died in a car accident. Then they broke into a chant:

We are following the movement!

We are planting education!

We are practicing Salete's dream!

Their voices carried powerfully as they punched their fists into the air. Their confidence and solidarity impressed me.

As I scanned the students' faces, I could see that they were learning to be much more than teachers; they were learning to be builders of a new society even as they struggle literally to claim the ground that makes their survival possible.

As our group continued to tour the institute's grounds, I was struck by the school's focus on gender equality and its holistic approach to education. The school has a large garden, a crafts room, library,

kitchen, daycare, nursery, and natural pharmacy with massage. The students make preserves and juice in a small factory and baked goods for their own consumption and to sell at markets. The school runs as a cooperative; resources are shared between everyone, and everyone has a task that contributes to the whole, such as baking or gardening. Ideally, the students rotate through all the positions before graduation.

One of my favorite moments on the tour was watching several teenage boys and a girl gently rock babies to sleep in the nursery. I couldn't help but think back on my high school parenting class, where I was assigned to tend an egg for a week to learn what it means to care for a baby. And I realized how rarely I see teenage boys caring for babies.

Creating gender equality is integral to the MST movement, according to João Carlos, a resident of an MST camp. "Men and women have to work together. If a man fights, it's half a fight," he says. "It's only complete if men and women fight together."

Living in an MST camp

The day after our tour of the school, we visited Camp Monte Pill—also near Porto Alegre. As we arrived at the camp, an Afro-Brazilian man strummed his guitar and sang just outside the camp. A small group of teenage boys stood around him joining in the song and keeping time with clapping hands.

Behind them, a beautifully green 1,600-hectare farm sat idle. To their side stood a maze of black plastic tents—the homes of 200 landless families. They had pitched the tents on a narrow strip of land squeezed between a buzzing highway and the carefully guarded farm. The owner of the farm owes the government more money than the land is worth, and he does not live in Brazil, we were told; this makes the farm a good candidate for agrarian reform.

MST camps, such as this one, are where the MST's holistic and egalitarian approach to education and life begins.

"Time at the camps is incredibly important to start restoring people's dignity and awakening their social consciousness," João Carlos says. Many MST members are accustomed to being excluded from society—living in slums where drugs, violence, and poverty are rife and easily lead to an oppressive cycle. Integrating these people back into a functioning community is central to the success of MST settlements. The teachings of Paulo Freire (author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) on self-dignity, social responsibility, and breaking the cycle of oppression



Michelle Burkhart

"Time at the camps is incredibly important to restoring people's dignity and awakening their social consciousness"

help residents create positive change and the life they want to live.

According to Jacqueline—a Monte Pill resident who gave only her first name—the days go by quickly at camp and people stay motivated because of the many planning meetings, classes, music, and daily chores. The health of many of the Camp Monte Pill residents is poor due to lack of water and poor hygiene. The camp is plagued by pollution from a leak at a nearby gas station, acid leaking from a neighboring metal factory, and indoor smoke from residents' wood fires. The camp turns into a muddy mess when it rains, and when it doesn't rain the black tents trap the hot sun. The children play along the highway where large trucks go barreling by and people yell insults at camp residents from car windows. A security guard hired by the landowner keeps a watchful eye on the camp, and a police car passes by every half hour to check on them. Planning their future settlement helps camp residents keep their spirits up during their arduous stay at the camp.

The Monte Pill residents have lived on this strip

of land for about a year. The police once attempted to evict the families. In response, residents marched on the state capital and camped outside the government building in Porto Alegre for six months. They won the right to return to Camp Monte Pill to wait for the idle land next door.

Camp residents expect to receive the farmland soon; however, there will not be enough land to sustain everyone. This creates tensions in camp, says Jacqueline, because they will have to allocate the land only to those who have been at the camp the longest.

Camp Monte Pill is one of approximately 12,000 similar MST camps in Brazil. The MST strives to create a leader out of each individual at the camps; these leadership capacities help achieve successful cooperative-style settlements when land is turned over to the campers. It also helps further the broader-reaching goals of the MST—to create a just Brazil.

Re-Inhabiting the land

Assent Lagao do Junco, a permanent MST settlement, is made up of small, tidy houses lining a dirt road that leads to a large communal space surrounded by farmland. This settlement was another stop on our tour.

Fifteen of 35 families on the settlement chose to live in a cooperative-style community. Their communal space includes a kitchen with running water, large wood-fired ovens, a bathroom with flush toilets, murals depicting MST farmers and teachers, and picnic tables beneath shady trees. The settlement, where people know they have a permanent home, is a huge leap up in human dignity and in meeting basic human needs compared to the MST camps.

There is another way

In the settlements, MST works to demonstrate that people can provide their own food instead of importing and exporting cash crops—a system that has led to a large increase in poverty and starvation in Brazil.

"It's a slow walk," Tarcisio Stein, one of the settlement residents, says. "But we're showing society that there is another way of doing things."

At Assent Lagao do Junco, residents are proud to say that they have practiced 100 percent organic farming for four years.

"When we arrived, we had the idea that we had to use lots of pesticides," Tarcisio says.

With time, the community realized that they were spending more and more money on fertilizers and pesticides because the chemicals were exhausting the soil. The chemicals' side effects also caused illnesses within the settlement. The community decided to switch to organic farming.

Today, the settlement continues to experiment with ways to make organic farming more cost-competitive with conventionally grown food. Recently, they increased rice yields by adopting a Chinese practice of using carp to help till and weed their fields. The settlement also raises cattle for meat and dairy, and fruits and vegetables for their own consumption.

Not all MST settlements have switched to organic farming, but they are working in that direction.

One of the MST's biggest challenges now is the recent decision by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to lift a ban on the sale of genetically modified crops. MST leaders believe this will increase corporate control over crops by making seeds "intellectual property."

This is not the only disappointment that the MST has faced since 2002 when Lula won the presidency. The MST and many other Brazilians had invested high hopes in Lula, Brazil's first left-leaning president, a former labor leader, and a long-time ally of the MST who had vowed to work to end hunger and close Brazil's monstrous economic gap.

"During Lula's government, nothing has changed," Carlos says. Lula's government is under tremendous pressure from the International Monetary Fund, other world organizations, and the owners of large estates, he says.

Nonetheless, Lula's divergence from his campaign pledges is not halting the MST's momentum to fight for a just Brazil.

"It is quite clear that Lula himself, as a single person, will never make agrarian reform. We must make agrarian reform happen," Carlos says. "No matter what government we have, change has to come from the base."

To strengthen their base, the MST is working to build an organization that unites all movements in Brazil. "Once we are united with all the movements, we can start the construction of a new social reality," Carlos says. "We will not wait."

Michelle Burkhart is a free-lance writer and a former intern at YES! magazine. You can learn more about the Landless Workers Movement at www.mstbrazil.org and about Global Exchange's international tours at www.globalexchange.org.

STOLEN *Harvest*

The HIJACKING of the
GLOBAL FOOD SUPPLY

by VANDANA SHIVA

SOUTH END PRESS

CAMBRIDGE, MA

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades every issue I have been engaged in as an ecological activist and organic intellectual has revealed that what the industrial economy calls "growth" is really a form of theft from nature and people.

It is true that cutting down forests or converting natural forests into monocultures of pine and eucalyptus for industrial raw material generates revenues and growth. But this growth is based on robbing the forest of its biodiversity and its capacity to conserve soil and water. This growth is based on robbing forest communities of their sources of food, fodder, fuel, fiber, medicine, and security from floods and drought.

While most environmentalists can recognize that converting a natural forest into a monoculture is an impoverishment, many do not extend this insight to industrial agriculture. A corporate myth has been created, shared by most mainstream environmentalists and development organizations, that industrial agriculture is necessary to grow more food and reduce hunger. Many also assume that intensive, industrial agriculture saves resources and, therefore, saves species. But in agriculture as much as in forestry, the growth illusion hides theft from nature and the poor, masking the creation of scarcity as growth.

These thefts have only stepped up since the advent of the globalized economy. The completion of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1994 and the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have institutionalized and legalized corporate growth based on harvests stolen from nature and people. The WTO's Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights

Agreement criminalizes seed-saving and seed-sharing. The Agreement on Agriculture legalizes the dumping of genetically engineered foods on countries and criminalizes actions to protect the biological and cultural diversity on which diverse food systems are based.

The anti-globalization movement that started in response to GATT has grown tremendously, and I have been honored to have been part of it. My friends in the Third World Network, including Chakravarty Raghavan, and the tremendous people in the International Forum on Globalization have been a community of creativity and courage that has dared to challenge globalization at a time when history is supposed to have ended. Globally, we have seen the citizens movements against genetic engineering and corporate control over agriculture move concerns about genetic engineering from the fringe to the center stage of trade and economics. Whether at the St. Louis meeting on biodevastation or the Swiss or Austrian referenda on genetic engineering or the launch of the campaign for a Five Year Freeze on genetically engineered commerce in the United Kingdom, I have worked with some of the most courageous and creative people of our times who have taken on giant corporations and changed their fortunes. Corporations that have made governments their puppets and that have created instruments and institutions like the WTO for their own protection are now being held accountable to ordinary people.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FIGHT TO SAVE THE STOLEN HARVEST

In 1987, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation organized a meeting on biotechnology called "Laws of Life." This watershed event identified the emerging issues of genetic engineering and patenting. The meeting made it clear that the giant chemical companies were repositioning themselves as "life sciences" companies, whose goal was to control agriculture through patents, genetic engineering, and mergers. At that meeting, I decided I would dedicate the next decade of my life to find-

ing ways to prevent monopolies on life and living resources, both through resistance and by building creative alternatives.

The first step I took was to start Navdanya, a movement for saving seed, to protect biodiversity, and to keep seed and agriculture free of monopoly control. The Navdanya family has started 16 community seed banks in six states in India. Navdanya today has thousands of members who conserve biodiversity, practice chemical-free agriculture, and have taken a pledge to continue to save and share the seeds and biodiversity they have received as gifts from nature and their ancestors. Navdanya's commitment to saving seed means we cannot cooperate with patent laws, which make seed-saving a crime.

Seed patent laws, forced upon countries by WTO rules, are not the only way in which the resources of the Third World poor are being stolen to generate profits for giant corporations. In 1994, the coastal communities of India invited me to support their struggle against industrial shrimp farming, which was spreading like a cancer along India's 7,000-kilometer coastline. The Jaganathans, an amazing Gandhian couple, had been leading a "shrimp *satyagraha*," or non-violent direct action, to stop the devastation of coastal ecosystems and coastal communities. We joined forces with others like Bankey Behari Das of Orissa, Tom Kochery of Kerala, Jesurithinam of Tamil Nadu, Claude Alvares of Goa, and Jacob Dharmaraj in Andhra Pradesh to challenge the shrimp-farming industry in a case that was heard before the Supreme Court of India in 1996. While the court ruled in our favor, commercial interests continue to attempt to subvert its judgement.

In August 1998, I witnessed the destruction of India's edible-oil economy by the imposition of soybean oil, a pattern being replayed in every sector of agriculture and the food economy. The women's movement and farmers' movements resisted the imports of subsidized soybean oil to ensure that their livelihoods and their traditional food cultures were not destroyed. In so doing, they demonstrated that food free from genetic engineering is not a luxury for rich consumers. It is a basic element of the right to safe, accessible, and culturally appropriate food.

On August 9, 1998, which is celebrated as Quit India Day in commemoration of the "Quit India" message given by Mohandas K. Gan-

dhi to the British, we started the "Monsanto, Quit India" campaign against the corporate hijacking of our seed and food. This movement against genetically engineered crops and food is now a global citizen's movement, involving farmers and consumers, activists and scientists. This book tells the stories of global corporations' destruction of food and agriculture systems as well as resistance to the destruction by people's movements.

These are exciting times. As the examples in this book show, it is not inevitable that corporations will control our lives and rule the world. We have a real possibility to shape our own futures. We have an ecological and social duty to ensure that the food that nourishes us is not a stolen harvest.

In this duty, we have the opportunity to work for the freedom and liberation of all species and all people. Something as simple and basic as food has become the site for these manifold and diverse liberations in which every one of us has an opportunity to participate—no matter who we are, no matter where we are.

The HIJACKING of the GLOBAL FOOD SUPPLY

*F*ood is our most basic need, the very stuff of life.

According to an ancient Indian Upanishad, "All that is born is born of *anna* [food]. Whatever exists on earth is born of *anna*, lives on *anna*, and in the end merges into *anna*. *Anna* indeed is the first born amongst all beings."¹

More than 3.5 million people starved to death in the Bengal famine of 1943. Twenty million were directly affected. Food grains were appropriated forcefully from the peasants under a colonial system of rent collection. Export of food grains continued in spite of the fact that people were going hungry. As the Bengali writer Kali Charan Ghosh reports, 80,000 tons of food grain were exported from Bengal in 1943, just before the famine. At the time, India was being used as a supply base for the British military. "Huge exports were allowed to feed the

people of other lands, while the shadow of famine was hourly lengthening on the Indian horizon."²

More than one-fifth of India's national output was appropriated for war supplies. The starving Bengal peasants gave up over two-thirds of the food they produced, leading their debt to double. This, coupled with speculation, hoarding, and profiteering by traders, led to skyrocketing prices. The poor of Bengal paid for the empire's war through hunger and starvation—and the "funeral march of the Bengal peasants, fishermen, and Artisans."³

Dispossessed peasants moved to Calcutta. Thousands of female destitutes were turned into prostitutes. Parents started to sell their children. "In the villages jackals and dogs engaged in a tug-of-war for the bodies of the half-dead."⁴

As the crisis began, thousands of women organized in Bengal in defense of their food rights. "Open more ration shops" and "Bring down the price of food" were the calls of women's groups throughout Bengal.⁵

After the famine, the peasants also started to organize around the central demand of keeping a two-thirds, or *tebhaga*, share of the crops. At its peak the Tebhaga movement, as it was called, covered 19 districts and involved 6 million people. Peasants refused to let their harvest be stolen by the landlords and the revenue collectors of the British Empire. Everywhere peasants declared, "*Jan debo tabu dhan debo ne*"—"We will give up our lives, but we will not give up our rice." In the village of Thumniya, the police arrested some peasants who resisted the theft of their harvest. They were charged with "stealing paddy."⁶

A half-century after the Bengal famine, a new and clever system has been put in place, which is once again making the theft of the harvest a right and the keeping of the harvest a crime. Hidden behind complex free-trade treaties are innovative ways to steal nature's harvest, the harvest of the seed, and the harvest of nutrition.

THE CORPORATE HIJACKING OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

I focus on India to tell the story of how corporate control of food and globalization of agriculture are robbing millions of their livelihoods and their right to food both because I am an Indian and because Indian agriculture is being especially targeted by global corporations. Since 75 percent of the Indian population derives its livelihood from agriculture, and every fourth farmer in the world is an Indian, the impact of globalization on Indian agriculture is of global significance.

However, this phenomenon of the stolen harvest is not unique to India. It is being experienced in every society, as small farms and small farmers are pushed to extinction, as monocultures replace biodiverse crops, as farming is transformed from the production of nourishing and diverse foods into the creation of markets for genetically engineered seeds, herbicides, and pesticides. As farmers are transformed from producers into consumers of corporate-patented agricultural products, as markets are destroyed locally and nationally but expanded globally, the myth of "free trade" and the global economy becomes a means for the rich to rob the poor of their right to food and even their right to life. For the vast majority of the world's people—70 percent—earn their livelihoods by producing food. The majority of these farmers are women. In contrast, in the industrialized countries, only 2 percent of the population are farmers.

FOOD SECURITY IS IN THE SEED

For centuries Third World farmers have evolved crops and given us the diversity of plants that provide us nutrition. Indian farmers evolved 200,000 varieties of rice through their innovation and breeding. They bred rice varieties such as Basmati. They bred red rice and brown rice and black rice. They bred rice that grew 18 feet tall in the Gangetic floodwaters, and saline-resistant rice that could be grown in the coastal water. And this innovation by farmers has not stopped.

Farmers involved in our movement, Navdanya, dedicated to conserving native seed diversity, are still breeding new varieties.

The seed, for the farmer, is not merely the source of future plants and food; it is the storage place of culture and history. Seed is the first link in the food chain. Seed is the ultimate symbol of food security.

Free exchange of seed among farmers has been the basis of maintaining biodiversity as well as food security. This exchange is based on cooperation and reciprocity. A farmer who wants to exchange seed generally gives an equal quantity of seed from his field in return for the seed he gets.

Free exchange among farmers goes beyond mere exchange of seeds; it involves exchanges of ideas and knowledge, of culture and heritage. It is an accumulation of tradition, of knowledge of how to work the seed. Farmers learn about the plants they want to grow in the future by watching them grow in other farmers' fields.

Paddy, or rice, has religious significance in most parts of the country and is an essential component of most religious festivals. The *Akti* festival in Chattisgarh, where a diversity of *indica* rices are grown, reinforces the many principles of biodiversity conservation. In Southern India, rice grain is considered auspicious, or *akshanta*. It is mixed with *kumkum* and turmeric and given as a blessing. The priest is given rice, often along with coconut, as an indication of religious regard. Other agricultural varieties whose seeds, leaves, or flowers form an essential component of religious ceremonies include coconut, betel, arecanut, wheat, finger and little millets, horsegram, blackgram, chickpea, pigeon pea, sesame, sugarcane, jackfruit seed, cardamom, ginger, bananas, and gooseberry.

New seeds are first worshipped, and only then are they planted. New crops are worshipped before being consumed. Festivals held before sowing seeds as well as harvest festivals, celebrated in the fields, symbolize people's intimacy with nature.⁷ For the farmer, the field is the mother; worshipping the field is a sign of gratitude toward the earth, which, as mother, feeds the millions of life forms that are her children.

But new intellectual-property-rights regimes, which are being universalized through the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights

Agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO), allow corporations to usurp the knowledge of the seed and monopolize it by claiming it as their private property. Over time, this results in corporate monopolies over the seed itself.

Corporations like RiceTec of the United States are claiming patents on Basmati rice. Soybean, which evolved in East Asia, has been patented by Calgene, which is now owned by Monsanto. Calgene also owns patents on mustard, a crop of Indian origin. Centuries of collective innovation by farmers and peasants are being hijacked as corporations claim intellectual-property rights on these and other seeds and plants.⁸

T "FREE TRADE" OR "FORCED TRADE"

Today, ten corporations control 32 percent of the commercial-seed market, valued at \$23 billion, and 100 percent of the market for genetically engineered, or transgenic, seeds.⁹ These corporations also control the global agrochemical and pesticide market. Just five corporations control the global trade in grain. In late 1998, Cargill, the largest of these five companies, bought Continental, the second largest, making it the single biggest factor in the grain trade. Monoliths such as Cargill and Monsanto were both actively involved in shaping international trade agreements, in particular the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which led to the establishment of the WTO.

This monopolistic control over agricultural production, along with structural adjustment policies that brutally favor exports, results in floods of exports of foods from the United States and Europe to the Third World. As a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the proportion of Mexico's food supply that is imported has increased from 20 percent in 1992 to 43 percent in 1996. After 18 months of NAFTA, 2.2 million Mexicans have lost their jobs, and 40 million have fallen into extreme poverty. One out of two peasants is not getting enough to eat. As Victor Suarez has stated, "Eating more cheaply on imports is not eating at all for the poor in Mexico."¹⁰

In the Philippines, sugar imports have destroyed the economy. In Kerala, India, the prosperous rubber plantations were rendered unviable due to rubber imports. The local \$350 million rubber economy was wiped out, with a multiplier effect of \$3.5 billion on the economy of Kerala. In Kenya, maize imports brought prices crashing for local farmers who could not even recover their costs of production.

Trade liberalization of agriculture was introduced in India in 1991 as part of a World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment package. While the hectares of land under cotton cultivation had been decreasing in the 1970s and 1980s, in the first six years of World Bank/IMF-mandated reforms, the land under cotton cultivation increased by 1.7 million hectares. Cotton started to displace food crops. Aggressive corporate advertising campaigns, including promotional films shown in villages on "video vans," were launched to sell new, hybrid seeds to farmers. Even gods, goddesses, and saints were not spared: in Punjab, Monsanto sells its products using the image of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. Corporate, hybrid seeds began to replace local farmers' varieties.

The new hybrid seeds, being vulnerable to pests, required more pesticides. Extremely poor farmers bought both seeds and chemicals on credit from the same company. When the crops failed due to heavy pest incidence or large-scale seed failure, many peasants committed suicide by consuming the same pesticides that had gotten them into debt in the first place. In the district of Warangal, nearly 400 cotton farmers committed suicide due to crop failure in 1997, and dozens more committed suicide in 1998.

Under this pressure to cultivate cash crops, many states in India have allowed private corporations to acquire hundreds of acres of land. The state of Maharashtra has exempted horticulture projects from its land-ceiling legislation. Madhya Pradesh is offering land to private industry on long-term leases, which, according to industry, should last for at least 40 years. In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, private corporations are today allowed to acquire over 300 acres of land for raising shrimp for exports. A large percentage of agricultural production on these lands will go toward supplying the burgeoning food-processing industry, in which mainly transnational corporations are involved.

Meanwhile, the United States has taken India to the WTO dispute panel to contest its restrictions on food imports.

In certain instances, markets are captured by other means. In August 1998, the mustard-oil supply in Delhi was mysteriously adulterated. The adulteration was restricted to Delhi but not to any specific brand, indicating that it was not the work of a particular trader or business house. More than 50 people died. The government banned all local processing of oil and announced free imports of soybean oil. Millions of people extracting oil on tiny, ecological, cold-press mills lost their livelihoods. Prices of indigenous oilseed collapsed to less than one-third their previous levels. In Sirsa, in the state of Karnataka, police officers shot farmers protesting the fall in prices of oilseeds.

Imported soybeans' takeover of the Indian market is a clear example of the imperialism on which globalization is built. One crop exported from a single country by one or two corporations replaced hundreds of foods and food producers, destroying biological and cultural diversity, and economic and political democracy. Small mills are now unable to serve small farmers and poor consumers with low-cost, healthy, and culturally appropriate edible oils. Farmers are robbed of their freedom to choose what they grow, and consumers are being robbed of their freedom to choose what they eat.

CREATING HUNGER WITH MONOCULTURES

Global chemical corporations, recently reshaped into "life sciences" corporations, declare that without them and their patented products, the world cannot be fed.

As Monsanto advertised in its \$1.6 million European advertising campaign:

Worrying about starving future generations won't feed them. Food biotechnology will. The world's population is growing rapidly, adding the equivalent of a China to the globe every ten years. To feed these billion more mouths, we can try extending our farming land or squeezing greater harvests out of existing cultivation. With

the planet set to double in numbers around 2030, this heavy dependency on land can only become heavier. Soil erosion and mineral depletion will exhaust the ground. Lands such as rainforests will be forced into cultivation. Fertilizer, insecticide, and herbicide use will increase globally. At Monsanto, we now believe food biotechnology is a better way forward.¹¹

But food is necessary for all living species. That is why the *Taittiriya Upanishad* calls on humans to feed all beings in their zone of influence.

Industrial agriculture has not produced more food. It has destroyed diverse sources of food, and it has stolen food from other species to bring larger quantities of specific commodities to the market, using huge quantities of fossil fuels and water and toxic chemicals in the process.

It is often said that the so-called miracle varieties of the Green Revolution in modern industrial agriculture prevented famine because they had higher yields. However, these higher yields disappear in the context of total yields of crops on farms. Green Revolution varieties produced more grain by diverting production away from straw. This "partitioning" was achieved through dwarfing the plants, which also enabled them to withstand high doses of chemical fertilizer.

However, less straw means less fodder for cattle and less organic matter for the soil to feed the millions of soil organisms that make and rejuvenate soil. The higher yields of wheat or maize were thus achieved by stealing food from farm animals and soil organisms. Since cattle and earthworms are our partners in food production, stealing food from them makes it impossible to maintain food production over time, and means that the partial yield increases were not sustainable.

The increase in yields of wheat and maize under industrial agriculture were also achieved at the cost of yields of other foods a small farm provides. Beans, legumes, fruits, and vegetables all disappeared both from farms and from the calculus of yields. More grain from two or three commodities arrived on national and international markets, but less food was eaten by farm families in the Third World.

The gain in "yields" of industrially produced crops is thus based on a theft of food from other species and the rural poor in the Third

World. That is why, as more grain is produced and traded globally, more people go hungry in the Third World. Global markets have more commodities for trading because food has been robbed from nature and the poor.

Productivity in traditional farming practices has always been high if it is remembered that very few external inputs are required. While the Green Revolution has been promoted as having increased productivity in the absolute sense, when resource use is taken into account, it has been found to be counterproductive and inefficient.

Perhaps one of the most fallacious myths propagated by Green Revolution advocates is the assertion that high-yielding varieties have reduced the acreage under cultivation, therefore preserving millions of hectares of biodiversity. But in India, instead of more land being released for conservation, industrial breeding actually increases pressure on the land, since each acre of a monoculture provides a single output, and the displaced outputs have to be grown on additional acres, or "shadow" acres.¹²

A study comparing traditional polycultures with industrial monocultures shows that a polyculture system can produce 100 units of food from 5 units of inputs, whereas an industrial system requires 300 units of input to produce the same 100 units. The 295 units of wasted inputs could have provided 5,900 units of additional food. Thus the industrial system leads to a decline of 5,900 units of food. This is a recipe for starving people, not for feeding them.¹³

Wasting resources creates hunger. By wasting resources through one-dimensional monocultures maintained with intensive external inputs, the new biotechnologies create food insecurity and starvation.

THE INSECURITY OF IMPORTS

As cash crops such as cotton increase, staple-food production goes down, leading to rising prices of staples and declining consumption by the poor. The hungry starve as scarce land and water are diverted to provide luxuries for rich consumers in Northern countries.

Flowers, fruits, shrimp, and meat are among the export commodities being promoted in all Third World countries.

When trade liberalization policies were introduced in 1991 in India, the agriculture secretary stated that "food security is not food in the *godowns* but dollars in the pocket." It is repeatedly argued that food security does not depend on food "self-sufficiency" (food grown locally for local consumption), but on food "self-reliance" (buying your food from international markets). According to the received ideology of free trade, the earnings from exports of farmed shrimp, flowers, and meat will finance imports of food. Hence any shortfall created by the diversion of productive capacity from growing food for domestic consumption to growing luxury items for consumption by rich Northern consumers would be more than made up.

However, it is neither efficient nor sustainable to grow shrimp, flowers, and meat for export in countries such as India. In the case of flower exports, India spent Rs. 1.4 billion as foreign exchange for promoting floriculture exports and earned a mere Rs. 320 million.¹⁴ In other words, India can buy only one-fourth of the food it could have grown with export earnings from floriculture.¹⁵ Our food security has therefore declined by 75 percent, and our foreign exchange drain increased by more than Rs. 1 billion.

In the case of meat exports, for every dollar earned, India is destroying 15 dollars' worth of ecological functions performed by farm animals for sustainable agriculture. Before the Green Revolution, the byproducts of India's culturally sophisticated and ecologically sound livestock economy, such as the hides of cattle, were exported, rather than the ecological capital, that is, the cattle themselves. Today, the domination of the export logic in agriculture is leading to the export of our ecological capital, which we have conserved over centuries. Giant slaughterhouses and factory farming are replacing India's traditional livestock economy. When cows are slaughtered and their meat is exported, with it are exported the renewable energy and fertilizer that cattle provide to the small farms of small peasants. These multiple functions of cattle in farming systems have been protected in India through the metaphor of the sacred cow. Government agencies cleverly

disguise the slaughter of cows, which would outrage many Indians, by calling it "buffalo meat."

In the case of shrimp exports, for every acre of an industrial shrimp farm, 200 acres of productive ecosystems are destroyed. For every dollar earned as foreign exchange from exports, six to ten dollars' worth of destruction takes place in the local economy. The harvest of shrimp from aquaculture farms is a harvest stolen from fishing and farming communities in the coastal regions of the Third World. The profits from exports of shrimp to U.S., Japanese, and European markets show up in national and global economic growth figures. However, the destruction of local food consumption, ground-water resources, fisheries, agriculture, and livelihoods associated with traditional occupations in each of these sectors does not alter the global economic value of shrimp exports; such destruction is only experienced locally.

In India, intensive shrimp cultivation has turned fertile coastal tracts into graveyards, destroying both fisheries and agriculture. In Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, women from fishing and farming communities are resisting shrimp cultivation through *satyagraha*. Shrimp cultivation destroys 15 jobs for each job it creates. It destroys \$5 of ecological and economic capital for every dollar earned through exports. Even these profits flow for only three to five years, after which the industry must move on to new sites. Intensive shrimp farming is a non-sustainable activity, described by United Nations agencies as a "rape and run" industry.

Since the World Bank is advising all countries to shift from "food first" to "export first" policies, these countries all compete with each other, and the prices of these luxury commodities collapse. Trade liberalization and economic reform also include devaluation of currencies. Thus exports earn less, and imports cost more. Since the Third World is being told to stop growing food and instead to buy food in international markets by exporting cash crops, the process of globalization leads to a situation in which agricultural societies of the South become increasingly dependent on food imports, but do not have the foreign exchange to pay for imported food. Indonesia and Russia provide examples of countries that have moved rapidly from food-sufficiency to hunger be-

cause of the creation of dependency on imports and the devaluation of their currencies.

STEALING NATURE'S HARVEST

Global corporations are not just stealing the harvest of farmers. They are stealing nature's harvest through genetic engineering and patents on life forms.

Genetically engineered crops manufactured by corporations pose serious ecological risks. Crops such as Monsanto's Roundup Ready soybeans, designed to be resistant to herbicides, lead to the destruction of biodiversity and increased use of agrochemicals. They can also create highly invasive "superweeds" by transferring the genes for herbicide resistance to weeds. Crops designed to be pesticide factories, genetically engineered to produce toxins and venom with genes from bacteria, scorpions, snakes, and wasps, can threaten non-pest species and can contribute to the emergence of resistance in pests and hence the creation of "superpests." In every application of genetic engineering, food is being stolen from other species for the maximization of corporate profits.

To secure patents on life forms and living resources, corporations must claim seeds and plants to be their "inventions" and hence their property. Thus corporations like Cargill and Monsanto see nature's web of life and cycles of renewal as "theft" of their property. During the debate about the entry of Cargill into India in 1992, the Cargill chief executive stated, "We bring Indian farmers smart technologies, which prevent bees from usurping the pollen."¹⁶ During the United Nations Biosafety Negotiations, Monsanto circulated literature that claimed that "weeds steal the sunshine."¹⁷ A worldview that defines pollination as "theft by bees" and claims that diverse plants "steal" sunshine is one aimed at stealing nature's harvest, by replacing open, pollinated varieties with hybrids and sterile seeds, and destroying biodiverse flora with herbicides such as Monsanto's Roundup.

This is a worldview based on scarcity. A worldview of abundance is the worldview of women in India who leave food for ants on their

doorstep, even as they create the most beautiful art in *kolams*, *mandalas*, and *rangoli* with rice flour. Abundance is the worldview of peasant women who weave beautiful designs of paddy to hang up for birds when the birds do not find grain in the fields. This view of abundance recognizes that, in giving food to other beings and species, we maintain conditions for our own food security. It is the recognition in the *Isho Upanishad* that the universe is the creation of the Supreme Power meant for the benefits of (all) creation. Each individual life form must learn to enjoy its benefits by farming a part of the system in close relation with other species. Let not any one species encroach upon others' rights.¹⁸ The *Isho Upanishad* also says,

a selfish man over-utilizing the resources of nature to satisfy his own ever-increasing needs is nothing but a thief, because using resources beyond one's needs would result in the utilization of resources over which others have a right.¹⁹

In the ecological worldview, when we consume more than we need or exploit nature on principles of greed, we are engaging in theft. In the anti-life view of agribusiness corporations, nature renewing and maintaining herself is a thief. Such a worldview replaces abundance with scarcity, fertility with sterility. It makes theft from nature a market imperative, and hides it in the calculus of efficiency and productivity.

FOOD DEMOCRACY

What we are seeing is the emergence of food totalitarianism, in which a handful of corporations control the entire food chain and destroy alternatives so that people do not have access to diverse, safe foods produced ecologically. Local markets are being deliberately destroyed to establish monopolies over seed and food systems. The destruction of the edible-oil market in India and the many ways through which farmers are prevented from having their own seed supply are small instances of an overall trend in which trade rules, property rights, and new technologies are used to destroy people-friendly and environment-friendly alternatives and to impose anti-people, anti-nature food systems globally.

The notion of rights has been turned on its head under globalization and free trade. The right to produce for oneself or consume according to cultural priorities and safety concerns has been rendered illegal according to the new trade rules. The right of corporations to force-feed citizens of the world with culturally inappropriate and hazardous foods has been made absolute. The right to food, the right to safety, the right to culture are all being treated as trade barriers that need to be dismantled.

This food totalitarianism can only be stopped through major citizen mobilization for democratization of the food system. This mobilization is starting to gain momentum in Europe, Japan, India, Brazil, and other parts of the world.

We have to reclaim our right to save seed and to biodiversity. We have to reclaim our right to nutrition and food safety. We have to reclaim our right to protect the earth and her diverse species. We have to stop this corporate theft from the poor and from nature. Food democracy is the new agenda for democracy and human rights. It is the new agenda for ecological sustainability and social justice.

- 1 *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, p. 124.
- 2 Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal, 1770-1943*, Calcutta: Indian Associated Publishing Company, 1944.
- 3 Bondhayan Chattopadhyay, "Notes Towards an Understanding of the Bengal Famine of 1943," *Transaction*, June 1981.
- 4 MARS (Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti, or Women's Self Defense League), Political Report prepared for Second Annual Conference, New Delhi: Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology (RFSTE), 1944.
- 5 Peter Custers, *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising*, Calcutta: Naya prokash, 1987, p. 52.
- 6 Peter Custers, p. 78.
- 7 Festivals like *Uganda*, *Ramanavami*, *Akshay Trateeya*, *Ekaadashi*, *Ahuyana Amavase*, *Naga Panchami*, *Noolu Hunime*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Rishi Panchami*, *Navartri*, *Deepavali*, *Rathasaptami*, *Tulsi Vivaha*, *Campasrusti*, and *Bhoomi Puja* all include religious ceremonies around the seed.
- 8 Vandana Shiva, Vanaja Ramprasad, Pandurang Hegde, Omkar Krishnan, and Radha Holla-Bhar, "The Seed Keepers," New Delhi: Navdanya, 1995.
- 9 These companies are DuPont/Pioneer (U.S.), Monsanto (U.S.), Novartis (Switzerland), Groupe Limagrain (France), Advanta (U.K. and Netherlands), Guipo Pulsar/Semins/ELM (Mexico), Sakata (Japan), KWS HG (Germany), and Taki (Japan).
- 10 Victor Soares, Paper presented at International Conference on Globalization, Food Security, and Sustainable Agriculture, July 30-31, 1996.
- 11 "Monsanto: Peddling 'Life Sciences' or 'Death Sciences'?" New Delhi: RFSTE, 1998.
- 12 ASSINSEL (International Association of Plant Breeders), "Feeding the 8 Billion and Preserving the Planet," Nyon, Switzerland: ASSINSEL.
- 13 Francesca Bray, "Agriculture for Developing Nations," *Scientific American*, July 1994, pp. 33-35.
- 14 *Business India*, March 1998.
- 15 T.N. Prakash and Tejaswini, "Floriculture and Food Security Issues: The Case of Rose Cultivation in Bangalore," in *Globalization and Food Security: Proceedings of Conference on Globalization and Agriculture*, ed. Vandana Shiva, New Delhi, August 1996.
- 16 Interview with John Hamilton, *Sunday Observer*, May 9, 1993.
- 17 Hendrik Verfaillie, speech delivered at the Forum on Nature and Human Society, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, October 30, 1997.

- 18 Vandana Shiva, "Globalization, Gandhi, and Swadeshi: What is Economic Freedom? Whose Economic Freedom?" New Delhi: RFSTE, 1998.
- 19 Vandana Shiva, "Globalization, Gandhi, and Swadeshi."

SOY IMPERIALISM *and the* DESTRUCTION *of* LOCAL FOOD CULTURES

*T*he diversity of soils, climates, and plants has contributed to a diversity of food cultures across the world. The maize-based food systems of Central America, the rice-based Asian systems, the teff-based Ethiopian diet, and the millet-based foods of Africa are **not** just a part of agriculture; they are central to cultural diversity. Food security is not just having access to adequate food. It is also having access to culturally appropriate food. Vegetarians can starve if asked to live on meat diets. I have watched Asians feel totally deprived on bread, potato, and meat diets in Europe.

India is a country rich in biological diversity and cultural diversity of food systems. In the high Himalayan mountains, people eat pseudo-cereals such as amaranth, buckwheat, and chenopods. The people of the arid areas of Western India and semiarid tracts of the Deccan live on millets. Eastern India is home to rice and fish cultures, as are the states of Goa and Kerala. Each region also has its culturally specific edible oil used as a cooking medium. In the North and East it is mustard, in the West it is groundnut, in the Deccan it is sesame, and in Kerala it is coconut.

- 24 Dan Glickman, quoted in Vandana Shiva, *Betting on Biodiversity*, New Delhi: RFSTE, 1998, p. 45.
- 25 Report of the Independent Group of Scientific and Legal Experts on Biosafety, 1996.
- 26 Report of the Independent Group, 1996.
- 27 COST 98 Action (European Union Program) in Lund, Sweden, November 25–27, 1998.
- 28 George Monbiot, "Food Fascism," *Guardian*, March 3, 1998.
- 29 Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Natural Resource Policy, "Cultivating Diversity: Biodiversity Conservation and the Politics of the Seed," New Delhi, 1993.
- 30 Vandana Shiva, "Biodiversity-Based Productivity," New Delhi: RFSTE, 1998; and Peter Rosset and Miguel Altieri, "The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture," International Forum on Agriculture, San Francisco, 1999.
- 31 Charles Benbrook, "Evidence of the Magnitude and Consequences of the Roundup Ready Soybean Yield Drag from University-Based Varietal Trials in 1998," InfoNet Technical Paper, No. 1, Sandpoint, Ohio: July 13, 1999, p. 1.
- 32 Vandana Shiva et al., "Globalization and Seed Security: Transgenic Cotton Trials," *EPW*, Vol. 34, No. 10–11, March 6–19, 1999, p. 605.

7

RECLAIMING FOOD *Democracy*

*F*ood democracy is an imperative in this age of food dictatorship, in which a handful of global corporations control the global food supply and are reshaping it to maximize their profits and their power. Food democracy is being created through a new solidarity between environmental democracy and sustainable-agriculture movements, farmers' movements, consumer movements, and new movements of public-interest scientists.

The central concern of citizens' movements, North and South, is creating democratic control over the food system to ensure sustainable and safe production and equitable distribution and access to food. Democratic control over food requires the reining in of the unaccountable power of corporations. It involves replacing the "free trade" order of corporate totalitarianism with an ecological and just system of food production and distribution, in which the earth is protected, farmers are protected, and consumers are protected.

Industrial agriculture in general and genetic engineering in agriculture in particular increase commodity production for the market by tak-

ing away nature's share of nutrition, and by increasing external inputs such as pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic fertilizers. Returning to nature and her species their share of nutrition is not just an ethical and ecological imperative; it is essential for maintaining food productivity for humans.

Industrial agriculture based on a reductionist, fragmented, and competitive worldview interprets partnerships, cooperation, and mutual help as competition. Instead of viewing cows and earthworms as our helpers in food production, it views them as making competing demands on food, and thus views the denial of their right to nutrition as a gain in human nutrition. Thus, in breeding, the yield of grain is increased at the cost of straw. Food for humans is increased at the cost of food for cows and earthworms.

Reclaiming democracy in food production implies reclaiming the rights of all species to their share of nutrition and, through this ecological step, reclaiming the right of all people to food rights, including future generations. A food democracy that is inclusive is the highest form of equity and democracy. Such a democracy can feed us abundantly because other species do not feed themselves at our cost; they feed us while they feed themselves.

MOVEMENTS FOR ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

In India, the poorest peasants are organic farmers because they could never afford chemicals. Today, they are joined by a growing international organic movement that consciously avoids chemicals and genetic engineering. A U.S. nationwide survey released in November 1998 by the agribusiness-affiliated International Foods Safety Council found that 89 percent of U.S. consumers think food safety is a "very important" national issue—more important than crime prevention. Seventy-seven percent were changing their eating habits due to food-safety concerns.¹ A *Time* magazine poll published in its January 13, 1999, issue found that 81 percent of U.S. consumers believe genetically engineered food should be labeled. Fifty-eight percent of con-

sumers said they would not eat genetically engineered foods if they were labeled. In 1998, over 5 billion dollars worth of organic food was consumed in the United States, where the organic market is growing at 25 percent annually.

In India, ARISE, the national network for organic agriculture, holds village-level courses throughout the country to support farmers wanting to give up chemical addiction. Ecological and organic agriculture is often referred to in India as *ahimsic krishi*, or "non-violent agriculture," because it is based on compassion for all species and hence the protection of biodiversity in agriculture.

While organic agriculture is a low-input, low-cost option, and hence an option for the poor, it is often presented as a "luxury of the rich." This is not true. The cheapness of industrially produced food and expensiveness of organic foods does not reflect their cost of production but the heavy subsidies given to industrial agriculture. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements has been working toward the global democratization of organic agriculture.

MOVEMENTS AGAINST GENETIC ENGINEERING

In November 1998, farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in India uprooted and burnt Monsanto's Bollgard crops planted in trial fields. In February 1998, a suit calling for an end to genetic engineering trials and a ban on genetically engineered food imports, filed by environmentalists and farmers, was admitted to the Supreme Court in India.

In Britain, a movement called Genetix Snowball, launched in 1998 when five women uprooted Monsanto's crops in Oxfordshire, removes genetically engineered crops from trial sites to protect the environment. In February 1999, an alliance of U.K. farm groups, consumer groups, development groups, and environmental groups launched a campaign for a "Five-Year Freeze" on genetic engineering.

In 1993 in Switzerland, a grassroots-funded organization called the Swiss Working Group on Genetic Engineering collected 111,000 names in favor of a referendum to ban genetic engineering. The biotech

industry hired a public relations company for \$24 million to defeat the referendum, which was outvoted by a margin of two to one in June 1998. But the debate is far from over. A similar referendum was organized by Greenpeace and Global 2000 in Austria.

In Germany, resistance to genetic engineering is led by the Gen-Ethisches Network, BUND, and a grassroots initiative called Food from the Genetics Laboratory.

In Ireland, the Garlic Earth Liberation Front dug up a field of Roundup Ready sugar beet at Ireland's Teagasc Research Centre at Oakport. In France, farmers of Confédération Paysanne destroyed Novartis's genetically engineered seeds. Subsequently, France imposed a two-year moratorium on transgenic crops.

Throughout Europe, bans and moratoriums on genetic engineering, in response to growing citizen pressure, are increasing. In July 1998, citizens from across the world met in St. Louis, Missouri, where Monsanto's headquarters are located, for a conference on "biodevastation" and to conduct protests at Monsanto. This gathering launched a new global movement of citizens against global corporations trying to control the very basis of our lives.

SAVE THE SEED

Another attempt to reclaim food democracy has been through reclaiming the seed from the destructive control of corporations. For more than a decade, Indian environmentalists and farmers have built Navdanya, the movement for saving seed.

In periods of injustice and external domination, when people are denied economic and political freedom, reclaiming freedom requires peaceful non-cooperation with unjust laws and regimes. This peaceful non-cooperation with injustice has been the democratic tradition of India and was revived by Mohandas Gandhi as *satyagraha*. Literally, *satyagraha* means the struggle for truth. According to Gandhi, no tyranny can enslave people who consider it immoral to obey laws that are unjust. As he stated in *Hind Swaraj*, "As long as the superstition that peo-

ple should obey unjust laws exists, so long will slavery exist. And a non-violent resister alone can remove such a superstition."

On March 5, 1998, the anniversary of Gandhi's call for the salt *satyagraha*, a coalition of more than 2,000 groups started the *bija satyagraha*, a non-cooperation movement against patents on seeds and plants.

Seed is a vital resource for the survival of life anywhere. Seed is a unique and priceless gift of nature evolved, bred, and used by farmers over millennia to produce food for the people. Farmers select and save the best seeds from a good crop to plant them again the next season. This seed-selection, -saving, and -replanting cycle has continued since the beginning of agriculture.

The salt *satyagraha* embodied India's refusal to cooperate with the unjust salt laws and was an expression of India's quest for freedom with equity. The *bija satyagraha* is our refusal to accept the colonization of life through patents and perverse technologies, and the destruction of the food security by the free trade rules of the World Trade Organization. It is an expression of the quest for freedom for all people and all species, and an assertion of our food rights.

Navdanya's aim is to cover the country with seed banks and organic farming initiatives. Navdanya will not recognize patents on life, including patents on seed. It aims to build a food and agriculture system that is patent-free, chemical-free, and free of genetic engineering. This movement will reclaim our food freedom by strengthening our partnership with biodiversity.

THE MONSANTO CAMPAIGN

Because of the nationwide awareness of genetic engineering and Monsanto created by the "Monsanto, Quit India" movement, in 1999, news of Monsanto's genetic-engineering trials in India was leaked to the press. These trials were being carried out in 40 locations in nine states. Since agricultural decisions are supposed to be made by regional governments, state agricultural ministers objected that they had not been consulted on the trials. They released the locations of the trial

sites, and immediately farmers in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh uprooted and burned genetically engineered crops.

In Andhra Pradesh, the farmers also got a resolution passed through the regional parliament and put pressure on the government to ban the trials. After the first uprooting by farmers, the government itself uprooted the Bt-crop in other locations.

BUILDING ALLIANCES

The global movement for food democracy is building broad-based alliances—alliances between public-interest scientists and the people, between producers and consumers, between North and South. Solidarity and synergy between diverse groups is necessary because the corporate push for genetic engineering raises issues of democracy at many levels.

Public scientists who have worked on the science of ecological impact have been an important part of this movement. In 1994, Brian Goodwin, the eminent development biologist; Tewolde Egziabher, Ethiopia's environment secretary; Nicanor Perlas of the Philippines; and I proposed a meeting of scientists working on non-reductionist approaches to biology. The Third World Network in Penang generously offered to host the meeting. The team of public scientists who gathered in Penang—Mae Wan Ho, Christine Von Weiszacker, Beatrix Tappeser, Peter Wills, and Jose Lutzenberger, along with Elaine Ingham, Beth Burrows, Terje Traavik, and others—has played a key role in raising ecological and safety issues.

Without these scientists' solidarity with citizens' movements, industry's attempt to polarize the debate as if it were between "informed scientists" and "uninformed citizens," or between "reason and emotion," would have been successful. The protests would have been brushed aside, and commercialization of genetically engineered organisms would have continued without any question or pause.

Solidarity between producers and consumers is also necessary. Since most people in the South are farmers, and only 2 percent of the world's farmers survive in the North, movements for food democracy

will take the shape of consumer movements in the North and both farmers' and consumer movements in the South.

Our movements for the recovery of the biodiversity and intellectual commons are the basis of the democratization of the food system. On the one hand, refusal to recognize life's diversity as corporate inventions and hence corporate property is a positive recognition of the intrinsic value of all species and their self-organizing capacity. On the other hand, the refusal to allow privatization of living resources through patents is a defense of the right to survival of the two-thirds majority that depends on nature's capital and is excluded from markets because of its poverty. It is also a defense of cultural diversity, since the majority of diverse cultures do not see other species and plants as "property" but as kin. This larger democracy of life, based on the earth democracy, or what we call *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, is the real force of resistance against the brute power of the "life sciences industry," which is pushing millions of species to extinction and millions of people to the edge of survival.

If we can still imagine food freedom and work to make it real in our everyday lives, we will have challenged food dictatorship. We will have reclaimed food democracy.

the nation / the world



Canadian Farmer Takes On Monsanto

By Renata Brillinger

An historic battle that began on a small farm in the Canadian prairies is headed to the Supreme Court of Canada. This "David and Goliath" saga pits a 72-year-old farmer named Percy Schmeiser against Monsanto Corporation, a multinational agribusiness and global champion of biotechnology. Monsanto has sued Mr. Schmeiser for patent infringement because he has refused to pay Monsanto's technology fee for use of the patented genetically engineered canola seed that he says contaminated his crop. This battle will have worldwide consequences for the rights of farmers, the influence of corporate agribusiness, and for the legal basis for genetic engineering, specifically the applicability of existing patent law to life forms.

For over 50 years, Percy Schmeiser has been growing canola on his farm near Bruno, Saskatchewan. He has been saving seed and developing a varietal that is highly adapted and specific to his farm ecosystem. He owns a farm equipment business, and was also the mayor of Bruno from 1966 to 1983, and served as a member of the provincial legislature from 1967 to 1971.

In 1997, Percy Schmeiser was charged by Monsanto with illegally planting its genetically engineered (GE) Roundup-resistant canola seed without a contract and without paying their \$37 per hectare fee. Monsanto detected the herbicide-resistant genetics in seed samples they obtained by trespassing onto his land. Percy maintains that his fields were contami-

nated via wind, insect cross-pollination and/or from passing trucks carrying neighboring crops. He has never planted "Roundup Ready" seed, and has never applied Roundup, which is the only alleged benefit to planting the GE seed since it permits unfettered application of the herbicide without risk of crop damage.

In March of 2001, the court ruled that regardless of how the Roundup Ready genes got onto his land, they are the property of Monsanto. Schmeiser was ordered by a provincial court to pay \$19,000 in damages for unlawfully using the seed and another \$153,000 to cover Monsanto's court costs. His appeal of this decision

to the Federal Court of Appeal was lost in early September 2002, and he is now taking the case to the Supreme Court of Canada. Percy has counter-sued Monsanto, accusing the company of a variety of wrongs, including libel, trespass and contamination of his carefully developed gene bank with Roundup Ready genes. This case will not be heard until the original lawsuit is settled.

The patent law that was used to decide in favor of Monsanto was written to apply to machines to protect inventors from

the profiting of others, knowingly or unknowingly, from the original design. However, patents on life forms require different considerations, both practical and ethical. Some of the embedded questions include:

- What, if any, life forms should be protected under patent law?
- What are the consequences of the inevitable escape of patented genetics from their intended legal user, both ecologically and legally?
- Who is responsible for the unwanted, unintended introduction of the patented life form into a non-target environment?
- Shall we entrust the stewardship of our collective

seed heritage to individual farmers and their consumers, or to the legal fiction of the corporate entity?

At its root, this story provides a case study illustrating the perils of GE technology. High school biology teaches that cross-pollination occurs naturally between different plant varieties of the same species, and that therefore, for example, GE canola can cross-pollinate with non-GE canola to result in some GE offspring. The products of genetic engineering cannot be controlled or contained once they are re-

leased into the environment. Although GE seed is banned in Mexico, genetically engineered corn genes have been discovered in indigenous maize varieties in Oaxaca, Mexico, the genetic birthplace of domesticated corn and the world's most genetically diverse corn-growing region. The commercial release of GE varieties into our food system presents a threat to all organic food producers and to all farmers cultivating their own seed strains.

It also illustrates the centralization of power that is enhanced by the biotech model. Because global corporations exist primarily to generate and maximize profit, the production and sale of GE seed must necessarily be confined by contracts with farmers limiting their ability to save the seed for future planting. This is the only way these corporations can justify the huge R&D costs, legal fees and advertising, and continue to perform for their investors. The technology package being sold to farmers includes the seed, herbicides and other chemicals, and machinery for sowing, fertilizing, spraying, harvesting and processing. Roundup Ready seed is inextricably linked to the sales of Roundup, Monsanto's most profitable product. Thus, in many ways, the autonomy of farmers regarding on-farm practices is compromised. And farmers seeking redress, like Percy, must go up against corporate financial and legal resources rivaling those of some nations.

Renata Brillinger works for the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

The court ruled that regardless of how the Roundup Ready genes got onto his land, they are the property of Monsanto.

Nonviolent Struggles Build Autonomous Zones in Chiapas

Luc Davidson Schuster is a former AFSC-NH Youth Organizer who recently returned from Chiapas.

In 1930 Mahatma Gandhi led the famous Salt March to the sea. This nonviolent action went beyond traditional forms of protest by employing a constructive program, a concept that was central to Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. In this case, the march was constructive because, rather than simply defy the British monopoly on salt, the Indian protesters productively defied their colonizers by illegally making salt of their own.

Central to the indigenous Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico is the concept of autonomy. After almost 500 years of colonial and neocolonial rule in Mexico, the Zapatistas, in the spirit of previous indigenous uprisings, rose up to wrest control over their communities. Though this uprising is commonly thought of as a violent revolution, the Zapatistas' success in maintaining autonomy from the Mexican government has depended in large part on their use of nonviolent tactics, particularly through employing their own constructive program. This program of constructing alternatives comes in the spirit of one of Gandhi's unique strengths—the ability to articulate *and act out* alternatives. The Zapatistas now have an entirely separate state structure in place. They have established schools, clinics, weaving and shoemaking cooperatives, and a decentralized government structure headed up by five different *juntas del Buen Gobierno*, or Committees of Good Government. These *juntas* provide a unique challenge to the political authority of mestizo politicians in Mexico City who have historically exercised power from afar. The Zapatistas went from protesting a *mal gobierno* to constructing a new *buen gobierno* for themselves.

Ten years ago, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) violently confronted their cultural and economic colonizers by seizing the tourist town of San Cristobal and forcing large ranchers off of indigenous land. The initial fighting lasted only twelve days and although much violence has since rained down from both the

Mexican military and hired paramilitaries there has been little or no armed response by the Zapatistas since January 12, 1994.

Over the past ten years, the Zapatistas have deliberately invested their time and energy into cultivating grassroots democracy among indigenous people and broadening their base of support throughout international civil society. Each of the community organizations in the Zapatista-controlled territories is designed with the primary goal of empowering the indigenous population.



"Civil Society - Neutral Zone"
Tzajalukum, Chiapas.

Photo: Jeremy Nelson, www.rtfcam.org

The weaving and shoemaking projects are all run cooperatively by the participating craftspeople; the schools and health clinics across Chiapas are run by indigenous *promotores*; and the governing *juntas del Buen Gobierno* make decisions by consensus with members rotating on and off every fifteen days. The *juntas* were designed to turn power over to civil governance from the military.

Because they incorporate extreme forms of consensus decision-making down to the most grassroots level, these structures have the potential to create a society that is truly by and for the people.

The work inside autonomous Zapatista communities has been done alongside strong international support. In order to deter military and paramilitary incursions, international human rights observers have maintained a constant presence in many of the autonomous communities over the last ten years. The schools and clinics are funded, for the most part, by donors worldwide, and the shoemaking and weaving coopera-

tives depend almost entirely on the support of "Zapatourists," foreign activists who visit Zapatista communities. Beyond gaining material support, the Zapatistas have also won over the hearts and minds of many internationals through the use of poetry, Internet communiqués, and other creative forms of mass communication.

It is important to acknowledge that in addition to the obvious tension between the ideal of nonviolence and the militant force used during the first twelve days of January, 1994, there are other aspects of Zapatismo that don't jibe with most philosophies of nonviolence. Nonviolence demands respect for all human life no matter your position in a particular conflict. While women do enjoy some meaningful power in the autonomous communities, scarcely any women serve on the *juntas del Buen Gobierno* and traditional gender roles go largely unchallenged.

In addition to the subjugation of women within the movement, the Zapatistas have not always respected the humanity of their adversaries, such as the mestizo ranchers who were expelled during the first days of the uprising. Meaningful autonomy cannot exist in Chiapas without respect for all voices involved in the conflict, within indigenous communities and without.

In addition to affirming the equal worth of all human life, nonviolence is based in grassroots democracy and the peaceful communication of ideas. It must also foster creative alternatives. But most of all, nonviolence requires active resistance to systems of oppression.

So much of this is evident in the Zapatista movement for autonomy that it is unfortunate for media attention to focus on the EZLN and the gun-toting image of Subcomandante Marcos. The initial uprising was indeed violent, and the Zapatistas continue to do things that at times make pacifists uncomfortable, but will this forever taint our image of the overwhelmingly successful Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and prevent us from learning from it? The indigenous Zapatistas are deeply proud of the new society they are creating and we should share in their celebration of it. ☪

A Quechua Leader Speaks

EL PAÍS

Fed up with being exploited as slaves in 1764, ancestors of Ecuadoran Antonio Vargas rebelled and tried to establish a government run by local chiefs. The unsuccessful uprising challenged the system of forced labor in the mines and indentured servitude to which natives were subjected. On Jan. 21, 2000, Vargas, a 41-year-old Quechua, led a revolt, invoking Mahatma Gandhi's pacifist philosophy. He demanded what has been long overdue: justice and autonomy for Ecuador's ethnic minorities and the government's fulfillment of its many broken promises.

The leader of the National Confederation of the Indigenous Population of Ecuador (CONAIE) is a bilingual teacher, father of four, and instigator of the uprising that overthrew President Jamil Mahuad and consolidated the expansion of indigenous cultures in this impoverished Andean country of 12 million people, 30 percent of whom are from indigenous groups.

The morning of the fleeting establishment of the Council for National Salvation, the day that a civic military triumvirate seized the government for three hours, Vargas saluted and joined hands with Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, his ally in insurrection. Vargas shouted to the crowd: "A revolution has occurred with no bloodshed in Ecuador!"

Vargas has demanded justice and autonomy for Ecuador's ethnic minorities.

The break with constitutional order was short-lived, the conquest was clean, and it does not seem that Vargas is particularly worried. "I predicted what would happen, the betrayal of the generals." He adds, "I've had a conscience since I was little. I was raised in the countryside, more or less in the Amazon jungle. And when I dedicated myself to school, the teachers were foreigners, and there were problems with that. It was then that I learned to suffer."

Every day, he made the journey from his small village to the school in town on foot. "I witnessed the racial discrimination of the indigenous people and *mestizos*. In the schools, Indians were marginalized and told to forget their native language of Quechua and replace it with Castilian Spanish."

His commitment to activism began when he was 17 years old. "It was for the land, for the language, for all of it," he says. That is, for Indian legal, health, and education systems and the funds to procure them, social security, and programs against poverty and against the progressive degradation of some of the 10 national ethnic groups.

Yet Vargas claims that he does not seek independence. "That is what those who are trying to sow confusion say, those who say that we are trying to form another country. But it's not like that.

We want to fortify Ecuador."

Vargas was born in Puyo, in western Ecuador. Fighting the lethargy of the most downtrodden and resigned Indians of the Amazon took several years. He was president of the Organization of Indian Townships of Pastaza (OPIP) from 1990 to 1994 and led the 1992 protest against oil companies in Indian regions. As a result, more than 2 million hectares [4.9 million acres] were returned to the Indians. From 1994 to 1997, he was provincial director of bilingual education and then became president of CONAIE. "I'm not going to join a political party," he says. "This way, with uprisings, we're better off. Our people have less bitterness or resentment."

"There never has been a program on behalf of the government exclusively to help the countryside," says Vargas. "The majority has been dedicated to the cities, in support of large national and international businesses and large banks. The countryside is exhausted."

The attorney general has ordered Vargas to be arrested for subversion. However, it is unlikely that the edict will be executed, as an indigenous mobilization for his freedom and highway blocks would begin immediately.

"I'm not afraid that they will arrest me," says Vargas. "If we had been stealing, or if I were a thief or a criminal, I would be afraid. I fight corruption, hunger, and poverty; if that is a crime, we're going to jail. We don't run away, like corrupt bankers."

—Juan Jesús Aznárez, *El País (liberal)*, Madrid, Jan. 31, 2000.

Year One of the Chávez Era

IPS
INTER PRESS SERVICE

The Venezuelan government of President Hugo Chávez has marked its first year in office. The year has been characterized by a far-reaching process of change that, through the rewriting of the constitution, has redesigned the country's political map.

"Now comes the stage of translating into reality what has been planted as a seed in the constitution," said the controversial Chávez, who makes no bones about his aim to remain in power until the year 2012.

A charismatic retired lieutenant-colonel who led an aborted coup attempt in February 1992 and, in November of that year, served as the "inspiration" for another attempted coup from his prison cell, Chávez took office on Feb. 2, 1999, after a landslide victory in the December 1998 elections.

From the very start, the president made clear his intention to replace the "moribund constitution," in effect since 1961, with a new document "in line with the new times."

The first clause of the new constitution, which took effect three days before the turn of the century, renamed the country the "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" as suggested by Chávez, a fervent admirer of South American liberator Simón Bolívar, the leader of Venezuela's independence movement.

The first year of the Chávez administration will remain in the memory of Venezuela's 23 million inhabitants as a time of feverish electoral activity and high-running tension on the political

Ecuador: A Kidnapped Democracy

Clarín

Gustavo Noboa has already installed himself in the Carondelet Palace, Ecuador's government headquarters. The new president took over with much more room to maneuver than his predecessor, having already been granted one of the prerequisites for staying in power in a country like Ecuador. At least, that is how the recent experiences of former Presidents Abdalá Bucaram (deposed in February 1997) and Jamil Mahuad (ousted in January 2000) seem to indicate.

Noboa assumed power when his country's social conflicts had worsened dramatically to the point of provoking an insurrection, while Ecuador's blind politicians refused to address the problems. Yet fortunately, at least for now, the unrest has not reached the level of political violence that faced the Southern Cone countries during the 1970s.

Noboa's power is based on a "sacred alliance" that is in the process of uniting the economic elites of Quito and Guayaquil. The president can count upon the blessings of those corporate and financial sectors that have survived the worst economic crisis in Ecuador's history. This is their way of rewarding Noboa for continuing on the road to dollarization [begun under Mahuad], despite the protests by the native peoples of the Na-

tional Confederation of the Indigenous Population of Ecuador, the group that put an end to Mahuad's regime.

Furthermore, Noboa counts on support and advice from former President Osvaldo Hurtado, the influential leader who pushed for Mahuad's exit a few weeks ago, before the indigenous demonstrators had arrived in Quito, and prior to the military's separation into different factions.

Both rightist and moderate parties are also falling into line with the new government out of political opportunism rather than ideological or democratic conviction. For that reason, it is very likely that the primary economic reform—dollarization—will end up being forced upon Congress in the next few days. That will be the first step toward the stage of development that many Ecuadoran and foreign investors dream about: the wide-scale privatization of public enterprise and property.

Privatization promises huge gains for big business, and corporate leaders are confident that that is where the great ventures of the future will be found. Until now, the government has privatized nothing. Ecuador's powerful petroleum sector is estimated to be worth \$15-\$20 billion; the energy sector, another \$7 billion; and telecommunications could

bring between \$2 billion and \$3 billion of profits once they are privatized.

The third area of support for Noboa is the military elite, and not at the lower and middle levels of the hierarchy, which are becoming increasingly isolated from the Ecuadoran oligarchy and the corporations. On the contrary, the lower levels of the military are moving closer to the indigenous and the impoverished, something never before seen in this country.

How will Noboa respond to the indigenous leaders, who are now speaking from a position of strength and not in a helpless plea for assistance? Without a doubt, that will be a crucial question and the factor controlling his presidency, his credibility, and his stability over time.

In gaining the support of the establishment and the military, Noboa appears to have closed the door on the lower classes, particularly the indigenous population, which is being swept toward the fringe of political power. Judging from this perspective, Ecuadoran democracy has been virtually kidnapped. Once again, the government rests upon the three traditional foundations of power: large financial cartels, a divided military, and corrupt political parties.

—Anibal del Rio, Clarín (liberal),
Buenos Aires, Jan. 24, 2000.

Promises from a New President

hoy

One week after taking power at the office of the Armed Forces Joint Command, Gustavo Noboa tries to rest at a hacienda owned by a relative. There, the president of Ecuador grants Hoy his first interview to the media. Excerpts from the dialogue follow.

Your economic team is still not complete, and the country still does not have a very clear idea about the way ahead.

• In the first place, it is important for the country to know that I have a vice president who was the minister of finance and who has a very clear understanding about financial planning. Governments usually have one month to make up their cabinet. I had only five days.

It is said that your energy minister, Rodolfo Barniol, does not have any experience with petroleum.

• Look at all the ministers with experience in petroleum, and look where we are. Where is the expansion of the oil

pipeline? Where are the \$480 million that we should have from the oil price recovery? We only have \$40 million from that recovery. What I want in my cabinet are honest technicians, citizens of great prestige.

In your first address, you announced that the dollarization and privatization process would continue. You are an economic liberal.

• Yes, but I have a profound social awareness. To me, the poor come first. When I said no more bankers in my government, that was not just a phrase. Not all bankers are bad; that I know. They will be tried in the courts, and those who committed abuses will be punished.

The previous administration sent a bill to Congress urgently advocating dollarization. How long will the process take?

• A team has been working on that. We will move forward, and hopefully, we will soon be able to announce to the country some good news.

Indigenous leaders say that if the crisis is not resolved soon, we will have a civil war. How can you prevent that?

• I have already established bridges with the Indians. I have always been in favor of dialogue.

The other time bomb is the military.

• It has been discouraging to see a few colonels leading a rebellion. They failed to understand how serious it is to detract from democratic order. The Organization of American States, the European Union, and the United States could expel us from the international community. Those who [rebelled] failed to realize that the international community could set up a blockade and isolate us.

What about the possibility of restructuring the Supreme Court, following the model of Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela?

• I am studying alternatives.

—Carlos Jijón, Hoy (independent),
Quito, Jan. 30, 2000.

Colombia

From FOR updates, 2004

The communities profiled in "Resistance Unarmed" are located in Colombia's northern Urabá region. San José de Apartadó formally declared itself a peace community in 1997. After being threatened with forced displacement they decided not to support directly or indirectly any armed actor in the civil war. Cacarica community of self-determination, life and dignity is an Afro-Colombian community that was initially displaced to the coastal city of Turbo and has since returned to their home territory in the lower Atrato river region. They have established two "humanitarian zones" where no weapons are allowed. The Peace Communities San Francisco de Asís, Nuestra Señora del Carmen, and Natividad de María are Afro-Colombian communities that have chosen an "option of life" by deciding to not participate in the armed conflict, though they live in areas contested by armed groups. The Balsita Community of Life and Work, near the municipality of Dabeiba in the department of Antioquia, is another community that has chosen a strategy of survival based on principles of nonviolence.

For more information contact Gilberto at 415 495 6334, Fax: 415 495 5628 or <gilberto@igc.org>.

Faced with the loss of their brothers, fathers and children, the survivors of the massacre were left with few options: stay in their homes and risk further attacks and threats to their safety, or flee down the mountain. Although for many in Colombia the refusal to leave their land has proven to be the equivalent of signing of one's own death order, the people of **La Unión** know first-hand how displacement destroys communities. Summoning every ounce of courage, this time they fought the instinct to run. They stayed in their village and resumed the daily business of survival—working the land, tending their animals, educating their children. This time the shelter they sought was in reaffirming their commitment to a peaceful future.

Important Resource on Colombian Peace Initiatives

Accord, a journal on peace initiatives, recently published an excellent special issue on "Alternatives to War: Colombia's Peace Processes". The issue, edited by Mauricio García-Durán, examines Colombia's peace negotiations, grassroots peace initiatives, regional efforts, and the role of the international community.

More than a dozen articles, maps, timelines, links to other resources are available on-line at: <http://www.c-r.org/accord/col/accord14/index.shtml> We highly recommend this reading!

The New York Times

International

[Sign up for Today's Headlines!](#)NYTimes: [Home](#) - [Site Index](#) - [Archive](#) - [Help](#)Welcome, [mrmatthew](#) - [Member Center](#) - [Log Out](#)

Go to a Section

Go

Site Search:

Go

Audi TT

[NYTimes.com](#) > [International](#) > [Americas](#)

Colombia War Spills Into Indians' Peaceful World

By [JUAN FORERO](#)

Published: May 2, 2005

TACUEYÓ, Colombia, April 28 - The Nasa Indians appear to live well on their lush reservation here in southern Colombia, a swath of mountains and valleys where sweet fruit grows, trout teem in fast-flowing creeks and colorful birds dart about.

They live in tidy, well-kept homes, growing coffee, bananas and beans. Emphasizing economic independence, they run a successful fish farm and are trying to strike up a marble mine.

The one major threat to their existence is Colombia's unrelenting civil conflict, which has ground on for 41 years. But the Nasa, an Indian nation that numbers about 100,000 in this region, has used a pacific civil resistance campaign to stay out of the drug-fueled war, which pits the army and right-wing paramilitaries against Marxist rebels intent on toppling the state.

For four years, the Nasa's stern-faced but unarmed Indigenous Guards - now a force of 7,000 men and women - have simply driven away the fighters who venture into these fog-shrouded mountains in Cauca Province. They confront rebel and soldier alike with ceremonial three-foot batons decorated with tassels in the colors of the Nasa flag, green and red, and persuade the outsiders to leave.

Their success has earned the acclaim of the United Nations and the foreign governments that pay for Nasa development programs.

The Indians have forced traffickers to close down cocaine-producing labs. They have faced down paramilitary death squads. When the mayor of the Nasa town of Toribio was kidnapped by guerrillas last year, 400 guards marched two weeks over the Andes to the rebel camp where he was being held. They won his release.

"We do not want armed groups on our land," said Julio Mesa, 57, the leader of the Indigenous Guards in

[Enlarge This Image](#)

Carlos Villalon for The New York Times
Julio Mesa, second from left, patrols the town of Tacueyó, Colombia. Mr. Mesa is the coordinator of the Indigenous Guards, an unarmed force of 7,000 men and women.

ARTICLE TOOLS

- [E-Mail This](#)
- [Printer-Friendly Format](#)
- [Most E-Mailed Articles](#)
- [Reprints & Permissions](#)

ARTICLE TOOLS **millions**
SPONSORED BY **NOW PLAYING IN THEATERS**

Multimedia

PHOTOGRAPHS



The Nasa Nation

An Indian nation has used a pacific civil resistance campaign to stay out of the drug-fueled war between Marxist rebels and the army.

Most E-Mailed

1. Op-Ed Columnist: [Conservatives v. 'South Park'](#)
2. Op-Ed Columnist: [The Greediest Generation](#)

Technology
[nvtimes.com/tech](#)

Top 10 most popular
cellphones

Also in Technology:
Top 10 most popular

Tacueyó. "So what we do is we get people together and get them out."

But in the last two weeks, brutal fighting has swept into three of the Nasa's eight towns, testing the Indians' pacifism and autonomy.

Starting on April 14, the rebels began rocket attacks on Toribio. In nine days of fighting, a 9-year-old boy and several policemen and soldiers were killed. The government took back the town, but rebels pounded another community, Jambaló, with their notoriously inaccurate mortars, propane tanks armed with explosives.

Tacueyó was next.

On Wednesday, with a Colombian military plane raining down bullets on rebel positions, dozens of young soldiers supported by light tanks and armored vehicles stormed Tacueyó. The rebels responded by firing nearly a dozen of the makeshift mortars. Soldiers answered back with their mounted machine guns from the central square.

"What worries me are the sharpshooters," said one baby-faced soldier, Andrés Nova, 24, as he squeezed up against a wall for protection. "They are not that good, but anyone with a rifle is a danger."

Shortly after, snipers killed a soldier and wounded two others.

Tacueyó's Indians were caught in the middle. When a rebel rocket landed on a house, severely injuring two children, Mr. Mesa and others ran to help. They looked stunned and helpless.

Mr. Mesa, 57, and his wife, María, 54, also a member of the guard, had spoken to the rebels early on. "They said, 'We're at war,'" Mr. Mesa recounted. "There was nothing more to say, so I left. But first I told them, 'What you're doing is very bad.'"

Across Colombia, dozens of Indian tribes are being hammered by the war. Assassins single out leaders of the Wayuú in northeastern Colombia. In northwestern Choco State, Embera children, whipsawed by war and poverty, have committed suicide. Nationwide, tens of thousands of Indians have become refugees. Some of the smaller tribes, the United Nations recently warned, are on the verge of disappearing.

Mr. Mesa and other Nasa leaders are determined to see their nation avoid that fate.

The Nasa, also known here as the Páez, were not always peaceful. In the 1980's, they formed a fighting group, Quintin Lame, but the violence only escalated. The Indians changed tactics, and vowed to stay out of the fighting. They focused on building a self-sustaining community held together by an overarching philosophy of self-determination and the right to be left alone.

"The government wants to involve us, in their army, in the police, in their informants network," explained Nelson Lemus, an Indian leader. "The guerrillas, they want us to get involved in the revolutionary story, the fight for power."

But "getting involved in war," he said, "hurts our culture, our language, our ways."

As Mr. Mesa spoke about the Nasa's efforts to keep the peace, a sniper's bullet came close and the Indian leader and other guards hit the ground.

"We want to talk, to see if they will listen," Mr. Mesa said, lifting his short, bulky

3. [The World Is Flat: The Wealth of Yet More Nations](#)
 4. [Op-Ed Contributor: The War We Could Have Won](#)
 5. [Abduction, Often Violent, a Kyrgyz Wedding Rite](#)
- [Go to Complete List](#)

- [Link to other news stories](#)
- [Top 10 most popular handheld devices](#)
 - [Top 10 most popular cameras](#)



The military stormed Tacueyó last week, and rebels responded by firing makeshift mortars.

frame off the ground and dusting himself off after the shooting ended. "Sometimes they do listen to us, but lots of time, they do not."

For the army, whose commanders met with the Indians throughout the ordeal, there could be no withdrawal, though Col. Juan Trujillo said he understood the Nasa's position. But he said it was the army's job to fight off the rebels. "We are the state here," he said.

Still, Mr. Mesa was not about to give up. Last Thursday, he calmly trudged across Tacueyó, wearing a farmer's hat and carrying his trusty baton, and generally oblivious to the shooting around him. What he faced, though, was at times heartbreaking. A 2-week-old girl had died; villagers debated whether the missiles and bullets that had raked the fields near her home were to blame.

But not all the news was bad. When townspeople became concerned that light tanks were being positioned too close to where most villagers had escaped, Mr. Mesa was able to get a tank commander to hold off.

And when a young man was detained by soldiers, suspected of helping the rebels, Mr. Mesa was able to get the army to turn him over.

"You see," Mr. Mesa said, leading him away. "Talking is the best way to resolve things."

Special Offer: Home Delivery of The Times from \$2.90/week.

Ads by Google

Travelling to Colombia?
Read our impartial Consumer Reviews first and Avoid any Nasty Surprises
www.reviewcentre.com

International Relations
eWoss can help you find it. Collectibles & much more!
www.ewoss.com

International Relations
Online degree program available. Study diplomacy and foreign policy.
www.apus.edu

what's this?

OUR ADVERTISERS

Network Solutions
Offers robust web hosting as low as 9.96 w/1 yr plan

Sheraton Savings
Buy 2 Nights Get the Third Free Book Now!



RELATED ARTICLES

- [La Sierra Journal: Where Violence Reigned, Camera Has Compassion](#) (April 19, 2005) \$
 - [Colombian Rebel Is Extradited to the U.S.](#) (March 10, 2005)
 - [Paraguay Suspects Leftists in a Killing](#) (February 18, 2005) \$
 - [Colombia Admits It Hired Agents to Abduct Rebel in Venezuela](#) (January 13, 2005) \$
- Find more results for [Civil War and Guerrilla Warfare](#) and [Colombia](#)

TOP INTERNATIONAL ARTICLES

- [35 Iraqis Killed as Insurgents Press Spate of Attacks](#)
- [Taiwan Communication Plan Stirs New Hopes for a Thaw](#)
- [Egypt Detains More Than 200 in Attacks on Tourist Industry](#)
- [U.S. Denounces North Korea After Reports of Missile Test](#)
Go to [International](#)

TIMES NEWS TRACKER

Topics	Alerts
Civil War and Guerrilla Warfare	Create
Colombia	Create
International Relations	Create

Track news that interests you.

- [Create Your Own](#)
- [Manage](#)
- [Most Popular Alerts](#)
- [Take a Tour](#)

CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE \$

From: Barbara Wien <barbara_wien@usip.org>
To: COPRED-LIST <COPRED-LIST@gmu.edu>
Subject: What democracy looks like
Date: Wednesday, April 19, 2000 10:00 AM

Seattle!

An inspiring account of one young woman's experience. She's from the U. of Indiana-Bloomington and involved in the anti-sweatshop movement and Amnesty International. New winds are blowing...

Hello all,

I and many other No Sweat! members just got back from the IMF / World Bank protests in Washington D.C. All of us have our own impressions, feelings and thoughts on our weekend. I certainly don't mean to represent everybody's opinion here, but I would like to share mine with you, especially concerning certain aspects of the weekend, which the mainstream press has not adequately covered so far. In the Washington Post, New York Times, USA Today, and other AP stories I have read since Sunday, disturbance of the downtown D.C. area and clashes with police have been headline stories. Almost every news photo I have seen in the papers involves some aspect of violence - - protesters wearing gas masks, an officer with a club beating an activist, an anarchist under a police horse's hooves. Other stories noted the fact that part of D.C. was closed on Monday so that government employees couldn't attend work. Others quoted World Bank officials disputing activist claims or highlighting the "failure" of the demonstrations and actions to shut down the financial bodies' meetings.

The "real" story from this weekend is the character and dynamics of a nascent movement. The real story is deep, self-conscious celebration and appreciation of a common humanity that the thousands of protesters reveled in throughout every moment of every day. The real story is NOT that these activists are trying to tear down an old world order -- embodied this time in the Bank and the Fund -- but that they are actively and successfully CREATING and LIVING a new one.

Most descriptions of protesters (and certainly many of the arguments I heard from people I helped to block out of the IMF building on Sunday) focus on how "strange" they are....the way they look, dress, speak, behave. The protesters are marginal, and perhaps partly arising out of a fear of people they don't understand (obviously a common phenomenon among us humans), the press and others feel a need to marginalize them further, treat them as the other, either mocking them or merely tolerating them with a wry, resigned smirk, as if they were oddities in a circus or wild animals in a zoo. If they could come to terms with this fear and put it aside to judge fairly, they would open themselves to a new experience and experiment in love and democracy.

This weekend I saw thousands of people, with no central decision-making hierarchy, pull off beautifully orchestrated collective actions of civil disobedience. Affinity groups of 5 to 25 people formed clusters with other groups, sent delegates to long meetings, kept in touch with each other at all times via cell phones and bike messengers, and word of mouth passed from one group to another as they met in the street. I saw thousands of people so dedicated to consensus decision-making that they would spend all night in a circle talking rather than vote over the opinions of a minority --and it worked. Even in the middle of mass actions, as thousands locked arms and surrounded the IMF building, the spokespeople of affinity groups met, and dispensed messengers who walked among all the lines, soliciting opinions from small groups, building

consensus for the next stage of the current endeavor. I saw techniques in action that had been developed and consensed upon to keep large groups communicating - - hand signals, chants, rituals.

Democracy and nonviolence and love were principles, at once spoken and unspoken, that informed every move they made. And it wasn't that they didn't recognize or even demonstrate other tendencies of human nature -- hierarchy, violence, anger, peer pressure, insensitivity-- these were all there. But there was a deep recognition of our common humanity, our tendency toward these behaviors/emotions, and they had non-violent, socially-agreed upon techniques of handling these situations in a loving and transcendent way.

Once, during a long hot meeting in a church basement, as hundreds of young activists struggled to form consensus on a course for Monday's actions, a man became angry at the facilitator and began to yell. Immediately the assembled crowd groaned and quietly hissed its disapproval. The man did not lower his voice, and chants of "nonviolence" and "respect" could be heard throughout the basement. Still the man did not lower his voice, and suddenly (it seemed to me to be almost immediate and simultaneous) the hundreds assembled began to sing one beautiful musical note. The man swallowed his anger, the singing stopped, and the meeting was able to continue through to consensus. There were hundreds of people in the room. No one responded to his anger with more anger. No one raised their voice in response. No one overrode his opinion as the meeting progressed...just his method of communicating it, which had been out of sync with the principles that he and his comrades were operating from and were in struggle to uphold and propagate in the world. They acknowledged his common humanity and dealt with it with love, respect, and firm dedication to the needs of the many. In this movement, everyone is fit to govern. Methods such as these may seem strange and even silly to many of us, but they WORKED, and they were truly representative, truly patient, truly democratic, and hence deserve careful consideration and respect. I had never seen democracy in action like I saw it this weekend and it is a lesson we as a country could learn a lot from. There are a lot more impressions that I could share with you. One surprise (strange that it should have been a surprise to me, but it was) was the warmth with which we were met by the ordinary people in D. C. We were certainly treated with contempt by many of the delegates and business people kept out of their jobs on Sunday and Monday, but we were thanked and fussed over and treated with affection by the line workers in cafeterias, the immigrants having coffee in the Ethiopian restaurant, the working and non-working poor in the part of town in which we had our convergence center, the woman in the subway who had been a "radical herself" in the 1960's. Unlike the monied elites we confronted in the papers and during the blockade, these people treated us like we were on their side and represent hope, which I think, indeed, we were and we are. I was touched by the reception. I enjoyed being part of the thousands that milled through the city that weekend, who everyone recognized by the way we were dressed and the conversations we had I enjoyed sitting down in the Metro next to someone reading about the "invasion of the protesters" on the front page of the Post, and getting a sideways glance. I enjoyed the dignity that my work afforded me during those days. . . No matter what you might think of the of the protesters , their image, their behavior, and their message, they definitely know what democracy is and how to live it. . .-- Amber Gallup