

Inspired by the Zapatistas' invitation to weave a global network of resistance, and following the success of the 1996 Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in Chiapas, a second encuentro took place exactly a year later in Spain.

Organized horizontally through co-operation between numerous European social movements, involving planning meetings in Prague, Zurich, and Barcelona, the second encuentro brought 3,000 activists from 50 countries together under the banner, "For a World Which Contains All Worlds."

For nine days in locations spread across Spain, Tuareg nomads from the Western Saharan desert mingled with German anti-fascists, Indian Ghandians with landless Brazilians, British anti-road protesters with Zapatista delegates. The nebulous network began to take shape as disparate groups met face to face to continue the growing global conversation about fighting capitalism and building alternatives.

Despite the intense heat, the difficulty of coordinating workshops separated by hundreds of miles, and complaints of too many fiestas (six in nine days) the main themes of the gathering began to take shape as people explored questions like: How do we learn from each others' struggles? What kind of network do we want? What are the new forms of struggles and politics?

Many new initiatives and groups were born during those long dusty days, including the idea of a more concrete global campaign against the World Trade Organization and the development of a global alternative media network. There was no doubting that the global network of resistance was becoming a powerful reality.

Dreaming of a Reality Where the Past and Future Meet the Present

by Andrew Flood

"Everywhere there are people who are fed up with the dominant values, who seek to change their own lives, to open new spaces and construct a more dignified present. Everywhere there are willing accomplices desiring to live an adventure."

– **Manifiesto for the convocation of the Second Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism**

Imagine for a moment marching up a hill, lit only by starlight and a distant bonfire on a hot August night, in Andalucia, near the very tip of southern Spain. Looking at the stars you point out the red twinkle of Mars to the comrade whose arm you entwine. She comes from the opposite end of Europe. Behind you lies an agriculture estate, left derelict by its owner but now seized by agricultural workers. Behind you hundreds of comrades try and ford the shallow river in the dark. On either side, olive groves stretch up the hills in neat rows, the red soil now dark and cool.

Someone on the road ahead starts singing 'A Las Barricadas' (To the Barricades) in Spanish. Slowly this is taken up by others behind and ahead, in Italian, Turkish, and other languages, sometimes just hummed or whistled by those who don't know the words. The Spanish version is familiar to me from a scratchy recording an Italian comrade

passed on to me on tape. The original recording is of 500,000 people singing this working class anthem at a rally of the anarchist National Confederation of Workers (CNT) in Barcelona, July 1936, days after the revolution there.

Those on this road have gathered from all over the world, over 50 countries in all. They have temporarily left the struggles in their own countries to come here to dream of a new reality together. Here the weather-beaten features of a male *campesino* from Brazil are found beside the sunburned face of an 18-year-old female squatter from Berlin. Do you feel you are imagining something impossible, something from a Hollywood blockbuster, or the past? Then add one more detail: a gasp goes up from those on the road, for overhead a shooting star briefly appears. Were it not for the collective gasp each of us might have imagined this was a vision we alone were seeing. But no, we look around and realize we are marching, seeing, and dreaming together.

In our modern world The Power tells us such dreams are no longer possible. History has ended, there is no dream, just the reality of alienation, work, and obedience. Yet the scene above is not from a film or from a history book, rather

it took place on the evening of 2 August 1997. This was the Second Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism. I could describe it in cold, political terms alone but this would miss the 'for humanity' part and in truth for every day we discussed organizing 'against neoliberalism' we spent another 'for humanity'.

The encounter was organized without a central committee through co-operation on a continental level. News of it flowed along many paths in many languages. It made huge leaps via the internet and fax, and smaller ones via leaflets, pamphlets, on radio shows, in photo exhibitions, and during a million conversations. In various ways the news of the encounter-to-be was put into the hands of those marching in Derry in February 1997 against the massacre of civilians by the British army there 25 years earlier; landless *campesinos* occupying land in Brazil; refugees from the Western Sahara in camps in Southern Algeria; anti-road protesters in Britain; First Nation activists in Canada, those running a 'pirate university' for workers in Turkey; environmental campaigners in Colombia; academics in South Africa; anarchists in Poland – the list



>> **May 3** >> Declaring "The oil is ours," 50,000 workers at Brazil's government-run oil company, *Petroleo Brasileiro*, walk off the job over pay cuts and a plan to privatize the company. The strike is reinforced by a strike of thousands of rail workers and truckers, as well as tens of thousands of other government workers demanding higher wages and an end to privatization.

>> **May 14** >> Two cars collide and block Camden High

Street, a busy shopping district in London, UK. The drivers argue, and then begin smashing up the cars. Suddenly, 500 people pour out of the underground station and occupy the street. The first Reclaim the Streets street party begins, challenging the privatization of public space by the car, while bringing together the spirit of carnival and rebellion, rejuvenating creative forms of direct action.

goes on and on. It echoed right down to the Zapatista villages in the mountains and jungle of the Mexican south east where the idea of the first encounter had come from.

Flowing to Spain

And so in July people from everywhere came on boats, by plane, by car, bus, and train, even a few by bicycle. Alongside them came messages bearing titles like *Resistance to Neoliberalism: A View from South Africa* as dozens of papers began to arrive to be translated and circulated. As we got closer, the streams started to merge until a river of people arrived from the Metro station to fill the public buses to San Sebastian de los Reyes, a small and dusty town outside Madrid.

The opening ceremonies were held in a nearby bull-ring, Plaza de Toros, where two delegates from the Zapatista communities read out greetings in which they prophetically warned us that: "As companions in the struggle for harmony in our world, we say that it is necessary to put up with heat, thirst, and tiredness, like a farmer who puts up with everything because he has faith in his work in the fields." These were indeed prophetic words for the week ahead of us.

We split up for discussions on a variety of issues which were held in five different locations in the Spanish state. I set out for the train station alongside others heading north to Barcelona for the economics and culture group. We travelled overnight on a specially chartered train to Barcelona. Many of us felt Barcelona was a fitting location, the centre of the anarchist revolution that had swept

much of Spain some 61 years earlier, a revolution that in the last few years had become a point of redefinition for sections of the left.

Arriving at 8.00 am we first formed a cordon through the train station for the security of the Zapatista delegates who had travelled with us. Then we marched in a long column through the streets, at one point passing under a squat from the roof of which large exploding fireworks were being fired in welcome. This brought the neighbours out on their balconies along the route to wonder what this motley, tired, and unwashed sample of the world's population were up to.

One of the strange features of our group was how many of the delegates sleeping on mats in school halls were equipped with portable computers, digital cameras, and other play-things. But with these we succeeded in putting up on-the-spot accounts and pictures of the encounter in process.

The sub-group I worked with dealt with the issue of how to form the network of information between struggles. The call for this network had emerged from the previous encounter in Chiapas and was contained in the closing statement: "That we will make a network of communication among all our struggles and resistance's... this intercontinental network of alternative communication will search to weave the channels so that words may travel all the roads that resist."

Most of us had experience in communication, from pirate radio and small circulation magazines to regional TV stations. We decided to work in English and Spanish, as everyone there

had a working knowledge of one of these languages.

We began by rejecting the traditional pyramid structure of news media where local sources feed up to regional level, which feed to national and perhaps the global level before news trickled down again to other regions. In discussing what a network without a centre could look like (but in recognizing that some people have more time and resources to dedicate to the flow of information than others), we came to use the human brain as an analogy. Here the many nodes have major paths that carry information between them but it is possible for any two nodes to form a connection and for any connection to improve in speed and the amount of information it can carry if this is needed. Therefore many minor paths also exist. There is also a two-way flow of information and feedback on the information that is sent.

This image flowed out of what the network already is, in practice. The network we described is an organic one already in existence and already growing. Our role was more to begin a description of it and come up with ways to develop this existence and improve the flow of information.

We considered, for instance, the path a communiqué

from Subcomandante Marcos might take after he has written it in the heights of some *ceiba* tree in the mountains of the Mexican south east. Perhaps it goes on horseback to the nearest settlement, from there by car to San Cristóbal where it is typed onto a computer, translated and suddenly takes more paths, perhaps by fax to newspapers and solidarity groups on the one hand, on the other it jumps onto the internet and runs down the telephone lines to listserves like Chiapas 95. Here it replicates hundreds of times and make its way onto a desktop in Ireland where it jumps onto webpages and more lists but also gets printed out and stuck up as a poster in a bookshop or reproduced and distributed in the *Mexico Bulletin*. Simultaneously it has arrived in Istanbul, where it is also printed out and travels by bus to some distant town and a union meeting. Multiply this path by thousands and consider all the alternatives and we see the network already exists without a centre; indeed the different nodes have not only never met but can be unaware of each others' existence.

In the course of the week in Barcelona we also mobilized in support of one of the squats where the encounter was

>> **June** >> Health-care workers occupy hospitals throughout Cordoba, Argentina. Nurse Ana María Martoglio says, "We've taken over this hospital because they haven't paid us in two months and because the government has sent the health-care system to hell."
>> **June 1** >> About 5,000 Argentinian students surround the Congress, preventing deputies from entering, and forcing the government to postpone discussion and voting

on President Menem's proposal to introduce tuition fees for the first time. Days later, the vote is in favour of fees, and riots erupt throughout the night.
>> **June 5** >> Over 3,000 people occupy the Mexico City stock exchange, protesting against election fraud in the state of Tabasco. Three hundred people arrive on foot, having walked 500 miles from Tabasco to draw attention nationwide to what has become known as 'Tabascogate'.

>> **June 8** >> South Korean President Kim Young Sam warns unions that a planned strike at the state-owned telephone company would be akin to "an attempt to overthrow the state".
>> **June 15-17** >> The Halifax People's Summit in Canada brings together international non-governmental organizations (NGO) and local networks of activists, linking global issues with local concerns. Workshops,

being held. In a piece of blinding stupidity the council had announced its intention to evict this in the middle of the week. They backed down on the day of the demonstration, which became a victory march through the Hospitalet district complete with samba bands, stilt walkers, and fire jugglers. An enduring image from the demonstration is one of a Brazilian carrying the flag of the MST, the movement co-ordinating the occupation of farmland by landless *campesinos*, in support of the occupation of a building in one of the big industrial cities of Europe.

Another highlight of the week was a video-showing of the Milan train occupations. These occurred in June of this year when 4,000 Italians occupied two trains in Milan and succeeded in travelling right across Europe to the demonstration against the EU summit in Amsterdam, focal

point of the European march against unemployment. The video was produced by Italian autonomists from a social centre in Rome which, we were thrilled to learn, was in an old military fort with a castle and a drawbridge.

The encounter was bringing people from different traditions of struggle into contact with each other so that we could draw inspiration and learn from each other. The value of this sort of exchange cannot be over-estimated. By seeing the struggles of others, we come to understand our own struggles better.

After several days, we boarded the train for the closing gathering and settled down for the long night-journey across the Spanish state to El Indiano. Throughout the night, and into the next day, vast amounts of liquid refreshment were consumed to the sound of revolutionary songs from every corner of the globe, which emanated from the dining car. By the early hours of the morning the songs were becoming shorter as words were forgotten, but the spirit was there. On that long train journey south many kindred spirits living in this temporary and mobile 'free world' reached out to each other in the dark of one hundred compartments. All through that night and into the next day the train rolled south and as the sun rose, so did the heat, and it kept rising and rising as further south we went into a land of red soil – sunflowers and olive trees stretching into the distance.

The journey took 20 hours by train and another 30 minutes by coach to the small town of Puerto Serrano. Here we ran into two gates, each guarded by a large bearded man



Second *Encuentro* for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. Spain

shouting at us to go to the other one. Eventually something was sorted out and thousands of activists flooded into the schools and their grounds to stake out spaces for sleeping.

That evening there was the inevitable fiesta. We formed into a long column outside the schools and marched there – definitely more of a manifestation than a demonstration. The locals turned out in force to watch. At one point an old man stood outside the house, both arms above his head, cheering those marching by. From his age and obvious joy we speculated that here was a participant whose eyes had seen the struggle that Spain represented to so many of us, the Spanish revolution of 1936. We were, after all, in the olive groves of Andalucia where a previous generation had fought and died for their vision of a new world.

On the final day of the encounter we walked to El Indiano, an agricultural estate squatted by the *Sindicato de Obreros del Campo* (Union of Rural Workers). We were passed at one point by a digger, its front bucket crammed with several punks who had hitched a lift from a local.

Revolutionary Spain briefly met Mad Max on that road.

The end was an anti-climax; throughout the long, hot

day each group from the numerous discussions reported back in three languages, Italian, Spanish, and English and in the evening we returned to hear the closing words of the Zapatista delegates before making our way back along the road; this is where the shooting star appeared and this account begin. From here there is little to tell or there is everything to tell. The Second Encounter ended but the encounter for humanity and against neoliberalism goes on.

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Resources:

» **Documents from the second *Encuentro* can be found at www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3849/encounter2dx.html**

protests, carnivalesque street theatre, and outdoor picnics prevail, while the G7 meet under extremely low security, with delegates freely walking about the city, and meeting in a Maritime Museum which features, ironically, a deck chair from the Titanic.

>> **June 19** >> Workers at Hyundai Heavy Industries in South Korea approve a provisional wage agreement providing for a 5.6 per cent wage increase and bonuses

of three months pay.

>> **July 13** >> Energy workers in Ecuador begin a long strike that threatens to halt electricity and petroleum production. The unions demand the repeal of laws restricting the right of public workers to strike. Administration buildings of the state-run companies are occupied by workers.

>> **July 17** >> Some 50,000 teachers in Costa Rica

strike, closing about 4,000 public schools, as well as four state universities. The teachers demand a presidential veto of a recently approved pension law. Another 10,000 state workers join the teachers' strike two days later, protesting government plans to reduce the work force. Meanwhile, the central labour union in Costa Rica prepares for a general strike.

>> **July 21** >> One thousand mothers and children march