

From Seattle to South Africa, Chiapas to Croatia, a radical and democratic peoples' news network for the world has spread like wildfire, recklessly endangering the corporate media's monopoly on information. Known as the Independent Media Centre (IMC, or Indymedia), this network enables hundreds of alternative media organizations and thousands of activists to collaborate through the internet in a joint effort to democratize the media. Since the success of the first IMC in Seattle, Indymedia is the fastest growing alternative media network in the world, with 112 websites spanning six continents as of April 2003 – the most recent addition being IMC Iraq.

Through Indymedia, people who are directly affected by social and economic policies can directly share their news and views with the world, using innovative 'open publishing' software. This allows anyone with access to the internet to easily and instantaneously publish text, audio, and video files onto the network's newswires. Viewers can comment directly below the original post, creating an open forum for dialogue and debate.

Open publishing is redefining journalism by welcoming people to publish more than just the facts, to tell their tale as they witnessed it. "People all over the world are dipping their story telling toes in the water," says Matthew Arnison, a member of the Indymedia Tech Collective. Without much in the way of rules or style guides, Indymedia is hub for the collection of eclectic and lush story telling, a breeding ground for the exploration of new and creative journalistic styles, and an archive for history as it happens.

Indymedia has evolved into a hopeful vision that a new media landscape is on the horizon, one that gives voice to millions of people. "Those who are looking for a better world, those who are revolting... can no longer rely on corporate [and] mainstream media," says media critic Robert McChesney. "They need their own media. That is precisely the mission of the IMC."

Indymedia: don't hate the media, be the media

What follows is a compilation of texts, which explain some of the origins and spirit of Indymedia. First is a log made up of excerpts from the New-IMC network email list that works with new site applications from around the globe. Here they explain their reasons for requesting a new site:

>> GLOBAL IMC LOG >>

IMC PALESTINE

>> Our mission is to help Palestinian activists organize, motivate and inform. We want to help people develop the art of story-telling and debate. We want to be a catalyst for those stories to reach into other media and parts of the planet. We want to break down barriers and encourage the flow of information from people with both good and bad stories to tell, to the people we know are out there who want to hear them. We want to create a physical and virtual space that creates a sense of achievement and reflection but is vibrant and open enough to attract people who are interested in activism; while remaining practical and focused to encourage all people in our audience to contribute.

>> Out of the ten people in our core group, only two are women. Unfortunately this is a trend throughout Palestine that we do not want to follow and we are encouraging more women to attend our meetings and take an active role in the new media centre.

>> New volunteers have asked us who is running this project? Most businesses and organizations in Palestine suffer from over-management and from having too many people in charge. This makes it even more crucial that we strive to create an open and transparent organization whose members report fully to one another and share responsibilities.

>> IMC NIGERIA

On the issue of the Nigerian government reaction, should they learn that a Nigeria IMC have commenced in the country, we resolved that we are going to operate our IMC though we know that the Nigeria government will never be in support of our new technique in getting real news spread within and outside the country. An activist from Dehura cited the killing of the editor-in-chief and founder of *Newswatch* magazine who was murdered by the federal government because of his unrelenting effort to unfold the ills of the Nigerian government, which is not the usual operation of the corporate press in Nigeria. We all agreed that the field of operation will be rough, but we just have to contribute lots of sacrifice to start and sustain the Nigeria IMC, knowing the positive effect it will have on the Nigeria people as a nation. We agreed that all our discussion-making system shall be non-hierarchical, consensus-based and collective decision process. We also agreed that the Nigerian IMC is not owned by any person or organization.

>> IMC JAKARTA

In a place where internet access is expensive and difficult, an IMC can/must do work primarily off-line to have it be effective. Whether or not an IMC makes media on or off the internet, the general organizing principles are the same – have meetings, have enough people to sustain a group, gather a mission statement and editorial policy, not be dominated by one organization...

large petro-chemical corporations display callous disregard for human life and the future of this planet... To their lies, we respond with pies."

>> **March 24** >> Thousands of workers denouncing government austerity measures march through Romanian cities and threaten a general strike next month unless their demands are met. Demands include: indexation of wages, new labour legislation, an end to

redundancies, lower utility prices for consumers and a grace period for companies unable to pay their debts.

>> **March 24** >> In the United States seven Oglala warriors maintain a tipi camp at La Framboise Island in the Missouri River to protest the controversial Mitigation Act, which would turn nearly 200,000 acres of their land over to the state of South Dakota.

>> **March 26 – April 5** >> An eight day partial strike

>> IMC ECUADOR

In our country the mass media are private monopolized corporations; as a logical consequence they only inform about notices of their interest, not informing about actions of the majority of Ecuadorians. These days, knowing objectives/aims of Indymedia, and after having some meetings of analysis with responsible persons of alternative communication, we found it necessary for Ecuador to join power to create an IMC Ecuador, to inform the world about our struggles, processes, activities, proposals and thoughts.

>> Indymedia is the space of communication, which will help us to inform lots of people about our feelings, thoughts, proposals, actions, and mobilizations like indigenous, *campesinos*, urban, popular, and other social movements of Ecuador. We will get back the space of communication that the conventional mass media have monopolized, not expressing the reality of people and social movements.

>> IMC ZAMBIA

After covering the Conference of Parties (COP 7) of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, in Marrakech, Morocco, I feel deeply encouraged to set up an IMC in Lusaka, Zambia. I contributed a series of stories to the IMC-Climate project in Morocco and after reading my stories on the IMC site, I was very much challenged to set up our local IMC. I have familiarized myself and other colleagues and have read the IMC blueprint

against privatization by Spain's Iberia Airlines workers causes the cancellation of about 400 flights, affecting nearly 100,000 passengers.

>> **March 31** >> Bahaman telecommunications workers stage a walk-out, accusing the government of deceiving them in negotiations over privatization of the state phone company. Consultants recommend reducing the work force of 2,100 to under 1,000. The walkout leaves

documents. We seek to set up a committed, country-based IMC group that will work consistently and provide up-to-date independent news coverage. We also seek further guidance from already existing and established IMCs. We are neighbours to South Africa and Congo and I hope with effective communication, we can make our dream a reality.

>> IMC GLOBAL

Re: new imc process: We don't want to just have people fill out the form and click off the boxes and say, yeah give us the domain name. To me, personally, that feels like standing in line, filling out a form and getting a drivers license. That is NOT what Indymedia is about. It's not about a site. That would be easy. That would mean we are just a digital network. But we are much more than that and that is why we are a threat. We are a social network combining the best of a decentralized digital network. So think tanks like the RAND Corporation are threatened by us. If we were just a collective of websites linked to a few servers across the globe, with groups of people uploading stories to open publishing sites, that would be cool. But that wouldn't be Indymedia. The work we are doing is not easy. It is not just about filling out a form. It is not just about getting a server going. It's about changing paradigms... and hopefully about listening and learning more from each other so that we really can change the world and communicate without commodification and with more of a vision for how we want to see things.

/Logging off >>

Indymedia: precursors and birth

This is an edited transcript of an October 2000 interview with one of Indymedia's originators in Seattle, Jeff Perlstein, by journalist Miguel Bocanegra. Interspersed between the text of the interview are first-hand accounts of other Indymedia activists which relate to the events Jeff describes.

Miguel Bocanegra: I'm here with Jeff Perlstein of the Independent Media Centre in Seattle. So Jeff, can you talk a little bit about... how you got involved in the issue of the WTO and give a history of the IMC?

Jeff Perlstein: Sure. In January or February [1999], I saw some flyer about a city-wide gathering about the WTO... I went to monthly meetings and started to hear more about the mobilizations that were happening and learn more about the policies of the WTO.

I'd also begun to see how many folks were coming to Seattle, and see these meetings grow and grow. As someone who has done independent media projects, I began to recognize that we couldn't just let CNN and CBS be the ones to tell these stories, that we needed to develop our own alternatives and networks. That's where the idea for the media centre came from – the necessity for communities to control their own message. So we set about to create a community-based peoples' newsroom. That's where the idea came from.

MB: How did the IMC develop, and how did it come out of the WTO process?

JP: Just to back up a bit, I always like to give respect to the media projects that have come before, that have been part and parcel of movements for social justice, because it's a long history and the IMC didn't just come out of nowhere. [Alternative media] is everywhere from Radio Venceremos [clandestine radio station which played a crucial tactical and cultural role in the 1980s liberation struggle in El Salvador] to Liberation News Service in the sixties here in the US, to the Zapatista's use of the internet in 1994 and since then, a project called Counter Media that I was involved with in 1996, [which brought together independent media activists from around the country to document actions during the] Active Resistance anarchist gathering during the Democratic Party's convention in Chicago, and it was kind of the kernel of the idea for the IMC. It was very small-scale – media activists were out shooting video and documenting what was going on in the streets that the networks weren't covering.

And others – Paper Tiger TV, Deep Dish TV, all the activist media over the years lay the groundwork and paved the way for the IMC model, which was really tying all of

these people together, nationally and internationally, in a network that would be powerful and vibrant – media for the movement.

>> Logging on >> J18.org

In the UK, the bug for independent media caught at the Carnival Against Capitalism on J18. Australian techies provided a website which allowed easy uploading – the beginnings of the code for open publishing. Experienced media activists from Undercurrents, Squall, and Schnews and others joined in with cameras, notepads, and tape recorders. A strong internet connection was added, and J18.org appeared.

>> “While the carnival was roving in the City of London, I spent most of the day on the other side of the river Thames, in a dark room packed with cables, used teacups and computers. Everybody was busy typing, uploading reports from all over the world to a shared website. Couriers came in with new audio and videotapes to be edited and uploaded. The footage was projected onto the wall. Reports were received on the phone. The room was buzzing with activity, everybody seemed to know what they were doing. When we left at three in the morning, the leftovers from the day were still visible in the quiet streets – graffiti, beer cans, forgotten leaflets. We were worried [about being] caught with our rucksack full of mobile phones, but determined to continue.”

BaTelCo with only a skeleton crew as it tries to repair Nassau phone links knocked out by sabotage.

>> April 8 >> In Mexico, State police occupy the autonomous community of San Andrés Sakam'chen, site of the historic San Andrés Accords, and install a PRI mayor. The following day, 3000 unarmed Zapatistas nonviolently force the police to leave the town and re-install their elected representatives.

>> April 17 >> Two members of Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo – the vocal mothers of those who disappeared during the right wing dictatorship – travel to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, to deliver a message of peace and dignity to the war-torn capital: “We are not here to support one sector against another, but to say to all of you that the only enemy is imperialism. This Yugoslav land today is fragmented by the interests and the

manipulations of the great powers. Beloved Yugoslav mothers, dear women who struggle: we are here together with you to struggle for peace and dignity. We, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, will carry our message to the world, because we don't believe that missiles and bombs are the way to build a peace. We believe in the word, in dialogue, and in the love of life.”
>> April 19-21 >> In Jamaica a new tax is

>> The day became a landmark for the emerging global protest movement due to the audacity of the action, but also due to the use of technology that allowed simultaneous, real time reports of events all over the world on a common website. Five months later, the first IMC website successfully reported the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, this time direct from the street, giving Indymedia a dynamic that would keep it moving and developing across the globe. – UK IMC

/Logging off >>

JP: In Seattle, we had this notion that we couldn't just wait for the networks to cover this. This was going to be a very important event, and it was right in our own backyard. It was coming to our town, so we had a responsibility to provide some sort of platform, some sort of framework, for people all over the country to plug in and do good media work.

We set about to do that with only about eight weeks before the WTO. We had no organization. We had no space. We had no funding. We had no staff. What we did have was these relationships with media activists who all were very excited about the idea of us coming together, of really amplifying our impact and bringing the resources and passion and skills that each of us could to really be a vibrant network and to provide a true alternative voice out there.

So that's what folks did. People pitched in, on really short notice, locally, nationally... Somebody said, "Well, this is what I can do. I can bring an editing deck, since you guys don't have one. And everybody can use it," or "We'll bring a

"In breaking down barriers, sharing ideas with friends and peers, we are creating a new front in the cultural war to decommodify information and our lives. I see this as an online front, working with journalism and activism at its core, the concept of a free and open exchange of ideas is now being built in earnest, thanks to a modestly conceived but paradigm-shattering open community called Indymedia." – Shane Korytko

bunch of camcorders, and we can help rent satellite time."

We were especially concerned with the way the internet has really grown and how access by a certain segment of the population has also grown, and so there's an issue of what's called a 'digital divide', [wherein the vast majority of the world does not have internet, or even telephone access]. So we set about to do this innovative thing, linking high and low technologies, or old and new technologies. So the internet and the website was the backbone of our distribution.

For example, we posted audio, video, text, and photos, all these different mediums, to the site, and easy to download. Then community radio stations, cable access stations, even community-based organizations internationally could download and distribute them. Here's a good example: Radio Havana pulled down the audio feed, because they had an

internet connection in their office, and then they rebroadcast it on the FM dial, and people all over the island could hear it; nine million Cubans could hear it and didn't have to use the internet.

Another example is that we kicked out a daily print publication called *The Blind Spot*, and we only had the money to run off 2,000 hard copies each day. It's expensive to make hard copies, and we gave those away for free, and posted the files on the site. Activists in Brussels then pulled down those files and printed 8,000 copies and handed them out in the streets of Brussels. So, again, that's 8,000 folks that didn't have to check out the internet, right?

MB: So how did the IMC as an organization become formulated? Did the [WTO organizing] process spark it, create a reason to develop this medium?

JP: In the independent and activist media worlds, there was a lot of discussion about networking, the need for us to have a powerful, vibrant network, as a true alternative to the corporation's network – a peoples' network. Subcomandante Marcos, in 1997 made a video communiqué which was screened at the Freeing the Media Conference in New York.

“We have a choice: we can have a cynical attitude in the face of media, to say that nothing can be done about the dollar power that creates itself in images, words, digital communication, and computer systems that invades not just with an invasion of power, but with a way of seeing the world, of how they think the world should look. We could say, well, ‘that’s the way it is’ and do nothing. Or we could simply assume incredulity: we can say that any communication by the media monopolies is a total lie. We can ignore it and go about our lives. But there is a third option that is neither conformity, nor scepticism, nor distrust: that is to construct a different way – to show the world what is really happening – to have a critical worldview and to become interested in the truth of what happens to the people who inhabit every corner of this world...”

This truth becomes a knot of resistance against the lie... independent media tries to save history: the present history – saving it and sharing it so it will not disappear, moreover to distribute it to other places, so that this history is not limited to one country, to one region, to one city or social group... The truth that we build... will reach full potential if we join with other truths and realize that what is occurring in other parts of the world is also part of human history.”
– Subcomandante Marcos, excerpt from video communiqué, 1997

implemented to compensate for the \$37 million budget shortfall. The tax results in a 30 per cent rise in fuel prices, leading to three days of rioting, which closes down major roads, schools and most businesses throughout the island. Police kill nine people, arrest 152, and eventually the shaken government backs down, cutting the new tax in half.

>> **April 20** >> Students at the National Autonomous

University of Mexico begin a general strike against a 3,250 per cent tuition increase – from two cents to \$65 per semester – and for administrative reform. The strike, which completely shuts down this university of 270,000 students for nine months, catches the attention of people worldwide and inspires many others who are dealing with similar budget cuts, privatization, and the general undermining of public education.

Though military police brutally take back the campus the following winter, the Mexican student movement, an inspiration to the world, continues its fight for free education for all.

>> **April 20** >> Students occupy Nicaragua's Central Bank in Managua, demanding that the government allocate six per cent of the national budget to the universities as mandated by the constitution. One is

So what we really saw with the WTO was an opportunity to be a spark, to be a catalyst... And then folks could bring [Indymedia] with them when they went home. The idea was to make it a replicable model they could take with them.

Since Seattle, when people come together for these big manifestations, the resources also come together, we document it, build an alternative, and then some of those resources stay behind, so we're building all these points in this network. Also we're building the personal relationships, not just a virtual world.

Although we are all linked now by this website, Indymedia.org, there's a real emphasis on the physical spaces, because one of the whole points is to reclaim space for ourselves, for people to interact and to come together and dialogue and exchange, and that that can happen in the virtual realm, but most powerfully happens when we're face-to-face, so these physical locations are linked by this virtual connection.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about the process itself. You said that you started organizing about eight weeks prior to the actual protests. Can you go through the timeline of events that occurred with IMC, the first eight weeks to 30 November through 4 December?

JP: We started convening these weekly meetings and became overwhelmed very quickly as to how ambitious this was and what we were trying to do. Like I said, we had no money. Most of us weren't fund-raisers or anything like that. We were grassroots activists.

Very quickly people started getting very involved, and

people started, in an amazing way, saying, "This is what I can do. This is what I can contribute here." The first meeting maybe had 15 people. The next week we had maybe 30. The next week we had 40, 50.

So about up to mid-October, we've got about 40, 50 people who are plugging in somehow. That's locally. Also, myself and a few others were keeping in touch with folks nationally and internationally, putting out the call and getting an overwhelming response. People all over the country, saying, "Yes, we're coming, we're coming. This is what we can bring," or "We're going to raise money for this."

A really key moment was that I made a trip to the Public Grassroots Media Conference in mid-October in Austin, Texas, because it was the only face-to-face opportunity that we had to meet up with independent media makers from around the country between the time of the idea and the WTO. Essentially, this project became the talk of the whole weekend. We ended up workshopping how we could make this go with people who had done these things for years. Paper Tiger has been around for 25 years doing activist media in New York, and they've got the experience. People from Free Speech TV from Boulder showed up. They were there with two people, and they basically said, "Well, we'll design the internet, and we'll provide all the resources for the web stuff."

Folks from *Acción Zapatista*, based in Austin, were providing a lot of the ideological framework, a lot of input on the process and the importance of process and how the Zapatistas have put that at the forefront, and also a

reclaiming of space and keeping this decentralized network, and this whole idea of “one no and many yeses”, that we all can come together in these moments from one unified “no” to globalization, to global capital, to confront power from above, but that the model and the process has to have ways for people to express their different yeses, their different identities, their different ways of expressing themselves.

So the whole project really accelerated then, to the point that when we got back to Seattle, people were really psyched and we located a space downtown owned by a local non-profit Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI). They really liked the idea of the project and they have this storefront that had just been sitting there unused for a few years. They said, “Look, you can use the place for two months. If you clean all the junk out, and you redo the walls and you paint the place, then that will be in exchange for rent.” It is a big place, 2,700 square feet, with high ceilings and an ideal location, right in the heart of downtown. We couldn’t really ask for much better.

Pieces are starting to come together. Everyone is bringing a different part to it. Still no money, though. This is late

October. We’re about a month away and we have about \$1,500 donated by one group early on. At this point we’re starting to see local people subdividing into different groups, different affinity groups almost. There’s a video team. There’s an audio team. There was a print team that didn’t really come together until the week before. People dealing with volunteer coordination. Another team dealing with security. Another with housing for out-of-towners, and stuff like that.

Meetings are happening almost every night of the week to make this thing go on. We’re starting to have phone conference calls, people nationally, to really figure out how all these pieces are going to plug in and hopefully make some sense when the week of WTO hits.

Right around the first week of November, we’re still pulling all these strands together and trying to get people involved. Because we were a new project and trying to make it go in eight weeks and probably far too ambitious for what we had in place, that the relationship with local organizers, local organizations, wasn’t as strong as it could have been, and in my mind should have been.

killed by a police officer, 21 others are wounded and 77 are arrested. In response, students take two hostages, burn a vehicle, and attack the building with homemade mortars. That night, they maintain a continuous occupation of the highway passing by the campus’ main entrance.

>> **April 20** >> South Korean docks are idle as shipyard workers walk off the job to protest Daewoo Heavy

Industry’s threats to auction off its shipbuilding division in order to eliminate half of its \$49 billion debt and meet the terms of a \$58 billion loan being issued them by the IMF.

>> **April 21** >> In Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 25,000 people protest against rising unemployment and IMF austerity measures. The peaceful No Confidence demonstration calls for President Cardoso’s resignation,

suggesting that he ought to face criminal charges for his role in the Central Bank scandal.

>> **April 26** >> South Korean striking subway workers stand off against 2,000 riot police who are trying to evict them from their protest camp at Seoul’s National University. The strike against layoffs is declared illegal with the government threatening to sack any worker who does not return to work immediately.



Indymedia activists interview *piqueteras* on a road blockade. Buenos Aires, Argentina

So early November, we finally got the space, and not only were we maxxed out just trying to make the media side of things happen, but now all the same people are having to pitch in to sheetrock the walls and paint the floors and put in plumbing and wiring. So many people really put their lives on hold.

Deep Dish TV from New York was on board – they started during the Gulf War, because they recognized the complete media consolidation during the war and how only a narrow thread of information was coming out. Their idea was to break through that blockade by producing video of the critical issues, and then loading it to a cable access station satellite so it would play on community access stations all around the country. For Seattle, they raised money for us to buy [TV] satellite time.

By mid November we have solid core people. We actually got another space donated to use for the video editing, because they had to crunch video all the time, 24 hours a day, in order to produce the nightly satellite broadcast, so footage from the streets had to be logged each day from all the videographers that were going to be out there.

As all this is happening, we're still in crisis mode. For example, we don't have a point person for the print team, and it's two weeks ahead of time. The audio team is just one guy from out of town who basically really wanted to be security and communications and just kind of stepped in to help out. And we're finding out that while lots of people were going to bring camcorders and video gear – the video team was stacked with resources – we couldn't even pull together two mini-disk recorders or even hand-held tape recorders for the audio team.

We didn't know if the phone lines would be installed in time, so there was this huge panic, since so much that we were doing relied on the web. It was our backbone of distribution. We didn't have phone lines in, and especially high speed internet connection in... We didn't have a photocopier lined up. Just real basic stuff.

We were having an argument – I should say discussions – about whether we should bother to paint the floor or not, because that meant that we were going to have to pick everything up and move it out, and we were going to lose two days. We were to the point where two days was like two

>> **May-June** >> An intercontinental caravan of 450 activists – the majority of them Indian farmers – from Southern grassroots groups travel around Europe to protest at centres of capital and make links with European social movements.

>> **May 4** >> A violent six day national strike by Nicaraguan transport workers ends with the government agreeing to lower fuel prices.

>> **May 7-10** >> At least 1,700 delegates attend the second Zapatista *encuentro* in La Realidad, Mexico. Members of civil society who organized the recent popular referendum discuss the results of their work, and make plans for the future.

>> **June 5** >> A street party against economic globalization erupts in Prague, Czech Republic, with between 5,000-8,000 people participating. The US

embassy receives a torrent of bottles and cobblestones, seven broken windows, and a barrage of words against NATO's involvement in ex-Yugoslavia.

>> **June 18** >> GDA Carnival Against Capital, London.

>> **June 18** >> Tens of thousands of people fill the streets from Port Harcourt to Ogoniland, Nigeria, in a festive "Carnival of the Oppressed" to greet Owens Wiwa, brother of Ken Saro-Wiwa, as he returns

weeks in any other point in your life.

Throughout this, there was a real concern about participation and representation. Like I said earlier, lots of local organizers were deeply involved in their own campaign projects. It was short notice. But we were finding that who was coming in the door to participate were mostly white folks – progressive activists, well-intentioned white folks. The intention of the project was to be an opportunity for under-represented groups, groups who not only aren't seen in the media or misrepresented in the media, but may not have access to media production resources. Yet most of the people that were getting involved did have access to this stuff, did have some prior relationship with media making, or had the resources to gain access if they wanted. That was just the way it was playing out, because of who had the 'free time' to get involved and to devote so much time to this project in such a short time frame.

It was a major issue – how questions of privilege play out. Even if we seek to be an alternative, and in some ways we were, there always needs to be an internal critique as well, and that privilege is based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, even. So the question of how to be a really heterogeneous group is a fundamental question that the media centres continue to grapple with, as do many progressive projects.

Another big question we were grappling with was how we were going to get people to check out the material? It is all well and good to come together and make a bunch of media, but if nobody sees it...? It's like the tree falling in

“Imperfect, insurgent, sleepless, and beautiful, we directly experienced the success of the first IMC in Seattle and saw that the common dream of ‘a world in which many worlds fit’ is possible – step by step, piece by piece, space by space, pdf by pdf, word by word, over the net, on pirate broadcast, in the streets, streaming live, and most importantly – face to face.”

– Greg Ruggiero, media activist and editor with Seven Stories Press

the woods – does it make a sound if no-one can hear it?

One issue with the site is it relies on people coming to the website to find this material and post their own. So people needed to know that it existed, how to find it. Not only didn't we have a budget for advertising, but we didn't have a pre-existing web presence. It wasn't like people had been accessing this web address, Indymedia.org, before. It never existed.

This was a real dilemma, because the site didn't even come online until the day before the WTO week. Yet it still got one and a half million hits that week, which was more than CNN's website, and we know that they have a bunch of advertising money. In some ways, I think what that speaks to is, first of all, the deep, deep desire and need for this sort of information, for this sort of network. People who did find

out about it, friends, through the different links of all the partner collaborating organizations, it was resonating so deeply with them that they were letting everybody they knew check it out, and it just rippled outwards, expanding.

So that's one part of its success. Part of it was also that we weren't trying to be in charge. We were very clear that we were trying to facilitate all these pre-existing organizations' and individuals' work, and so it was participatory in that regard and I think people really felt a powerful investment in the project, where they wanted to let everyone that they knew, know about the project. So they put links in their different websites; they were all referring to it.

What was just complete circumstance is that things got pretty crazy and pretty exciting in Seattle that week, and the world was watching. People were speaking their voices powerfully, and that made for really compelling news, compelling coverage. I think that people around the world had some sense that this was an historic moment, that there was a shift happening here.

We had ABC Nightly News showing up at the door of the IMC wanting to do a piece on the media centre, the new

model. And CNN and *Christian Science Monitor* all of a sudden, intrigued by all this.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about the actual week of the WTO, and how the events, like you said, made for a dramatic scene? What was the mainstream media not doing that you guys were able to do so people were going to your site instead of the CNN site?

JP: We opened our doors on Sunday, N28, and signed in over 450 people that week. So that allowed us to put about 100 videographers out in the street with camcorders. That meant that our coverage was in a lot of ways much more comprehensive than any of the networks who had maybe two camera people on staff. A real quick story is that we heard from some network folks later in the week that they actually started looking for intersections where they saw people with the IMC passes. They were bright green, obnoxious bright green. If they saw enough of those people around, they knew something was happening at the intersection.

That's what was so compelling – we were out in the streets talking to people, which mainstream media wasn't doing. They were talking about people; we were talking with

from exile.

>> **July 1** >> An unofficial "call in sick to work day" keeps one in four Jamaican police officers at home, following a ban on police officers taking industrial action and an ongoing dispute over pay raises. The government brings in the army to help maintain public order.

>> **July 5** >> Outraged at IMF-directed social cuts,

and massive hikes in food, gas, electricity, diesel and water costs, thousands of Ecuadorians rise up in protest. Taxi drivers block roads, bringing cities to a standstill, demanding a reduction in fuel costs. Indigenous groups also block roads, occupy state electricity offices, and take over communications towers. Teachers, health care, transport, and banana workers all go on strike demanding back payment.

Ironically the police also find themselves unpaid. In Latacunga, indigenous groups charge a military vehicle full of troops and the vehicle flees. In all, at least 13 people are shot and 400 are arrested, with the government declaring a state of emergency.

>> **July 7** >> Thousands of Iranian university students in Tehran begin demonstrations which rapidly spread throughout the country, and last for six days. In the

people, and handing people the microphone and letting them talk for themselves and be directly engaged.

Monday rolled around and there were all sorts of marches and mobilizing. There was a real palpable sense that Tuesday was going to bring something that we'd never seen before. Nobody knew what that was going to look like, necessarily. Then Tuesday morning, we got reports from way early in the morning. A number of IMC folks were out with the direct action affinity groups. Some had paired up with labour groups. Some had paired up with the [grassroots Filipino-led] People's Assembly march. We got a sense early on that the people in the streets were actually shifting the balance of power, at least in those hours. Even before 10.00 am we could see that the positions of the direct action people were very solid, strategic positions, and that in order for the police to move, there would have to be a whole lot of commotion.

By noon, with the police response we were capturing on film, it was clear that this could not be ignored by mainstream media. So folks went into overdrive to start conveying to and working with them – to make sure that the protesters' methods were really understood, to get the word out as widely as possible.

We were getting in the IMC all sorts of reports. We actually had our own walkie-talkie dispatch system so that the different video teams could report back on what was going on, so people running in and out filing reports could know where to go. As information came in, we began expecting a serious clampdown. So lots of the media team

stayed out in the field, to witness whatever might take place. This enabled us to counter a lot of the misinformation that the police department and city officials were putting out.

A really significant example is the denial that they were using plastic bullets. All the networks were carrying this denial from the Police Chief, as if it's law, as if it's the word of God. But yet, we were posting numerous photos of people holding plastic bullets of all sizes, with huge welts all over their bodies.

Just quickly I'll talk about how the curfew played out that night. It was pretty interesting at the Media Centre. We got an announcement of a dusk-to-dawn curfew, that people were going to be cleared out of the downtown area. As I said, we were positioned right in the centre of downtown. It was very unclear whether the Media Centre was going to be cordoned off or raided. A lot of people had to decide quickly if they were going to stay there for the night or if they should take off.

>> Logging on >> Information wars

It was early evening, and beyond the banks of computers, the tangles of radio wires and mikes, the giant map of Seattle's gridded streets pinned to the wall, and dozens of journalists rapidly uploading news reports from the anti-WTO protests onto the website of the Independent Media Centre, thick wisps of tear gas started curling under the front door. We all began coughing, and two men pulled a table across the entrance as the sound of concussion grenades clattered outside, coming nearer and nearer.

Outside the window we could see 'Peacekeepers', the armoured personnel carriers of the National Guard with huge mounted guns driving past in formation. Suddenly the door burst open, and out of the mist stepped a Darth

Vader-like figure, booted, masked, with heavy black cape. Those near the entrance tried to negotiate with the policeman. We were told we were all detained.

Reports were still coming in from video makers, radio journalists, reporters with mobiles dotted around the city. We knew the precise scale of the clampdown against the anti-WTO protesters, who was injured, who was arrested. The tension was rising, and the IMC was stuck right in the middle of the 'no-protest zone' where all constitutional rights had been suspended. A Dutch woman and I realized that as non-US citizens we would face possible deportation if arrested, and decided we would risk leaving. We climbed out the back window, past a burning dumpster, and looked left down the tiny alleyway. A line of riot police blocked our way. We turned right, only to find another line of police, this time with their backs to us. We found a third alleyway that was clear, and made our escape down it. It was abundantly clear to us as we skulked the 60 blocks back home, often having to turn back on ourselves to avoid more lines of police, that in a globalizing economy, not all information is equal. By the end of the first day of the historic street protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle almost every single newspaper box in the city had been graffitied with a single word: Lies.

– Report from British Indymedia activist in Seattle
/Logging off >>

largest demonstrations since the revolution, people call for a restructuring of the political system and even an overthrow of the religious state. The students' organizing involves many other sectors of society, particularly the unemployed and high school students, and the demonstrations seem to announce a new era in Iran.

>> **August 12** >> A McDonald's in Millau, southwest

France is dismantled just days before it was due to open. On a sunny afternoon a crowd of farmers, activists, union members, and local families remove doors, roofing, and electrical plates using a tractor, axes, and chain saws and load the rubble onto trucks and tractors, driving it through town and dumping it outside City Hall. The action takes place to protest against the US-imposed 100 per cent import tax on

JP: After the police left, [without detaining anyone] we were all pretty exhausted and emotionally distressed from the events of the day. We decided to run with just a skeleton crew that night in the centre so everybody else could get some rest and come back into the streets to document stuff the next day. So we basically emptied out the place. There were eight of us who stayed overnight, napping, and keeping stuff running.

That brings us through Tuesday night pretty much, at least the view from inside the Media Centre.

There were lots of memorable events during the rest of the week. One was a public hearing with the City Council on 2 December. People were demanding accountability from the city, in part because of the incidents that happened on Capitol Hill [the most densely populated neighbourhood on the west coast outside of San Francisco] the two nights previous, when police pushed crowds there from downtown with great force, used lots of tear gas and pepper spray, and attacked a lot of people who hadn't been involved in the protests and didn't consider themselves activists – that really politicized folks.

We had people there covering the hearing – it was

Roquefort cheese (among other European goods) in response to Europe's refusal to allow sale of US hormonally-tainted beef.

>> **August 23-26** >> The second conference of Peoples' Global Action is hosted by the KRRS, in Bangalore, India. It is called to plan for global actions against the looming meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in November. A hundred

standing room only, and several hundred people rallied in the rainy streets outside. They actually had to cut off the speakers – each had three minutes, but still it went on for more than six hours and they didn't get to everybody. So they had to schedule another one a few days later. It was just tremendous to see people speaking up. The IMC was getting calls from the hearing, because all the videographers were running out of film and batteries.

The other big moment was the presence of people at the jail, supporting those who had been arrested. Hundreds were camping out and demanding their release, and also making the connection between the arrests and brutality that happened to activists and the arrests and brutality that happens everyday in lots of communities, here and internationally.

So a part of what we've seen since Seattle, I think, is the growth of these international mobilizations and confrontations in Washington, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Prague. In all these places, people have seen it appropriate to carry the IMC model on, build on it, add to it.

>> Logging on >> Public access point – Prague S26

"Indymedia adds a further aspect to the carnival – a challenge to the boundaries between reporter and activist, documentation and spectacle, expert and amateur, techie and content-producer, cyberspace and real space. Public access points are one way to enforce this challenge. On marches in Belgium and Italy, Indymedia activists used vehicles with sound-systems as reporting hubs and for info distribution. On S26, the direct action day in Prague, the international Indymedia crew tried out the public access point

again: "We hooked up to the generator of one of the sound systems in Naměstí Miru, the main square. We didn't have any materials until that morning, but it came all together as the crowds gathered. A door was used as a table for two computers, hastily painted banners pointed to the public access point in Czech, Spanish, and English, and the whole thing was decorated with glitter hanging off the trees. People came and asked lots of questions, others typed or translated reports. It was not so much info-gathering, more a hub to exchange information – and the community that fed and read it extended far beyond Prague." – IMC UK
/Logging off >>

Thanks to Jeff Perlstein, Miguel Bocanegra, Ana Nogueira, UK IMC collective, and many anonymous others for contributions to this piece, and to the literally thousands of independent media makers around the world who continue documenting the peoples' history.

Indymedia: who are we?

>> Statement by IMC Argentina

Permit us to begin by digressing, as we Argentines so enjoy doing. We wish to inform you that from now on, when you speak with Indymedia Argentina, you should know that you are not speaking with Indymedia Argentina.

This sounds strange, but it is so, and it was discovered by DJ Soncho the other day. We believe that we were the 10, 20, 30, 50 or three that met from time to time. We believe that today it was us who wet our hair so we could stand the heat and write these lines. But someone told us we are not these things, and we return to the Zapatista slogan: we are not

ourselves – “Nosotros no somos nosotros.”

We admit that we are a rock that flew a little over a year ago and got imbedded in the window of a bank. We went for almost a year before discovering it by the old axiom that consciousness runs behind reality and rarely reaches it, but finally DJ spelled it out.

And now we know who we are, or, better said, we know to a scientific certainty that we are not ourselves.

And what are we if we are not?

Are we a picket line, barricade, burning tyre, masked face, nightstick, bullets that come flying, dining room where all the hands are all one and the mouths are in the thousands? Are we a factory takeover, posted lookout, machine that makes magic, that reproduces love, that returns to us what is ours? Are we a neighbourhood assembly, a woman that changes the life of her family, eyes that yearn, rebelliousness that speaks out? A while ago, shut up in an office (it wasn't as hot as it is right now) we asked permission of everything to be part of everything, and everything gave us permission to be part of itself.

And we disappeared. And we changed into all of the

above things, without even realizing it. And our voice got hoarse and spoke in other voices, and later we heard nothing. Then we discovered that others spoke.

That we were not ourselves and we were a protest, a factory, an assembly.

And so it was, simply, that we stopped being ourselves.

So imagine that every time we wanted to have a meeting, and wanted to discuss something, how our voices got mixed with the noises of machines producing, the slogans of *piqueteros*, or the shouts of the woman who prepares the food for everyone. And, once in a while, the police interrupt, or someone flees simply because we're facing an eviction.

And so it is that now with wet hair, to endure the heat of Buenos Aires, it is hard for us to say what we have to say.

English translation by Peter Maiden

Resources:

» **Global Indymedia:** www.indymedia.org (portal to all local sites)

delegates meet from 25 countries agreeing that, as the Indian slogan goes, they must “kill WTO before it kills us”.

>> **August 25** >> More than 90,000 Brazilians converge on the Congress building in Brasilia, demanding an end to President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's IMF-sponsored austerity drive. “If Cardoso resigns, it would be a gracious gesture, but Cardoso has

no grace,” says Luis Inacio ‘Lula’ da Silva, president of the leftist Workers’ Party.

>> **August 25** >> Rail workers occupy the San Pedro station in Cuzco, Peru, shutting down the line to the ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu. Pickets block freight trains at Cosicha, near the capital. Army helicopters start a replacement service between Cuzco and Machu Picchu. The workers are protesting a deal handing the

state-owned railways to a private consortium for 30 years. They are demanding a guarantee of five years’ work instead of the one year promised under the deal, and severance payments of \$5,000.

>> **August 29** >> South Africa sees one of its biggest protest actions in years, as thousands of teachers, with civil servants and nurses strike and take to the streets against low government wage offers.