



Walking we ask questions

“Utopia is on the horizon: when I walk two steps, it takes two steps back ... I walk ten steps, and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.”

– Eduardo Galeano

The anticapitalist movement has played the role of the child in the crowd as the parade of the powerful wheels by. While the pundits applauded and marketeers cheered, we yelled that the Empire had no clothes. Its cloaks of finery were woven from financial fictions. Its promise of universal salvation through neoliberalism was a global imperial project of resource-grabbing and domination. Its ‘humanitarian interventions’ left a trail of dead human beings in its wake. We always knew the cheerleading of their brutal global project would eventually stop.

Today, capitalism is being unmasked to the global crowd. The last decade has seen the increasing delegitimization of the neoliberal model as a movement of movements has sprung up on every continent, from Chiapas to Genoa, Seattle to Porto Alegre, Bangalore to Soweto.

Like this book, the movement is a web of interconnected strands, of recurring themes and discernable patterns. Autonomy. Participation. Democracy. Diversity. The reinvention of power. The importance of creativity and subjectivity. Real and basic needs rather

than ideology as the basis of political action. Access to the ‘commons’ – whether water, public space, software, seeds, or the manufacture of medicines. And constant questioning and innovation, especially when the movement is most self-satisfied or most despairing.

For movement implies motion, journeying, change. The first stage of the movement that this book documents, from the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to 2001, has been extraordinarily successful in delegitimizing the institutions of global capitalism. But as we move forward in a changing world, we are evolving, transforming once more, innovating tactics. The question now on our lips in the second stage of this movement is: “How do we build on our success and take the movements to another level?” There are many answers. In the words of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado:

*“Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more;
wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking.”*

When a movement stops asking questions, of itself, of the world, it becomes orthodoxy – an idea that has run out of ideas. It becomes fixed, static, brittle, rather than fluid. Water can resist the most savage of blows, ice shatters. It is only armed with our questions that we can change history.

Charting the journey

"This is how the true men and women learned that questions are for walking, not just for sitting around and doing nothing. And since then, when true men and women want to walk, they ask questions. When they want to arrive they take leave. And when they want to leave, they say hello. They are never still."
 – Old Antonio in 'Story of Questions', by Subcomandante Marcos

In making this journey into tomorrow, it is important to understand yesterday, to try and trace possible futures in the contours of the present. Mahatma Gandhi offers us some signposts for our journey in his summary of the Indian independence struggle: "First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win." We can follow the path of the anticapitalist movement using these signposts from 1994 to the present.

First they ignore you: Between 1994 and 1999 we were largely invisible. As far as the powerful were concerned, there was no opposition to capitalism, no alternative to the 'free' market. As Thomas Friedman, the ultimate proselytizer of globalization, wrote in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, "There is no more chocolate chip, there is no more strawberry swirl, no more lemon-lime; there is only plain vanilla and North Korea." Vanilla, you understand, being corporate capitalism, the pinnacle of human evolution. Moreover, he argued, "Not only is all we've got plain vanilla, but everyone is basically happy about it." Something had to give.

Then they laugh at you: 1999 was the summer of corporate love, when the dot-com bubble was at its height and business forecasters, with stunning hubris, were predicting that from here on the stock market would simply continue to go up – forever. Not coincidentally, this was the summer the anticapitalist movement emerged as a global event, when an earthy, rambunctious carnival against capital interrupted trading in the City of London. The contagion spread with the Seattle WTO shutdown later that year. We were raucous, outrageous, riotous, wearing silly costumes, and impossible to ignore. So they laughed at us. "A Noah's ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions, and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix," jibed Thomas Friedman, furious that his vanilla ice cream theory of history had been disproved. *The Wall Street Journal* jeered at the, "Global village idiots ... bringing their bibs and bottles."

By the time of the World Bank protests in Prague in September 2000, the laughing was sounding forced. *The Economist's* editorial was shrill, making its "case for globalization" with the picture of a poor African child – purportedly a future beneficiary of globalization – on its front cover. They were sounding less sure of themselves as they insisted that economic globalization is the "best of many possible futures for the world economy".

Then they fight you: The confrontations got worse. In Gothenberg in the summer of 2001, police shot live ammunition at two protesters, who survived. It was clear

that escalating summit protests would end in death. Months later, Genoa saw the most brutal suppression of the movement in the global North to date, when they shot Carlo Giuliani dead and beat 97 sleeping activists in their sleeping bags. At least 18 other live rounds were fired at activists that day.

At every summit the stakes got higher – they were learning about us and working out how to contain us, while we had ceased to evolve our tactics of spectacular summit blockades. Carnivals against capital are wonderful at delegitimizing global capital – but in Genoa they declared war against us. They would shoot us rather than ever let us get into the ‘red zone’. In any case, we had to stop and ask what would we do if we ever did get there? Preventing the G8 from meeting would never, alone, create the world we wanted. After Genoa, our direct action summit blockade tactics, which just two years before had shut down Seattle, could never happen again in the same way. The next step if we followed that path – really a cul de sac – which they want us to take was to declare all out war in a military battle we could never win. But as the blood dried on the cobblestones and white walls of the raided Diaz school, we realized that the struggle needed, once again, to be on our terms, not theirs. We needed to reflect, study the lessons of the movements so far, and evolve.

Genoa was the largest protest of its kind thus far. By this time, the movement was being taken enormously seriously, from corporate boardrooms to international

police conferences to the columns of the business press.

Six weeks after the Genoa protests, the first of a five-part series of full page articles appeared in the UK edition of the *Financial Times* under the title ‘Capitalism Under Siege: Globalization’s children strike back’. It claimed: “Just over a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall ... there is a growing sense that global capitalism is once again fighting to win the argument.” Hours after the paper hit the newsstands, Islamist terrorists attacked New York and Washington. Suddenly, hope was replaced by despair and fear. The politics of transformation we had been revelling in were suddenly forced to become defensive rear guard actions – defence of human and civil rights, against war, against nationalism. Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi was not alone in his opportunism when he noted the “strange unanimity” between the movement and Islamic terrorists, who were both “enemies of Western civilization”. US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, gunning for a new trade round at the WTO that November, was utterly cynical in his use of the dead from the Twin Towers, saying, “On September 11, America, its open society, and its ideas came under attack by a malevolence that craves our panic, retreat, and abdication of global leadership... This President and this administration will fight for open markets. We will not be intimidated by those who have taken to the streets to blame trade – and America – for the world’s ills.” We were not just described as terrorists. Pundits

who were five years late in noticing our emergence were now eager to be the first to proclaim us dead. The editor of *The Guardian* wrote, "Since September 11, there is no appetite for anticapitalism, no interest, and the issues that were all-consuming a few months ago seem irrelevant now." The *FT* series was pulled.

Bush's declaration of a 'war on terror', a crackdown on domestic dissent, a new era of pre-emptive strikes, and a war without end forced a reappraisal among many activists. It has challenged us all to take a deep breath, put our rhetoric into practice, and think strategically, and fast. Not only have these been dangerous times for dissidents, but the nature of the power we face has been transforming rapidly.

For movements in the global South, however, there was far less disjunction. For them – for the MST, for the Zapatistas, for the Colombian *campesinos* – this has always been a war. Spectacular street protests and global days of action were nothing but an opportunity to link their daily struggles – to be fed, to survive, to be paid, to grow food, to be healthy – to a growing global movement. "For us, every day is a day of action," a Bolivian trade unionist said.

And so rumours of the movement's death were greatly exaggerated. Even in New York City itself, a few months after 11 September, 20,000 protested against the World Economic Forum in the most difficult political landscape. Believing no-one would dare to protest their "act of solidarity", the WEF met in New York City in

*"IF YOU HAVE BUILT CASTLES IN THE AIR,
YOUR WORK NEED NOT BE LOST, THAT IS
WHERE THEY SHOULD BE. NOW PUT THE
FOUNDATION UNDER THEM."* – Henry David Thoreau

January 2002 - the first time it had left its mountaintop resort in Davos, Switzerland for 30 years. Simultaneously in Porto Alegre, Brazil, over 60,000 – six times more than the previous year – met for the World Social Forum under the optimistic slogan, "Another world is possible". The protests were still growing exponentially. That March in Barcelona, half a million people taking part in protests against the European Union summit showed they understood the new reality they faced after Genoa: "It wasn't about laying siege to the summit", organizers said of this action, "but about breaking the siege of our city," (referring to the siege created by the summiters and their police). The protesters in Barcelona also refused the declaration of war, as the anarchist trade union CGT explained: "We have to regain the furiously festive and subversive nature of our activities, breaking military frameworks (the summit-blockade-clash with police) the powers want to confine us to." By November, with the threat of war on Iraq looming, two million took to the streets of Florence to join the closing march of the European Social Forum.

What Genoa and 11 September marked, in fact, was the

end of the first, emergent stage of the movement that had erupted in 1994. It showed up some of the limitations of a momentum and event-based politics that concentrated primarily on interrupting and delegitimizing economic institutions. And so, against the spectacle, we turned our attention to the politics of necessity. We switched our main focus away from the rapid explosions of the days of action for slow-burning, gradually built, but enormous fires. From the ground up, we were building something new – and on our own terms. The movement had grown up. It was digging in for the long haul, the next stage of struggle – the fight, and as Gandhi predicted, the winning.

“The protesters are winning. They are winning on the streets.

Before too long they will be winning the arguments.

Globalization is fast becoming a cause without credible arguments.” – Financial Times, 17 August 2001

Then you win: Perhaps the biggest challenge the global movements face now is to realize that the first round is over, and that the slogan first sprayed on a building in Seattle and last seen on a burning police van in Genoa, “We Are Winning”, is coming true. What we need to do now is decide what winning actually means for us – disintegrating capitalism, or creating the world we want? They are not the same thing. Meanwhile, Western capitalism’s “crisis of legitimacy” in the various ways it wields power – from economic policy to military might – expands exponentially every day.

There has been a “nearly complete collapse of the prevailing economic theory”, according to economist James K Galbraith. Corporations and even whole countries that had been capitalism’s poster boys throughout the 1990s have gone bankrupt. Chaos reigned – not just in Argentina but in capitalism’s heartlands, the corridors of Enron, WorldCom, and many other powerful corporations. We are now in the most severe corporate crisis since the 1930s. “System Failure!” screams the front cover of capitalism’s in-house magazine *Fortune* – a sentiment that, during the late 1990s, you would find only in hip counter-cultural periodicals like *Adbusters*. Nowhere is that failure more clear than in Latin America, which contains the largest of the ever-spreading cracks in the edifice of neoliberalism, and the continent burns with an en masse rejection of globalization, as from Argentina to Uruguay schoolchildren eat grass to stave off hunger pangs. After Seattle, *Fortune* wrote the prophetic words: “If we are not careful, the ‘Washington Consensus’ [the economic ideology of globalization] will be a consensus of one. “The fire is building elsewhere, too, and almost entirely unreported. Asian labour activist Trini Leung reports that as China embraces a market economy: “Unrest has been growing among the retrenched workers and displaced farmers in the past decade. At least hundreds of protest actions such as sit-ins, street demonstrations, and road-blocks take place daily across the country. At times violent protests such as physical assaults and bomb attacks have also been assumed by angry and desperate protesters. This looks set to worsen

as long as their livelihood and displacement do not get better but worse.”

More and more, as the corporate consensus unravels, what you might call ‘soft power’ targets of the movement, such as corporate gatherings and trade rules, are overshadowed by ‘hard power’ – war, fascism, militarism. Of course, the velvet glove of ‘soft power’ has always had the iron fist of ‘hard power’ behind it. To quote Thomas Friedman again: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas ... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.” It is important not to simply move on from soft power institutions as the focus for dissent, nor to forget that it is global capitalism and not just the US military that we are opposing. However, our strategies must reflect the new reality.

The largest global day of action that the world has ever seen happened on 15 February 2003, a month before the US and UK led a renewed invasion of Iraq. Twenty million people took part. Effective resistance to the new imperialism is only possible through global networks of resistance, and it is the forms, links, and networks of the anticapitalist movement as a global political project that have made this level of mobilization and popular education possible. As the *New York Times* noted: “The huge anti-war demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the

planet: the United States and international public opinion.”

Back in 1994 the Zapatistas told us they were fighting the Fourth World War (the Third was the Cold War). Ten years later, the people of the world have realized that we are all in that battle together.

Centres and margins

“Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom.

But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, until at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals... the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its strength from it.”

– The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, ed Raghavan Iyer, Oxford University Press, 1990

The second stage of the movement will be harder than the first. It’s a stage of working closer to home, a stage where mass action on the streets is balanced (but not entirely replaced) with creating alternatives to capitalism in our neighbourhoods, our towns and cities. A politics which moves between construction and conflict, based on longer-term visions, where we seek to construct alternatives that will sustain us into the future – and yet remembers that any true alternatives to capital will throw us into conflict with the system and that we need to strategize continually to defend ourselves against it.

Yet returning to our neighbourhoods, we must not fetishize the local, retreat into subcultural ghettos, nor forget that we are the world's first grassroots-led global political project. We must not undo the global ties that bind us together in a world-wide network. These powers cannot be fought alone, or by single factions. They will pick us off one by one if we attempt to do so. And our resistance still needs to be as transnational as capital, as financial speculation, as climate change, as debt, as corporate power.

Maintaining the movement as a global phenomenon is also crucial for another reason. The nationalism inherent in a purely localized response to globalization has a dangerous appeal for the world's population. In a recent survey of university students in India, Hitler came third after Gandhi and their current Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Vajpayee as the greatest leader in history. Many in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia are turning to authoritarian Islamism as the only hope for a true opposition. In this context, the newly formed Anti-Globalization Egyptian Group, a rare example of this kind of movement in the Middle East, offers a hopeful alternative. Egyptian Marxist development economist Samir Amin points out that their sophisticated analysis of the real nature of domination in the region is a cause for hope, and internationalist networks that include these kinds of groups must be part of the movement's future.

But being global does not necessarily mean being

centralized: the international Indymedia network should teach us that. And though many groups and political parties at the World Social Forum (WSF), for example, believe that it is they who are at the 'centre' of things, directing the movement, they are mistaken. It is in the WSF's corridors, the gym halls, the plastic-sheeted MST encampment under the overpass, where social movements and the marginalized from five continents meet, where the real revolution is being forged.

As one statement to come out of the WSF workshop, 'The Labour of the Multitude' put it: "It was not in the centre of Porto Alegre that we and others were mostly interested ... Social movements always just use – joyfully or cynically, in a healthy or genial way – the paraphernalia created by the 'centres' and their self-satisfied navels." We desperately need a space to strategize as a global movement. Not a world parliament, but a world network. When the marginalized combine, the world shifts a little on its axis. And, as the Multitude text points out: "Sooner or later our course will have to be towards the 'centre'; we will have to cross it as the Argentinean demonstrators do by banging on their pots or forming pickets while marching from their neighbourhoods to their meeting points. The work of the multitude – our work – is to bridge the gaps between peripheries so that they can make the 'centre' explode ... It is better, anyway, that the 'centre' does not realize any of this. It might become afraid. We won't tell it till the last moment."

Of movement and stillness

How can we discover the paths we should take? How will we know they are the right ones? For is there any revolution in history that has not taken a wrong turn eventually, ending in bloodshed and betrayal – ultimately, in failure?

The anticapitalist movement is the most sustained recent attempt to reinvent the notion of revolution into a constantly evolving process rather than the triumph of an ideology. One thing we have tried to learn from history is that the means we choose determine the ends. Too many times we have seen power-seekers gradually compromise every principle they hold until by the time they succeed in gaining power, they must be resisted because they have betrayed everything they stood for. We are not creating a new ideology to impose from above, to ‘replace’ capitalism, but evolving a new, radically participatory methodology from below. Rather than seeking a map to tomorrow, we are developing our own journeys, individually and collectively, as we travel.

As the activist Starhawk asks, “Can we think like no other social movement has ever thought?” Can we act as no other rebellion has ever acted? Can we create a politics that isn’t left up to specialists, a politics that is not just relevant to but part of everyday life, a politics that doesn’t look or feel like politics?

To that paradox, let us add a few more to describe this movement that is many movements. This ancient struggle that is new. This movement that is left-wing

but has rejected the traces of the leftist state-authoritarianism of the twentieth-century. This movement that masks itself in order to be seen. This movement that dreams of other possible worlds here on earth, but has only hunches, not certainties about the way to get to them. This movement with no name. This movement, the most globalized in history, which was labelled “antiglobalization”. This movement which has no leaders, but whose leaders lead by obeying. This movement in which farmers from competing economies, North and South, stand together. This movement that shows the limits of an economic accounting – not with recalculated sums but with carnival – in order to reveal those things that do not show up as losses on the balance sheet: nature, people, culture, and lost souls.

Ancient Greek philosophers used paradoxical, indeterminate, and self-contradictory statements to which there was no resolution, known as *aporia*, in order to evoke a questioning spirit, awe, and speculation in their students, rather than put them to sleep with ready-made answers. It forces the thinker to take responsibility for themselves. *Aporia* creates wonder and amazement before the confusing puzzles and paradoxes of our lives and of the universe. The origin of the word means to lack a *poros* – a path, a passage, a way.

Is this what the Zapatistas mean when they say, “Walking, we ask questions”? Do we have the courage to move – sometimes stumbling, sometimes running – towards an unknowable destination? Would you be willing

to suspend your disbelief if we told you we had all the answers? And if we did and you followed them, how would that help you, in the long run?

The idea of a revolutionary movement that genuinely listens is itself a paradox. Revolutionaries normally shout, they chant, they try to make their screams heard above the roar of a system that bulldozes their means of living, their desires. Yet the idea of listening is central to many in these movements. When a vanguardist Maoist urban guerilla-intellectual first went to Chiapas and spoke to the indigenous in an attempt to revolutionize them, they didn't understand him. Eventually he overcame the arrogance of the revolutionary and he learned to listen. People now call him Subcomandante Marcos. Out of this experience was born *Zapatismo*, a form of rebellion that leads by obeying. This idea of a listening rebellion turns preconceived notions of struggle on their head. *Zapatismo* throws political certainty to the wind, and out of the shape shifting, flowing mist, it grasps change; change not as banal revolutionary slogan, but as actual process. Change as the ability of revolutionaries to admit wrong, to stop and question everything. Change as the desire to dissolve the vertical structures of power and replace them with radical horizontality: real popular participation. Change as the willingness to listen, the wisdom to grow, the commitment to transform.

Getting lost 'without a path' might even be an important part of that process. Making mistakes, having profound doubt, perhaps for sustained periods – this is

part of learning to walk. Learning also means understanding why we fail. This isn't a personal crime or flaw – often it is a legacy of history. Learning true democracy is not something you arrive at, and then sit still, clutching it tightly. It falters, starts up again, requires constant rejuvenation and experimentation. It is a series of skills that require practice, self-knowledge, self-confidence, self-awareness. Walking, and asking questions.

A movement that stops asking questions will become more ruthless, possibly more 'effective' in the short term, but ultimately, repressive, doctrinaire, unable to respond to new threats or opportunities. We begin, in short, to resemble what we oppose. We ossify, and are toppled by those who innovate while we stagnate and pontificate. We refuse this fate which has befallen so many radical movements. We commit ourselves to move on and reconstitute rather than let that happen.

Rebels or revolutionaries

"Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it."

– Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1966

"I cannot give you the answer you are clamouring for. Go home and think! I cannot decree your pet, text-book revolution. I want instead to excite general enlightenment by forcing all the people to examine the condition of their lives ... I don't want to foreclose it with a catchy, half-baked orthodoxy. My critics say: There is no time for your beautiful educational

programme; the masses are ready and will be enlightened in the course of the struggle. And they quote Fanon on the sin of betraying the revolution. They do not realize that revolutions are betrayed just as much by stupidity, incompetence, impatience, and precipitate action as by doing nothing at all.”

– Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*, 1987

Why do revolutions fail? Let us ask history. The uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s – huge in scale and international in scope – are a reference point for many radicals today. Yet while those movements transformed the world – the social progress on race, gender, imperialism for example was extraordinary – eventually they were broken, co-opted and conquered. How did this happen? How can we avoid making the same mistakes again?

Mike Albert of Z-Net says: “The fact that my generation hasn’t shared with yours the lessons we learned out of the failures and successes of the 1960s and 1970s is a sin of humanity.” He observed that activists in the US in the 1960s were like “front runners in a marathon where the mass of people were following along some way behind. In fact, those people would have been better off running in amidst that crowd, not way out in front.”

PR Watch, a radical investigative group in the US, uncovered the advice of Ronald Duchin, of US public relations intelligence gathering firm Mongoven, Biscoe and Duchin, on how to break anti-corporate groups: isolate the extremists, and through dialogue, co-opt the

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Ramona: Artists, Revolutionaries, and Zapatistas with Petticoat”

idealists so that they become ‘realists’. In other words, divide and conquer. In the 1970s, some of those radicals who were “running way out in front” of the crowd turned to guerrilla tactics. This allowed the authorities to use incredible force to crack down on the movements, whilst persuading many who were only spectators that they would never join the running crowd.

Quite apart from the moral arguments, why hand the authorities just what they need to destroy us? This would be a suicidal tactic for a movement that has so far managed to base itself on breaking down dualisms. It would push us towards the “with us or against us” dualisms of Bush’s ‘war on terror’. In any case, how can you use weapons to defeat powers with the mightiest weapons in the world? We require a far more strategic, jujitsu style to prevail.

George Lakey, a direct action peace trainer working with Indonesian students in 2001 who were fighting an oppressive government and powerful military, explains how reasons for them to use violence were everywhere. He says: “One young man’s eyes filled with tears as he described to me what it was like to watch comrades die on the street where they’d been shot by soldiers during a demonstration. ‘I want payback,’ he admitted softly.” Without denying the legitimate feelings of anger, the trainers asked the group: how will violence affect the array of political actors in Indonesia and bring some of them to your support?

Lakey says: “The participants plunged into vigorous dialogue, fingers poking at the graphic display of potential allies. A sudden silence came to the group when one person, forefinger stabbing the air, exclaimed, ‘And that’s why the government pays provocateurs to come among us to get the violence going!’”

The point of this story is to show how important strategic thinking is, rather than to try and say that

violence is never justified as a tactic. We need to analyze the enemies we face, what would benefit them and what would undermine them. We should never underestimate the power of a broad social base of popular support. We need to be able to use self-defence when required, but not descend into pitched battles we can’t win, that alienate others, and help to break us. We need constant cross-generational and cross-cultural strategic learning.

Like the Indonesian students, we need to redefine what we need to do, not just to fight, but to prevail. Are we content to remain rebels, outside of society – or are we revolutionaries who wish to transform it? Are there nurses in the movement? Are there schoolkids? Are there grandmothers? What does it mean if our movement doesn’t look like our society? What kind of a world are we building if we don’t involve everyone in its construction?

Everywhere and nowhere

“Keep walking, though there’s no place to get to.

Don’t try to see through the distances.

That’s not for human beings. Move within,

But don’t move the way fear makes you move.”

– Rumi, thirteenth-century Sufi poet

“When we lose our fear, we lose our feelings,” says Gaby, a young Argentinean activist, when asked how it feels to be a radical in a country in which 30,000 people were ‘disappeared’ by the military dictatorship between 1976-1983. Often in the process of struggling for the things we

want, we sacrifice our humanity. Struggle can require us to become soldiers. Eventually, like soldiers, we become unable to feel. Facing oppression, beatings, torture, seeing our friends imprisoned or even killed, our hearts harden. We become better fighters, but worse human beings. We may become more determined, angry revolutionaries, but we also make it more likely that our revolution will be imposed upon, and in turn oppress, others.

Seeking to understand how the oppressed become oppressors – the most common dynamic in all revolutionary history – is vital. We need to explore not just what we say in public, but the intimate spaces of revolution, to work out not just how we stay alive, but stay human. It is extraordinarily difficult to withstand that fear, and their violence, while continuing to innovate as a movement. Asking questions of received movement wisdom at these moments of fear and insecurity requires enormous courage, can get you labelled a traitor, a reformist, or a sell-out – and yet is vital.

Those who have experienced conflict and war, including the economic war of extreme poverty, can carry a depth of rage, resistance and humiliation inside them that can fuel the strength of revolutionary movement but fatally weaken it by actually preventing the activist from being able to listen, being able to communicate to those outside the movement, subverting its democracy and efficacy.

‘Give up Activism’ was the title of an influential article written after J18 in London. It asked some important

*“WE CAN CONTINUE ON THE RIGHT PATH,
IF WE, THE YOU, WHO ARE US,
WALK TOGETHER.”*

– opening remarks by the EZLN to first International Encuentro for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, Chiapas, Mexico, July 1996

questions: “The role of the activist is threatened by change ... If everyone is becoming revolutionary then you’re not so special anymore, are you?” And: “It is not enough merely to seek to link together all the activists in the world, neither is it enough to seek to transform more people into activists.” What is needed is not for more people to become activists, but for the everyday fabric of society to become engaged. That involves risking our own identity as a movement, and our own sense of our place in the world. It’s only through letting go of our precious identities, letting go of our egos and our subcultures, that we can remove the limits we place upon our own achievements and move into the kind of pluralist politics that we need now more than ever.

As Jeremy Gilbert, a British academic and activist, wrote in an email to us during the production of this book: “We are everywhere? We’re not, you know – but we could be. And if we’re going to be, then we have to acknowledge what a scary thought that really is: for once ‘we’ are everywhere then there will be nothing to define ourselves against, and so ‘we’ will be nowhere. If we really want to make the world a better place than that’s

what we have to want. But learning to want it will take courage, the courage to accept the risk to our identities which real change always poses.”

So let’s have the courage, let’s have the heart that lies in the root of the word courage, *le coeur* – the heart to build a rebellion that embraces, the heart to insist on an insurrection that listens, the heart to create a revolution that when it looks in the mirror understands that it’s not just about rage, but that it begins with the word ‘lover’. Let’s have the courage to demand nothing for us, but everything for everyone, the courage to keep the spaces that this movement of movements has created, radically open, rebelliously inviting, and profoundly popular....

For when ‘we’ are truly everywhere, we will be nowhere – for we will be everyone.

Notes from Nowhere

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

– Arundhati Roy, World Social Forum, 2003

