

Postscript for the anti-capitalist movement

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Argentina may well prove to be the crisis which irrevocably splits the ever-widening crack in the neoliberal armor, especially if things continue to unravel in other parts of Latin America. Recent events in Venezuela, and the possibility of left wing gains in this year's Brazilian presidential elections, point to a shift away from the "Washington Consensus" across much of the region.

The last decade has seen the increasing delegitimazation of the neoliberal model, as a movement of movements has sprung up on every continent, challenging the seemingly unstoppable expansion of capital. From Chiapas to Genoa, Seattle to Porto Alegre, Bangalore to Soweto, people have occupied the streets, taken direct action, practiced models of self-organization, and celebrated a radical spirit of autonomy, diversity, and interdependence. The movements seemed unstoppable, as mass mobilizations got bigger, more diverse populations converged, and the World Bank, WTO, IMF, and G8 were forced to meet on mountain tops, protected by repressive regimes, or behind fences defended by thousands of riot police. Seeing them on the defensive, having to justify their existence, gave the movements an extraordinary sense of hope.

By identifying the underlying global problem as capitalism, and by developing extraordinary international networks of inspiration in very short amounts of time, it felt almost as though history were speeding up, that perhaps we could succeed in the next phase, the process of imagining and constructing worlds which exist beyond greed and competition. Then, history did what it does best, surprising us all on September 11th when the twin towers were brought down, and it seemed for a while that everything had changed.

Suddenly hope was replaced by the politics of despair and fear. Demonstrations were called off, funding was pulled, and mass backpedaling and distancing occurred within the movement itself. Commentators immediately declared anti-capitalism dead.

September the 11th forced a reappraisal among activists, particularly in the global North. It challenged us all to take a deep breath, put our rhetoric into practice, and think strategically, and fast. Then three months later, history seemed to resume its accelerated speed, when Argentina erupted, followed closely by the collapse of Enron. It seemed that despite the blindly nationalist, racist, and indefinite "war on terror" to distract the world, neoliberalism was continuing to disintegrate.

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," may actually be true. The "crisis of legitimacy" expands exponentially almost daily. Corporations and institutions such as the World Bank and the G8 are constantly trying to appease the growing global uprising, with empty promises of environmental sustainability and poverty reduction.

With mainstream commentators falling over themselves to declare that capitalism is good for us and will save the world, it seems clear that the first round of this movement has been a victory. There has been a "...nearly complete collapse of the prevailing economic theory," according to economist James K. Galbraith. But the next round

will be the hardest. It will involve applying our critiques and principles to our everyday lives; it will be a stage of working close to home. A stage where mass conflict on the streets is balanced (but not entirely replaced) with creating alternatives to capitalism in our neighborhoods, our towns and cities, our bioregions. This is exactly where Argentina can show us an inspiring way to move forward.

The situation in Argentina contains many elements of the anti-capitalist movements: the practice of direct action, self-management and direct democracy; the belief in the power of diversity, decentralization, and solidarity; the convergence of radically different social sectors; the rejection of the state, multinational corporations, and financial institutions. Yet, what is most incredible is that the form of the uprising arose spontaneously, it was not imposed or suggested by activists, but rather, created by ordinary people from the ground up, resulting in a truly popular rebellion that is taking place every day, every week, and including every sort of person imaginable.

Argentina has become a living laboratory of struggle, a place where the popular politics of the future are being invented. In the face of poverty and economic meltdown, people have found enough hope to continue resisting, and have mustered sufficient creativity to begin building alternatives to the despair of capitalism. The global movements can learn much in this laboratory. In many ways it is comparable with the social revolutions of Spain in 1936, of France in May 1968, and more recently, in southern Mexico, with the 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)—all rebellions which inspired, then and now, millions around the world.

We need to be prepared, not only to resist, but to find ways to rebuild our societies when the economic crisis hits. If the popular rebellion in Argentina succeeds, it could show the world that people are able to live through severe economic crisis and come out the other side, not merely having survived, but stronger, and happier for struggling for new ways of living.

The complete text of John & Jennifer's work on Argentina is online at www.nadinorg/nadin'initiativ/agp/free/imf/argentina/txt/2002/0918que_se_vayan.htm

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