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Latin America, State Power, and the Challenge to Global Capital

An Interview with William Robinson

William I. Robinson is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he teaches and writes on global capitalism, Latin America, social change, and democracy. His recent publications include Promoting Polyarchy (1996), Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Globalization and Social Change (2003), and A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, State and Class in a Transnational World (2004). Robinson is currently finishing a new book on globalization and Latin American which will be released in the coming year. In September of 2006 Honor Brabazon and Peter Brogan interviewed Robinson for Upping the Anti. In this interview Robinson traverses a wide terrain, from an in-depth historical summation of the sweeping structural changes that have occurred in Latin America over the past few decades to a critical assessment of movements in Bolivia and Mexico. Additionally, attention is paid to the lessons movements in North America can draw from these vibrant and inspirational struggles.

Why do you think it's so critical to think about Latin America and globalization right now?

Latin America is at a special historical conjuncture in terms of resistance to global capitalism. Neoliberalism became the dominant model, achieving hegemony in the Gramscian sense, when it became a consensus among global elites. Elites who might have been opposed to neoliberalism succumbed to the program, and even among popular forces a sense developed that there was no alternative to neoliberalism. But that hegemony cracked in the

late 1990s and early 21st century. The Argentine crisis was a major symbolic turning point. From that point on, neoliberalism became moribund. Its hegemony was cracked. This is the case worldwide but it is particularly so in Latin America.

It is also in Latin America that possible alternatives are emerging in the struggles against neoliberalism. Latin America is at the forefront of the current upsurge of social movements, revolutionary movements, and challenges to the neoliberal state and to the dominance of global capitalist groups. The question of what will replace the neoliberal model is what's at stake in Latin America right now. Will it be some type of reformed global capitalism which will allow the exploiting class to gain a new lease on life? Or will neoliberalism be replaced by a more radical alternative such as that which might be under construction in Venezuela or in Bolivia? It's too early to say.

Wherever we look in Latin America, popular movements still seem to be facing the classic question of how to engage the state. Given the deep structural changes that have occurred in these countries since the 1970s, how are contemporary movements dealing with the state and international institutions? More generally, do you think the nation state is a viable vehicle for revolutionary change today?

If I jump to the last thing you said, no, the nation state does not provide a viable alternative. And it's not Bill Robinson saying that, it's the leadership of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela saying that. What they have figured out is that the survival of the popular project must occur within a wider South American and Latin American project. They might not articulate what I'm saying in the same terms, but the idea that a popular transformation of global capitalism could develop in Venezuela without being linked to ongoing and coordinated continental transformations throughout South America is an idea that doesn't correspond to reality. I think that Venezuelans, for example, would agree with this.

Venezuela is an interesting case because in it one can see dual power structures developing outside of the nation state while, at the same time, people at the executive and military level are building connections with Bolivia and Cuba in an effort to develop a regional bloc. So, while you can't simply use your own nation state to create radical

change in the global system, you can use it to create regional resistance.

It's not my position that the nation state is irrelevant. The reality is that we have a global capitalist system that has entered a new phase during the last couple of decades, and this has changed the terms within which we understand that system. Yet, challenges in this new phase are still organized along nation state lines in terms of both political authority and formal state power. That's the contradiction.

To be clear, what this means is that social and political forces still need to challenge state power at the national level, to make a bid for state power at that level, and from there to continue to challenge the global capitalist system. One of the things that's changed fundamentally in Latin America is that the earlier revolutionary strategy took the organizational form of the vanguard party and was aimed at bringing together various classes politically, particularly workers and peasants. It then sought to use that mobilization to overthrow the state and implement a revolutionary transformation of society. We know that this model failed. Yet, in its place grew a similarly failed understanding of what's required to transform society: that there would be no need any more to talk about state power or political organizations that could operate not just in civil society but also in political society. The height of this kind of thinking is expressed theoretically in John Holloway's book *Changing the World Without Taking Power*. Holloway argues that we can fundamentally transform capitalist social relations and overcome dynamics of domination and subordination not by homing in on the state, but by changing things at the level of civil society alone. And, while I'm caricaturizing Holloway a bit, it is essentially that argument that has been bought by some leaders of social and political movements around the world.

So, we have two extremes. The first is the old model of social and political forces mobilizing through political organizations – through a vanguard – in order to overthrow the existing state, take power, and transform society. The other is that you don't need to think about state power at all. But, as Venezuela and Bolivia demonstrate, the key question remains how popular forces and classes can utilize state power to transform social relations, production relations, and so forth. And once you raise that question, you have to talk about what type of political vehicle will interface between popular forces and state structures. That's the big question raised by the current

round of social and political struggle in Latin America: what's the relation between the social movements of the left, the state, and political organizations? Previously there was a vertical model. In the last 15 or 20 years, the emphasis has been on horizontal relations, networking among different social groups, and cultivating much more democratic relations from the ground up. These shifts in emphasis have all been spearheaded by the indigenous organizations in Latin America. While I support that politically, at some point you need to talk about how vertical and horizontal intersect. This is precisely one of the problems with the autonomous movements in Argentina, among others. In attempting to overcome the old vertical model of vanguardism and bureaucratism, they've gone to the other extreme. But without a political vehicle you can't actually bid for state power or synchronize the forces necessary for radical transformation.

We need to find a balance between these two positions. Take the models of Brazil and Venezuela. In Brazil, popular forces and revolutionary forces represented in the Workers' Party are taking state power, but there is no mass autonomous organization from below. This has meant that the popular classes have not been able to exert the mass pressure and necessary control over the Workers' Party government so that it would confront global capital and implement a popular program. The Brazilian model shows that even when revolutionary groups take state power, if there is no countervailing force asserted by popular classes from below to oblige those groups to respond to their interests from the heights of the state, the structural power of global capital can impose itself and compel the state to implement its project. Global class struggle "passes through" the national state in this way.

Now, counterpose Brazil to Venezuela. In Venezuela, similarly radical forces have come to state power, and there are tremendous pressures from the global system to moderate and undermine any fundamental structural change. Yet, unlike in Brazil, there's mass mobilization from below pressuring the revolutionaries in the state not to succumb to the structural pressures of global capital but rather to carry out a process of social transformation. This is an ongoing process in which both the forces of global capital and those of popular majorities are constantly in struggle around the direction these states will move. So, you have to have permanent, independent pressure from mass social movements from below against the state, but, at the same time, you can't talk about any project of transformation without also taking state power.

The popular uprisings in Latin America have been an incredible inspiration to movements around the world. More than that, though, they've also served as an experimental ground. Bolivia and Venezuela have each pursued very different models for dealing with state power and building mass mobilization from below. Then there's the Zapatistas' "Other campaign" in Mexico which in the midst of the election scandal, has taken a very different approach to the national issue. What do you think of these three examples?

Along with hundreds of millions of people around the world, I am a great admirer of the Zapatistas and have taken tremendous inspiration from their struggle. But we need to be realistic about something. The Zapatista project has taken the Holloway argument to the actual real life, political-historical arena. The problem over the last couple of years is that the Zapatistas' principle strategy of mobilizing from below and not wanting to get corrupted with state power – which might have been a correct thing to do in the early 1990s, or even up until a couple years ago – has not been the correct thing to do over the last six months. In the current historical moment, the politically necessary thing to do – the only thing to do – was to participate in the struggle that the PRD and Manuel López Obrador were waging around the presidency. And this remains true despite all the limitations of the PRD and Lopez Obrador and every critical thing we could say about them.

Once we moved into the period when the fraud became clear and an upsurge of mass struggle was growing against that fraud, this became even more clearly the case. The only thing a revolutionary could do at that time was to join in and talk about those elections and about taking state power. Because the Zapatistas did not do this, they stagnated. They have had less and less influence on Mexican society. First of all, the social base of the Zapatistas outside of the indigenous communities in Mexico is increasingly young people, especially those who may adhere to the World Social Forum process. This is a radical oppositional base but not a mass working class base. The supporters of the Zapatistas outside of the indigenous communities, such as in Mexico City, have stagnated. Inside Chiapas, *Zapatismo* may still be a force of counter hegemony, or even of hegemony in some communities, but the fact is that since 1994 global capitalism has made major headway inside Chiapas

itself. The Zapatistas don't even have the leverage in Chiapas that they had a few years ago.

So that's the pitfall of following the Holloway model, of everything from below without looking above: it forgets about the state at a particular historic juncture when state power is on the agenda. That's the pitfall and a lesson to take from Mexico. What is the lesson from elsewhere, from Venezuela and Bolivia? It is this: the mass organizations, the indigenous organizations and other popular movements, should continue their mobilization – not pull back and not rest for one moment, but continue to pressure the Morales government or the Chavez government inside and outside the state.

To back up for one second, when comparing the Zapatistas in Mexico to the movements in Ecuador or Bolivia, for example, why do you think the Zapatistas have received so much attention from movements around the world? What is the difference between the movement in Ecuador (which is arguably the strongest indigenous movement on the continent), the Zapatistas, other indigenous groups in Mexico, or the movement in Bolivia?

While there are tremendous differences, we should first point out that all of these organizations are obviously united around a project of ending 500 years of oppression, discrimination, racism, and colonialism. But, putting that aside for a minute, in Ecuador the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and other indigenous organizations are constantly challenging state power. They overthrew five governments in a row. The Zapatistas, on the other hand, weren't interested in Mexico City or who was in the presidential palace. In Ecuador, however, they realized a few years ago that, yes, they had the capacity to overthrow the government, but they didn't have an alternative to it. They didn't have the capacity, once the government was overthrown, to place political forces and state representatives in power that would defend their interests and implement their program.

What happened as a result is that CONAIE had to depend on an alliance with Lucio Gutierrez, an army colonel. When Gutierrez betrayed the popular movement, when he turned to neoliberalism and delivered the country to global capitalism, CONAIE got burned very badly for having backed him and having brought him into the presidency. That did a lot of damage to CONAIE's credibility

with their base and to the strategy of putting somebody in the state who would represent their interests. So here we can see the complexities of popular and mass struggles at this historic juncture. In the October, 2006 elections, the indigenous movements again faced this major dilemma. Should they support another candidate and risk getting burned? Should they put forward an indigenous candidate along the Bolivian model? But they never took the Zapatistas' route of saying, we'll stay here in the highlands and the Amazonian region and forget about the government, about state power. The same is true in Bolivia. The organizations there never did that; instead, they put Morales in power.

There are a number of reasons why the Zapatista model looks so attractive around the world. I think that one reason can be traced to a historic moment in the early 1990s when neoliberalism was at its height as a monolithic project, and no one could question it. Many former revolutionaries adhered to the idea that "there is no alternative," that you just have to get the best deal possible for your country within global capitalism. It's in that environment that the Zapatista uprising of January 1, 1994 took place. It was a wake up call that said, NO!, the lowest of the low – the indigenous in Chiapas and, by extension, the downtrodden everywhere – are going to fight back. There is an alternative future, and we're going to try to reach out for it. That's why the Zapatistas are so inspirational: they represented the beginning of the end of neoliberalism's hegemony. Another reason why the Zapatistas have had such a following worldwide is because anarchism has made a big comeback, and the Zapatistas' perspectives on engagement with the state have been attractive to anarchist currents worldwide.

The turn the Zapatistas have made with the Sixth Declaration and the Other Campaign seems to be calling the ideas of not seizing state power and building an alternative outside the state into question. In fact, this move seems to be a recognition of the failure of that kind of approach in that it involves trying to build some kind of national project that doesn't purport to have the exact blueprint for revolution but continues the approach of leading by following, leading by listening. Do you see any kind of hope in these new projects, for example in how they are interacting with the large mobilizations in support of Obrador and the PRD?

I want to reiterate that we are all students and supporters of the Zapatista struggle. I am not dismissing out of hand the Zapatistas' political point on the state and social power, but here's the thing: the Zapatistas launched the Sixth Declaration and the Other Campaign at the exact moment when the political lightning rod in Mexico was shifting to the electoral process. As revolutionaries, you need to be able to shift strategy and tactics as you move along, as history actually unfolds. So that's my criticism: that there is a position of not getting involved with the state, not getting involved with the elections, and not going for state power. It's a mistake to elevate that position to a rigid principle, and that's what may have happened with the Zapatistas in Mexico.

What is the significance of these indigenous movements as a whole? How are they changing the way that people in the North think about power, politics, and social change?

That's a good question with no short answer. Some argue that, with few exceptions, revolutionary forces for much of the 20th century emphasized building as broad a base among popular classes as possible and, in so doing, ignored particular ethnic and racial oppressions and dismissed the indigenous reality. While the reality of 20th century revolutionary struggles cannot be reduced to this observation, this was indeed quite true of the Left in Guatemala, in Peru, in Colombia, and elsewhere. But this situation changed with the collapse of the traditional Left project in Latin America after the 1980s.

Indigenous communities have organized on a new basis. They have been at the forefront of the upsurge in social movements and in devising new ways of organizing from below to challenge the oppressions embedded in both social and cultural relations and the capitalist/colonial state. Indigenous movements have been at the forefront of popular movements in Latin America over the last 10 or 15 years. Many problems have yet to be resolved. The puzzles of how to move forward, of how to preserve autonomy at the base and how to make sure that the distinct interests of different communities and different groups can be advanced remain unsolved. The important question is how to address all of this while at the same time linking together diverse social and political forces and diverse communities around a collective project of change.

Can you discuss the connections between the rise of indigenous movements and the structural transformations

that have taken place in Latin America with the deepening penetration of global capital?

First, we need to understand the difference between the last round of structural changes in the 1960s and 1970s and those in the 21st century. Latin America has gone through successive waves of ever deepening integration into world capitalism. Every time there has been a new integration or reintegration into world capitalism there has been a corresponding change in the social and class structures of Latin America, as well as a change in the leading economic activities around which social classes and groups have mobilized. The model that we had in the 20th century was based on industrialization through import substitution, on traditional agro-exports, on development programs based on a national economy with protective barriers, and so forth. This model involved an active role for the state in accumulation and an oligarchical corporatist political coalition. But that model corresponded to the pre-globalization phase of world capitalism: national corporate capitalism rooted in a Keynesian state that regulated accumulation. All of this was at the nation state level, as were the social democratic models in advanced capitalist countries.

But a new globalization model of accumulation became consolidated in Latin America from the 1980s and into the 21st century. In this new model, the commanding heights of accumulation in Latin America are no longer the old traditional agro-exports or national industry.

First, with regard to industry, accumulation is now based on integrating national industrial activities as component phases of global production. So we have the *maquiladoras*, which may have started along the US-Mexico border but have now spread throughout Latin America and especially in the Greater Caribbean Basin. Related to this phenomenon, small and medium industrial enterprises all over Latin America – known by their Spanish acronym PYMES – have re-oriented from the national to the global market by becoming local subcontractors and outsourcers for transnational corporations and for global production chains.

Second, you have the explosive growth of the global tourist industry in Latin America. The data show that this industry is sweeping across Latin America and the world. In fact, tourism was the largest single economic sector worldwide until it was replaced by the energy sector with the rise of oil prices. Every single Latin American country has been swept up into the global tourist

industry, which now employs millions of people, accounts for a growing portion of national revenue and gross national product, and penetrates numerous “traditional” communities and brings them into the networks of global capitalism. For many countries – including Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, and most of the Caribbean nations, among others – it is the first or second most important source of foreign exchange.

Third, there’s a new type of transnational agribusiness that has replaced the old agro-export and domestic agricultural models. Every country – every Latin American national agricultural system – is being swept up in the new global agribusiness complex. If you go to Brazil or Argentina or Bolivia or Paraguay, the biggest export crop is now soy. It’s no longer beef coming out of Argentina. It’s no longer coffee and sugar coming out of Brazil. It’s King Soy. Soy is firstly an industrial product. Secondly it’s used as feed for animals all around the world. And, third, it’s increasingly a basic input for the global food industry, for the full range of processed and packaged food going to the global supermarket. Soy plantations set up by transnational agribusiness and run as capitalist “factories in the field” are displacing millions of small holders, eating up the rainforests, and so on. In Mexico, the biggest agricultural activity right now is no longer corn and beans but winter fruits and vegetables for the global supermarket.

The fourth commanding height of accumulation in Latin America right now is the export of labour to the global economy. Immigrant labour is exported across Latin America to intensive zones of accumulation and to the global economy, to the United States, Europe, and beyond. In turn, that immigrant Latin American labour sends back remittances. The amount of those remittances is vast, and they can’t be underestimated. So you have \$40 to \$50 billion being sent by immigrants all over the world, particularly from the US and Europe, back to Latin America. What do those remittances do? Those remittances mean that Latin Americans can buy things from the global economy and that their social reproduction is dependent on these global financial flows. In many countries, remittances are the number one source of foreign exchange which means that these countries are inserted ever-deeper into global capitalism. The export of labour and import of remittances insert hundreds of millions of Latin Americans right into global financial circuits.

What we are seeing is a total transformation of the Latin American political economy. The new dominant sectors of

accumulation in Latin America are intimately integrated into global accumulation circuits. In the 1960s, there were still massive pockets of society that were pre-capitalist or that at least enjoyed some local autonomy vis-à-vis national and world capitalism. The indigenous still had autonomy from world capitalism – not independence, but autonomy. But 21st century global capitalism has penetrated just about every nook and cranny of Latin America. In fact, there's almost no autonomous peasantry anywhere in Latin America. Capitalist relations are now practically universal in the region.

Indigenous communities have not stopped resisting for 514 years. But now, they have intensified that resistance in a direct confrontation with transnational capital over the natural resources that are in their communities. The transnational oil companies have invaded even the most remote outposts in Ecuador over the past few decades. So you have the indigenous spearheading resistance to the plunder of Ecuador by the oil transnationals. We could point to the struggles around energy resources in Colombia, national gas in Bolivia, the contradictory relationship of indigenous and local communities to oil in Venezuela, the confrontation that the indigenous in Guatemala are having with the transnational mining companies that in the past decade have invaded vast new stretches of that country. All of this represents an intensified penetration of global capital around major resources. This is a major structural backdrop to the new round of indigenous struggle, and that struggle is so important because it is a – perhaps the – leading edge of the challenge to transnational capital.

The Financial Times recently ran an article describing how transnational banks in Venezuela are making record profits as they interpenetrate with more domestically oriented factions of Latin American capital. In conjunction with Venezuelan dependency on US oil markets, this raises some serious questions. Can you speak to this in the context of Chavez's declaration that he's working to create 21st century socialism in Venezuela? What does that mean given the integration of the oil and banking sectors?

You're getting to the heart of what's at stake here. Earlier you asked me to talk about the nation state and how it relates to global capitalism. If all national economies have been reorganized and functionally integrated as component elements of a new global

capitalist economy and if all peoples experience heightened dependency on the larger global system for their very social reproduction, then I do not believe that it is viable to propose individual delinking or suggest that you can simply break off from global capitalism and create a post-capitalist alternative. China is now integrated into global capitalism, as are the former Soviet republics, the former Third World revolutionary states, and so on. In the case of Venezuela, both the oil and financial systems are totally integrated into global capitalism. And so an alternative needs to be transnational; it needs to be something which begins to transform global capitalism. That's exactly what's at stake here.

At the same time, this integration points to the possibility that interpenetrated structural power will translate into local political influence. Global capital has local representation everywhere and it translates into local pressure within each state in favor of global capital. This is exactly what you have in Venezuela. There are all sorts of dangers that those groups most closely tied to global capital, transnationally-oriented business groups, will gain increasing influence and try to destroy any radical transformative project. Indeed, the real threat to the revolution in Venezuela is not from the right wing political opposition but from the likelihood that parts of the revolutionary bloc will develop a deeper stake in defending global capitalism in Venezuela than in fighting for socialist transformation.

You also have the danger that state managers will become bureaucratized since their own reproduction will depend on deepening relations with global capital. To reiterate, that's why a permanent mobilization from below that forces the state to deepen its transformative project "at home" and its counterhegemonic transnational project "abroad" is so crucial. The question of what can be done in each country, and how the state fits into the picture, is being elaborated in Latin America and in Venezuela in particular. I don't have definitive answers for you because this history is unfolding as we speak. History is not predetermined.

But let's go back again to Venezuela and the fact that it is selling increasing quantities of oil to China. Here we can see where my analysis of global capitalism differs from that of many other observers. Many people see China's increased relations with Latin America and interpret things from the old nation state/inter-state centric framework. They say that China is competing with the US, which wants to defend its declining hegemony. That's a classic framework; that's the "New Imperialism" perspective.

But what's going on in China? And how is this linked to Latin America? An increasing portion of world industrial production has shifted to China. China is the industrial workhouse of the world. But it is the workhouse of transnational capital.

When I say "transnational capital" I don't mean capital from outside of China versus capital inside of China. Transnational capital is just that – it's transnational, meaning that the capitalist investment class operating in China are of Chinese, US, German, Japanese, Brazilian, South Africa, Thai, Indian, and Kuwaiti nationality, among many others. There are investors from all over the world. There are capitalist groups spread out all over the world who are concentrating on globalizing capitalist accumulation inside China for reasons that we already know – the massive availability of cheap educated labour, the largest agglomeration economy in the world, a state responsive to the conditions necessary for globalized accumulation, and so forth.

So when China tries to expand its world markets for the goods pouring out of its global workhouse, it is not that the Chinese – people running around with Chinese passports and speaking Chinese – are competing against people from the US speaking English or people from France speaking French or people from Japan speaking Japanese, all competing with one another trying to get new markets in Latin America. That is the classical framework of world capitalism in an earlier stage and it is not what is going on today. Now we have global capital trying to open up markets globally, to sustain an accumulation process in which the class contradictions are not national but transnational and in which the fiercest capitalist competition is not among national capitalist groups but among transnational conglomerates.

This new global capitalism has a territorial expression particular to it because global capitalism "lands," so to speak, or "zones in on" particular transnationalized territories, such as China's coast, for a phase of global accumulation. So again there's no way you're going to understand US – Chinese – Latin American relations from the old nation state centered framework. The argument that the US is trying to dominate Latin America and to ward off growing Chinese influence, that these two countries are competing for hegemony in Latin America totally misses the point.

Latin America is increasingly supplying raw materials to China. It is exporting vast quantities of soy, copper, oil and so on to Chinese coastal zones. The old style thinking concludes, "Latin America is breaking away from the US and is integrating with

China and therefore it's the end of US hegemony." But that's not what's going on. When the copper goes from Chile to China or when the oil travels from Venezuela to China it's not going there to feed "Chinese" capital but global capitalism in China, to fuel transnational accumulation taking place in Chinese territory. These are not nation state relations; they are global capitalist relations. If you want to understand Latin America's transnational relations, its relationship to political processes and power structures worldwide, you need to develop a global capitalist and not a nation-state-centric framework of analysis.

So to put two and two together, when the indigenous challenge transnational capital's extraction of oil from the Amazon, they are on the frontline of challenging global capitalism itself. It doesn't matter whether the oil is going to China or the US.

Can you talk about how these structural changes should inform our resistance here in Canada and the US, both politically and theoretically?

Increasingly North-South relations and centre-periphery relations are not nation state or regional relations in the global system, but social relations that are internal to global capitalism. So, for instance, the immigrant rights movement in the US is, at least momentarily, the lightning rod and spearhead for resistance to global capitalism inside the United States in the same way that the July 2006 Mexican elections and their aftermath was a lightning rod and spearhead for resistance to global capitalism in Mexico. And that immigrant rights movement is no different than the indigenous movement in Bolivia or the popular neighborhood movement in Mexico City or the landless workers' movement in Brazil. We need to see popular struggles unfolding in the US and Canada as part of this same wave.

The year 1968 was a key turning point in that it signaled the rise of a world counter hegemony, the ideological and political turning point which led capital to conclude that it had to restructure the system. The crisis of capitalism that ensued in the early 1970s gave capital the impetus and the means to initiate that restructuring. Capital went global and unleashed neoliberalism. Now, in the late 20th century and the early 21st century we are at another crossroads, like 1968, in which the ideological hegemony of global capitalism has cracked. We are in a battle over how the crisis will unravel and what will take the place of neoliberalism.

We should focus on the fact that the working class worldwide is increasingly informalized and flexibilized. There used to be a working class concentrated at the point of production and operating in a situation of formal and regulated labour. So trade unions organized at the point of production. Increasingly, capitalist production and the nature of accumulation are such that the production process is fragmented into thousands of different phases and those different phases draw in some formal workers, some point of production centers, along with endless armies of informalized workers who are not even workers in the formal sense. Increasingly, organizing the working class means organizing informal sector workers. It means shifting from an exclusive focus on the point of production to a focus on both the point of production and reproduction. That's what the *piqueteros* do. They say that if you're unemployed you can't organize into trade unions and withhold your labour. If you're structurally unemployed you have to disrupt the daily functioning of the system.

Similarly, if you're an informal sector worker you can't make demands on capital in the same way as a formal sector worker. So increasingly, the type of working class organization we need must address both production and reproduction – social movement unionism, for instance, linking neighborhood struggles to formal worker centers and so forth. That's the type of struggle unfolding in Latin America and the type of struggle that is increasingly unfolding in the US, Canada, and elsewhere. We need to theorize, analyze, and strategize around how to organize working classes that are more informal than formal, that participate directly in production at certain times of the year or in certain instances and at other times and instances participate in local community reproduction.

The AFL-CIO recently launched an initiative to work with the workers' center movement in the US. This is a really positive move toward organizing casualized immigrant workers in the informal sector. Does this model have any potential?

More than just having potential – it is the only way forward. The only demand that would truly be the right demand, the revolutionary demand, the just demand, is to end all distinctions between immigrant and national labour. Those distinctions only serve global capital. Global capital accumulation is now dependent

on immigrant labour pools. The state is the vehicle that reproduces the condition of immigrant labour. National borders, which are barriers to labour and not to capital, become functional to transnational capital. In this sense, Latino immigrant labour in the US and Chinese immigrant labour on the Chinese coast are no different; in China the immigrants come from the interior of the country – they are Chinese but they are displaced peasants moving to the coast and they face a situation of discrimination similar in many ways to that faced by Latino immigrants in the United States.

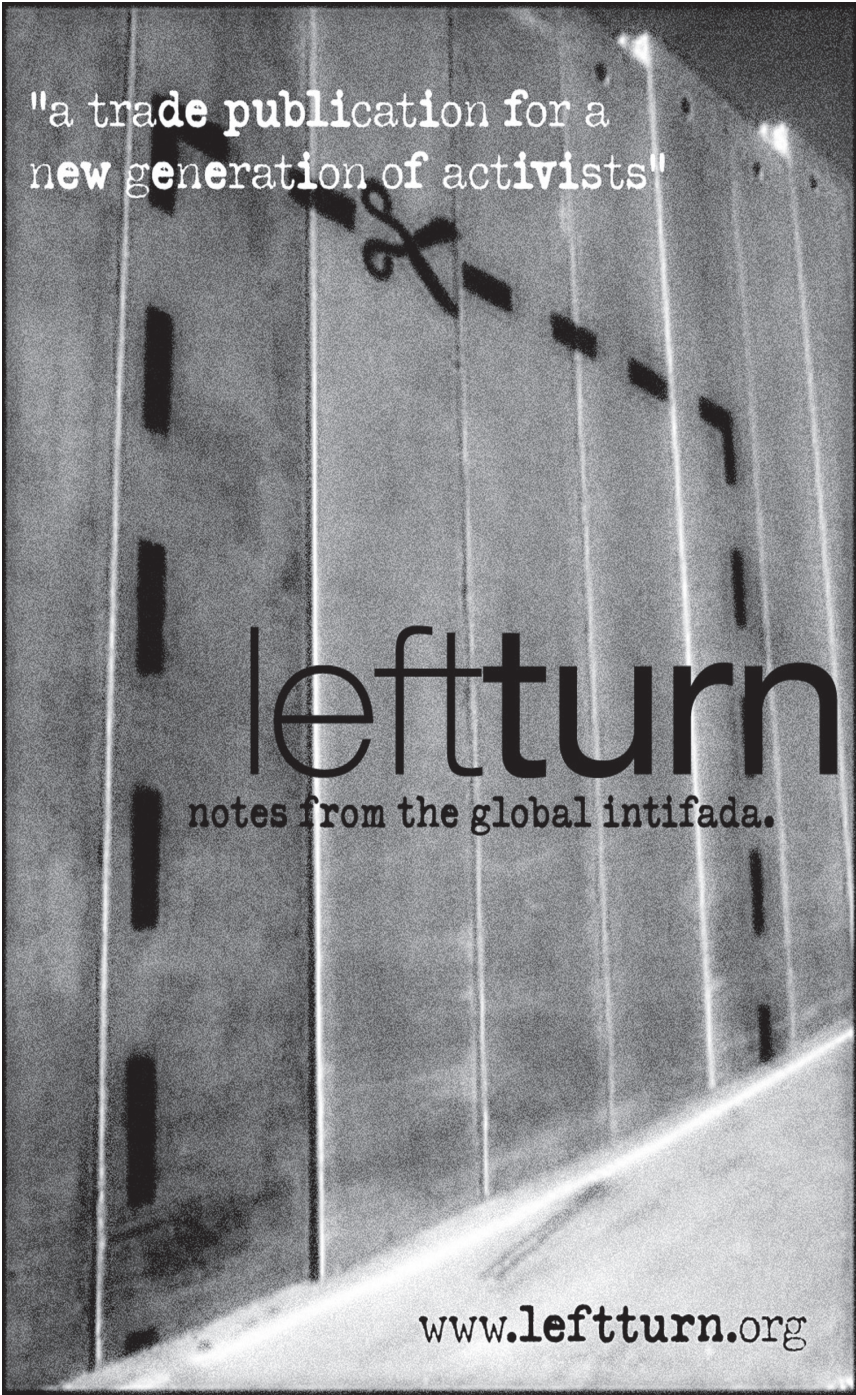
In Costa Rica, there are one million immigrant Nicaraguan workers who are treated as second class citizens. Costa Rica is one of the key centers of global accumulation in Latin American and the Caribbean, and it's based on Nicaraguan immigrant labour. You have Bolivians and Peruvians and Ecuadorians migrating to Argentina and Chile and it's not, nation-state-centric but transnational because it's only the global working class that gets divided into national and immigrant labour; this is the face of global capitalism. So, to the extent that the AFL-CIO organizes informal sector workers, it is moving forward. Our slogan must be an end to all distinctions between national and immigrant (or foreign) labour.

What are the projects currently underway to build a transnational movement against global capitalism?

We obviously need to move beyond the old internationalism and to disregard borders because organic communities are now transnational and are self-organizing transnationally. My grounding is in southern California where right now the cutting edge of popular struggle is the immigrant rights movement. The immigrant rights movement is a working class movement. The vast majority of immigrants here are linked to families that migrate back and forth between Mexico and the US or between Central America and the US. Other families are split transnationally. They send remittances back. So, by definition, a lot of these struggles are increasingly transnational. To give you a concrete example, here in Southern California the "March 25 Coalition" organized and spearheaded the May 1 national strike in the US for Immigrant Rights Day. When electoral fraud took place in Mexico in July of 2006, the same leaders of the March 25 Coalition organized a delegation of immigrant rights organizers and representatives of the Latino community to travel to Mexico City to participate in

the protests against the fraud. By definition when people develop their struggles in these transnational circumstances their struggles are transnational. We need to strategize around and advance these modalities of transnational struggle.

The novel forms of struggle, of engagement with the state, and so on, that we've been talking about for Latin America are relevant on a global scale, including for Canada and the US. But it's not like these things are just happening in Latin America and we should import them and try to implement them here. They are already happening here. We have to recognize this and work to deepen the transnational character of these struggles across the world. ★



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