

# **Towards the Intergalactica**

**Beyond Networking:  
Building New  
Autonomous Global  
Relations of Production,  
Reproduction and  
Exchange**

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### ***About the Paper***

In 1996 and 1997 Zapatista Intergalacticas took place in Mexico and the Spanish state. These large international gatherings aimed at weaving a global network of grassroots struggles. They had a profound effect on inspiring and galvanizing a major new circulation of global struggles. Now, once again, in the summer of 2005, the Zapatistas issued their 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, calling for a Third Intergalactic Encuentro, "from below and to the left".

The call came at a moment in which two seemingly contradictory trends were taking shape within global networks of struggle. On the one hand, these networks, together with the War on Terror and food/energy/financial crises, have provoked a profound loss of legitimacy for established institutions of power. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization all find themselves in the midst of deep crises. And, so too, the US state and its military apparatus also face a major crisis of legitimacy, both beyond and within the US itself. Yet, on the other hand, the global networks seem incapable of slowing and reversing the rapid lurch towards an authoritarian global politics based on fear, coercion, militarism, racism and religious fundamentalisms. Apparently, they are reaching the limits of their ability to move forward, and are finding it increasingly difficult to go beyond their unexpectedly successful assaults on major summits of many of global capitalism's key institutions (as well as large, but less successful, anti-war protests) in a way that deepens and expands the existing networks in order to make them functional enough to be able to go beyond protest in order to create alternative social relations.

Historically, capital and state power have responded to resistance by combining 3 strategies. Populations have been divided from one another through the creation and maintenance of hierarchies, both within countries and between countries, in order to prevent circulation of struggle. Partial reforms have co-opted and integrated struggles. Direct repression is the third aspect of this triple strategy. In the current context of global resistance we are already in the whirlwind of these three responses, a process which is only likely to intensify in the near future. The degree to which emancipatory struggles are able to anticipate, prepare for and confront these 3 strategies will determine the degree to which these struggles succeed in their goals.

By taking the time to build a solid and meaningful global process, based on broad participation from different struggles around the world, the Zapatista Intergalactica may offer the possibility to collectively create a global space for struggles to address these three concerns. Who might participate in building the Intergalactica and on what basis? And how might it come about and around which political contents? There are many good reasons to believe that the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration could have as important an inspirational and catalytic effect as the previous Intergalacticas did. The Zapatistas have set the ball rolling. However, the Intergalactica is not just the responsibility of the Zapatistas but of all those who identify with it throughout the world. Let's collectively respond to their invitation by creating a space for collectively moving beyond protest towards creating lasting alternative social relations of (re)production, exchange and livelihood.

*Also See Critical Engagement, No. 1 by Kolya Abramsky comparing two historical documents envisioning the world : Bamako Appeal and the EZLN's 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Selva Lacandona.*

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## Preface

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Since this text was written, in late 2007, a number of important developments have occurred. Perhaps neither document discussed in *Critical Engagement, No. 1*, the Bamako Appeal or the Zapatista 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration are as “hot” as they were when I wrote the text. Both have moved somewhat to the background as events evolved around them. Given that both texts are about long term processes that cannot be built overnight, it is in fact fairly logical that their presence will at times be more visible and at times less. Nonetheless, both texts still are key documents coming out of different global processes of networking struggle. I was asked if my article could be reprinted now at only very short notice. Ideally I would have liked to have updated my original article (an article which was very topical when I wrote it, but is, nonetheless, not an article I would have actually written in the current moment). Time constraints only allow me to write this brief paragraph.

At a global level, a number of developments which were brewing at the time of writing this article, have now emerged in clearer form. Perhaps the most important of these are the world-wide financial and banking crisis, inflation in food and energy, provoking world-wide food and fuel riots, the changing electoral scene in the USA. All of this and other issues to have profound implications for global networks of struggle and the construction of emancipatory alternative.

With regard to the Zapatista 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration, a number of important developments have occurred. On the international level, the high-speed international networking of 2006, (which saw three intercontinental Encuentros of the Zapatista Peoples and Peoples of the World (the last of which was a women’s meeting) and the Encuentro of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas)<sup>1</sup> has slowed down, as the process enters its next phase. In the summer of 2007, just a few weeks before this paragraph is being written, an international caravan visited Zapatista communities in Mexico<sup>2</sup>, especially in response to an intensified repression campaign that the Mexican government has been building, and continues to build, against the Zapatista movement and the Mexican-wide Other Campaign. In the same timeframe, a country-wide struggle against the privatization of Mexican oil is also intensifying<sup>3</sup>.

- Kolya Abramsky August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://zeztainternacional.ezln.org.mx/> for information and footage of these encuentros.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/> for information and footage.

<sup>3</sup> While I feel it is important to briefly mention these details, I would like to stress that this article deals with the international process the Zapatistas have launched with their 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration. It is *not* attempting to do any serious analysis of the internal political developments within Chiapas or Mexico. On the one hand, this is not the purpose of the article, and on the other, I am in no way qualified to write such an article, having spent only very little time in Mexico.

# **Towards the Intergalactica Beyond Networking : Building New Autonomous Global Relations of Production, Reproduction and Exchange**

**Kolya Abramsky**

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**T**he Zapatistas have called for a Third Intergalactica to take place, "from below and to the left". This call follows two previous Zapatista Intergalacticas, self-organized international gatherings of several thousand people aimed at weaving a global network of grassroots struggles. The invitations participate in these meetings were humourously extended to participants throughout the galaxy, hence the name. The first took place in 1996 in Chiapas, and the second in the Spanish state the following year. The first two Intergalacticas had a profound effect on inspiring, galvanizing and even giving some organizational form to a major new circulation of global struggles, which we have witnessed in the last decade. There are many good reasons to believe that the new process of global convergence and resistance called for by the Zapatista's 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, issued through collective discussion in the Zapatista communities in the summer of 2005, could have a similarly important inspirational and catalytic effect in creating a space in which the next stages of global resistance can take shape and collectively organize themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The current call comes at a moment in which two major and opposing trends are taking shape.

On the one hand, the last 10 years of global struggle and the War on Terror have provoked a profound loss of legitimacy for established institutions of power, such as international financial institutions, multilateral treaties, the nation state in general and its electoral systems and parties. In particular, the US state and its military apparatus are suffering a crisis of legitimacy,

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the Zapatistas' 6th Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, and for a comprehensive reference to related links etc, see : Kolya Abramsky, August 2008 [April 2007] – 'The Bamako Appeal and the Zapatista 6th Declaration - From Reorganizing the Existing World to Creating New Ones '. CE1 in the Critical Engagement series from CACIM. Available also at [www.cacim.net](http://www.cacim.net)

both beyond and within the US itself. As the US military fails to secure its war objectives in the face of Iraqi resistance, the US domestic political landscape has seen a massive surge in migrant (labor) struggles, and the first US Social Forum has taken place (as well as deep fissures evolving within the US military and political elites themselves). In parallel to this loss of legitimacy of established power, and also in response, there has been a great flourishing of self organized efforts to question and resist such power structures, frequently based on a confrontational approach to power rather than lobbying, and also based in principles of autonomy, diversity and non-hierarchical organizing. And, above all, such resistance is frequently globally networked, or at least internationalist in outlook, and often resonates beyond the immediate locality in which it occurs.

Yet, on the other hand, following on from massive success and visibility, the global networks are nonetheless seemingly incapable of slowing and reversing the rapid lurch towards an authoritarian global politics based on fear, coercion, militarism, racism and religious fundamentalism, a politics that is not just based on the whims of maniacal leaders the world over, but is also undeniably fostering a mass appeal at the expense of and in direct competition with the mass appeal of more emancipatory visions of social change based on autonomy, diversity and self-organization. Worryingly, existing international organizational processes which have played an important role in the last ten years, such as Peoples' Global Action and the World Social Forum, seem to be in a form of at least temporary paralysis, both in terms of immediate activities at the global level, and also in terms of wider strategic, and long-term, approaches. Some people, both within and outside of movements, have even (boldly, to say the least) declared that the global movements are dead. Yet, in the midst of the supposed death of the global anti-capitalist movements, so too the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization also find themselves in the midst of deep crises, perhaps nearer to their own deaths than emancipatory movements are themselves ready to acknowledge, suggesting that rather than being dead, the movements are actually at a very strong point.

Rather than seeing globally networked anti-capitalist struggles as dead, perhaps it is more useful to recognize that they have reached some kind of limit in their ability to move forward, and are finding it increasingly difficult to go beyond their unexpectedly successful assaults on major summits of many of global capitalism's key institutions (as well as large, but less successful, anti-war protests) in a way that deepens and expands the existing networks in order to make them functional enough to be able to create alternative social relations rather than just denouncing existing relations of

power. Perhaps some specific, named organizational processes are dead. Or, perhaps, they can be revived in a useful way. However, ultimately, the names which organizational processes take is not important. What is important is that there is a meaningful process of global resistance. The organizational names will follow the struggles, not the other way around.

Given the enormous potential for new global processes that the current moment offers, it is important that this potential is not lost and that the process through which the Intergalactica is built is as solid and meaningful as possible. Importantly, this means that, despite the fact that time is of the essence, the process should not be rushed. Rather, it is important that it takes shape at the pace necessary to enable a broad participation from many different struggles from around the world.

How can such an invitation be taken up? What obstacles might exist to realizing such a process?

### **Anticipating Capital and State power's response to autonomous global resistance**

Historically, capital and state power have responded to popular resistance through the combined use of 3 major strategies.

Populations have been divided from one another, both within countries and between countries, in order to prevent unity of struggle. Especially important has been capital's ability to prevent global circulation of struggles by maintaining a world-system divided into nation states. The world-wide division of labor has been hierarchically structured, based on imposed (and continually reimposed) divisions based around (especially, but not exclusively) race, ethnicity and gender hierarchies, as well as those between waged and unwaged labor. When considering the global division of labor, certain (minority) sections of the world's population have been implicated in the exploitation and discrimination of certain other (majority) sections of the world's population, due to gaining direct or indirect material rewards from their position in the hierarchy. Another crucial divide throughout history has been the citizen/non-citizen divide. Perhaps the most glaring example of this is the so-called post-World War II "welfare state" model which has provided large sections of the populations in the capitalist center (especially, but not exclusively, white male unionized workers) with greatly improved material standards of living at the expense of the great majority in peripheral countries, as well as people of color and unwaged (especially women) workers within the core countries themselves.

The second major strategy employed in response to social struggle has been cooptation that has integrated struggles, by partially giving in to certain demands for social, economic and political reforms while not substantially challenging private ownership and profit relations, political decision making, and labor control mechanisms that have defined capitalist (and imperialist, patriarchal, racist...) social relations. In its most ingenious forms, especially post-World War II Keynesianism and Developmentalism, not only was social struggle bought off, but it was also actually harnessed so that, safely channeled, protest could actually contribute to economic growth.

Last, but not least, has been repression. Those resistances which could not easily be integrated or bought off with reform have simply been crushed and intimidated out of existence, involving mass imprisonments, torture, and political murder, as well as war.

These three strategies are not employed in isolation from one another, but in careful combination. They are implemented with varying degrees of success (from the point of view of capital and state power), and never permanently.

In the current context of global resistance we are already in the whirlwind of these three responses, and this whirlwind is only likely to intensify in the not so distant future. The degree to which emancipatory struggles are able to anticipate, prepare for and confront these strategies will greatly determine how successful the movements are in building viable long term emancipatory social relations.

Perhaps one of the most important goals of the Intergalactica could be to collectively create a global space for struggles from around the world to seriously address these concerns. However, before the Intergalactica process is in a position to do this, it is important that relevant movements and struggles are aware of and participating in this process.

A key question that needs to be addressed before addressing any other question is *who* will take part in the process of building the Intergalactica and on what basis, and the questions as to *how* to build the Intergalactica and *what* its political contents and themes will follow on from there.

## **Unity against division: *who* should the Intergalactica strive to include?**

For a global process such as the Intergalactica, it is especially important that people from as many countries as possible are involved. In particular, there is the need to pay special attention to overcome divisions that are being fostered within the world-economy itself. Unless intentionally addressed by emancipatory struggles these divisions are likely to be reproduced within global networks themselves. In particular 5 types of divisions currently stand out, divisions which are likely to become much deeper and more damaging in the near the future:

- The so-called **"Clash of Civilizations"** is a process which could turn out to have similar divisive effects on global struggle as the Cold War did, in which (on a greatly uneven and hierarchical basis) people from "the west" and "the Arab world" are trained to fear, distrust and hate one another, divided by ignorance and encouraged to align themselves to one or the other side of absolute religious and cultural divides based around "good" and "evil". Crucially, until now, "the Arab world" has hardly been involved in (contemporary) secular global networks of anti-capitalist struggles, and within these regions, religious based struggle seems to have had much more of a mass appeal than anti-authoritarian global anti-capitalist networks. Furthermore, these global networks still remain largely ignorant of and isolated from struggles in the Arab world, though the situation in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan is changing this slowly and some interesting links have been made.
- **Africa** has been exploited and marginalized at the lowest levels of the hierarchical world-economy. Unfortunately, sometimes in global anti-capitalist networking processes, these processes of marginalization have also been reproduced. A discussion of reparations for slavery for Africans and their Diaspora is still very low on the agenda of most global networks, and most discussion around debt is still based in the language of pleading for "debt forgiveness" rather than demanding non-payment of illegitimate debts. The multiple wars in Africa also have very little prominence within global networks. The fact that the last two World Social Forums have taken place in Africa (Nairobi and Bamako, the latter as part of the 2006 Polycentric Forum) and that the Forum for Food Sovereignty also took place in Mali last year has perhaps slightly improved this situation. However, African struggles are still highly marginalized within many global anti-capitalist networking processes.

- The **Citizen/non-citizen** divide, despite sparking a vast amount of self-organized struggles throughout the world, especially in North America and Western Europe, makes it difficult if not impossible for undocumented migrants to travel to international meetings, gatherings, and protests and to make any form of direct exchanges with movements in other countries. Any form of contact with struggles in other countries must, by necessity, always be indirect, either through web, texts, videos, radio etc, or through intermediary (documented) supporters, who may or may not be mandated by the undocumented people concerned. This reliance on indirect and mediated communication presents profound challenges to self-organization and unmediated self-representation. Movements will have to think of creative ways to overcome this division itself. And, perhaps additionally, to fundamentally challenge the concept of expanded citizenship as an emancipatory route. Can citizens even exist without the parallel existence of non-citizenship?
- **Rival power/imperialist blocs.** Rivalries between regional power blocs have increased in recent years, and are likely to continue doing so in the future, especially along the lines of tensions between USA, China and EU countries, but also other countries including India, Brazil, Russia, Japan and the Koreas and the alignments that these latter countries' governments and their capitals choose in relation to the former countries. Currently it is still fairly easy for information and people to circulate between these regions, however, regional and national protectionisms (as well as military tensions) could emerge which make such contact more difficult in the future. Importantly, until now, Chinese struggles, which are accelerating rapidly in parallel to China's growth as an economic power, have been more or less entirely absent from global anti-capitalist networking process. However, in recent years there have been some intentional contact making processes outreaching towards Chinese struggles driven by people active in a range of different global networks, and the fact that the last WTO summit took place in Hong Kong also provided an important moment for connections to be made between different struggles, but there is still a great deal of work to be done in this area.
- The final type of division to be dealt with here are the divisions that exist between activists from countries that have hostile governmental relations to one another. For instance: Israel/Palestine, Israel/Lebanon, Israel/Iran, North Korea/South Korea, India/Pakistan, Iran/USA, Iraq/USA. International spaces have great potential to overcome such divisions, as, in practice, the "neutral territory" which they offer may

be some of the only spaces where activists in such situations are actually able to come together, since very often it is incredibly difficult (either in practical terms or because it is simply illegal) for them to come together in their own countries. However, while there may have been “bilateral” efforts between two specific conflicting countries, this theme has until now only been rarely addressed within a more global framework of struggles.

As a new global process, it is important that the Intergalactica seeks to overcome some of these divisions as much as possible, or at least acknowledges that they are important global divisions to overcome, in order to strengthen global unity of emancipatory struggles in the face of attempts from capital and state power to divide the global circulations of these struggles and the people involved in them.. However, high levels of participation in the Intergalactica from these regions, countries and sectors are very *unlikely* to happen spontaneously, and may in fact require an *intentional* and *targeted* preparation process that seeks out contacts and collaboration with struggles in these parts of the world, not just relying on existing contacts but rather trying to build new relationships where none currently exist. There are many obstacles that will have to be overcome in this process, not least of all language ones.

### **Beyond networking - building new autonomous global relations of production, reproduction and exchange**

Let us move from the question of *who* will participate in the Intergalactica to the *how* will the Intergalactica be organized and on *what* themes.

At the start of this article, it was asserted that current global networks and struggles are not dead, but rather are in the difficult and slow process of reconfiguring themselves in order to build on their big successes and overcome their limits in order to effectively move into a higher phase of struggle. Global networks *do* work, sometimes extraordinarily well. In a remarkably short time period (the first global day of action against the WTO took place just under ten years ago in May 1998) global networks have been constructed which have become excellent at organizing large global meetings, conferences, global days of action on common themes, calling for emergency solidarity actions in support of particular local struggles, as well as translating and circulating up-to-date and accurate information and news throughout the world in a short space of time. These processes were almost completely unheard of ten years ago. Now they are regular, daily occurrences. Indeed they have sometimes become so regular

that they are often taken for granted, and hardly noticed, to such an extent that people can even boldly proclaim that global networks are dead.

However, while not being dead, these networks *are* still very *limited*, and there is very little discussion of the concrete limitations that do exist or of how to overcome them. It is one thing to bring activists from many different countries and struggles together for a face-to-face meeting or protest that takes place over a very short and specific time period, normally of a few days only. However, it is quite another thing to actually build long term deep social relations between struggles at the global level, relations that create fundamentally different relations of production, reproduction of livelihoods and exchange and that go beyond the nation state and market as forms of organizing social relations. Until now, most global relations between struggles in different parts of the world have been quite ephemeral and highly superficial, often relying on small numbers of specific individuals rather than being appropriated by larger numbers in the respective movements. At this stage in the young networks, this state of affairs is not especially surprising, due to many different barriers including access to resources for travel and regular computer based communication, foreign language skills, detailed knowledge of the world-economy, the ability to take time away from local struggles and immediate day-to-day concerns, etc.

However, while not surprising, this situation is nonetheless highly problematic. It has created a major bottleneck for movements' abilities to go beyond networking and protest (denunciation) in order to construct long term alternative relations. This bottleneck means that global networking processes are not nearly decentralized enough, especially in relation to their own rhetoric of extreme decentralization; nor are they deep enough in terms of their ability to sustain meaningful exchange and mutual support processes. Furthermore, their reliance on small numbers of individuals makes them extremely vulnerable, both to the inactivity of specific individuals and to cooptation and repression (individuals are easier to kill, imprison and buy off than broader collective processes). Above all, global movements are still a very long way from constructing social relations that go beyond both the nation state and world- market, and in many cases (especially in the imperialist countries with a strong social-welfare state), there is still great dependency on state structures.

While the construction of alternative relations of production, reproduction of livelihoods and exchange are frequently at the centre of specific local struggles (especially land related struggles in Southern countries), these relations almost never extend to the regional or global level, and where they do (such as direct exchange coffee) they still have a very small reach

and are limited to specific products (often artisanal). Global networks are still far better at spreading news and coordinating protests in different parts of the world than they are at spreading products, people, skills, financial and technical support. (These latter set of activities are often occurring, but still remain, for the most part, within the context of fairly paternalistic NGO activity that is based around the premise of reform and integration into existing power relations rather than in a horizontal politics based on autonomy, solidarity, diversity and a confrontational approach to power). Overcoming these bottlenecks in global networking processes would take horizontal autonomous self-organization to new levels in terms of building global alternatives that go beyond both the nation state and the market. There is an urgent need for movements to tackle these difficult tasks.

It is in this context that the Zapatista call for another Intergalactica must be understood. The Zapatistas themselves have fought a long social struggle that has spent many years in the laborious and painstaking process of constructing long term autonomous social relations based on collectively taking over land, one of the fundamental means of production and reproduction of people's livelihoods. The invitation to participate in constructing a global Intergalactica "from below and to the left" comes from a clear understanding of the urgent need to intensify and strengthen anti-capitalist struggles and the need to deepen the human relations of solidarity on which the networks of struggles that have already been built in recent years are based, going beyond the limitations described above.

### **Building the Intergalactica slowly but solidly**

Until now, the process outlined in the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration has got off to a seemingly solid start. The Intergalactica itself is slow in taking shape, arguably a very wise move given that the process is intended as a deep, long-term process rather than a superficial, immediate, "one off" show-event. So far, the process has been predominantly driven forward by the Zapatistas, with a strong response coming from different groups around the world. To date, there have been five main "steps" since the publication of the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration in the summer of 2005. These are: the first and second stages of The Other Campaign within Mexico itself, an initiative aimed at building a strong country-wide *non-electoral* political process from below and to the left, with the first part taking place in parallel to the Mexican Presidential electoral campaign; the first and second Encuentros of the Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World (December 2006/ January 2007 and July 2007); and a period of consultation in which struggles around the world were able to make proposals for the Intergalactica. A number of further steps have been planned for the near future. In October

2007 there will be an Encuentro of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas convened by eight indigenous organizations, including the Zapatistas, in Sonora, Mexico. In December 2007/January 2008, an all women's Encuentro will take place in one of the five Zapatista Caracoles (autonomous self governing bodies), dedicated to Comandanta Ramona who died last year. These events are all events that are important in their own right. However, none of them are the Intergalactica proposed in the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration. Rather, they can all be understood as steps along the way to it.

Let us briefly evaluate the international aspects of this process. Narconews, the main English language website following the Other Campaign and developments since the Sixth Declaration was issued, has links to Other Campaign related materials in 8 languages, interestingly, including Farsi. Already, before the first Encuentro of the Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World took place in Chiapas last December/January, a decentralized process of preparatory meetings and other activities had taken shape throughout much of Europe, South, Central and North America in response to the Zapatista call. Between July 2005 and July 2006 (the period of consultation), 19 different activities were reported in 16 cities from 9 countries. Importantly, this included several within the USA, involving close overlap with those involved in the powerful migrant struggles that are erupting there. Many of them are Chican@s and Mexicans involved in the Other Campaign from within the USA, what has been dubbed "the Other Campaign on the Other Side". Whilst most of these meeting and initiatives have been fairly conventional processes of one-way solidarity to what is occurring in Mexico, some of them have gone further, employing the language and perspectives of the Other Campaign to engage in activities relating to local issues. Three important examples of this have been a local consulta organized by an immigrant organization Movement for Justice in El Barrio, in Spanish Harlem, New York and two different border camps against the US and Mexican border, as well as the complementary, although not explicitly linked, "Another Politics is Possible" track, which took place at the US Social Forum in Atlanta this summer. From these meetings and activities, a number of proposals have emerged for how the future Intergalactic Encuentro should be organized and what its contents should be, which will be addressed later in this article. Although not without its limitations, which will be addressed later in this article, it is clear that there is a strong international process emerging around the Intergalactica.

The two *Encuentros Between the Zapatista Peoples and the Peoples of the World* which have occurred to date both drew several thousand people to the autonomous Zapatista Caracoles in Chiapas, about half from Mexico and the other half from close to fifty countries from around the world. The

first meeting was held in one of the Caracoles, Oventic, over four days, and the second held in 3 Caracoles (Oventic, La Morelia and La Realidad) over nine days. The two meetings were opportunities for the Zapatistas to present their grassroots achievements of autonomy and self-government to people in struggle from different parts of the world, as well as for the Zapatistas to learn about struggles in other countries.

In the first Encuentro, members of the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Good Government Councils) presented Zapatista experiences in the following areas: autonomy and other forms of government; the other education; the other health; women; communication, art, culture and the other commerce; and land and territory. The final session of the first Encuentro was devoted to hearing proposals from around the world as to how, when and where to build the Intergalactic Encuentro, proposals which had emerged from the period of international consultation opened by the Zapatistas. Interestingly, the strongest participation from outside Mexico probably came from the USA and Canada, including a large number of Indigenous and First Nations organizations from these countries, as well as organizations active in the Other Campaign on the Other Side.

The second Encuentro built on the first Encuentro, going into greater depth about the nuts and bolts of autonomous organizing, with presentations by promoters and other community activists from each municipality around the themes of autonomy, collective work, health, education, and women. A very impressive delegation of Via Campesina representatives from major peasant organizations worldwide participated in this Encuentro, from: Brazil, Bolivia, Honduras, Dominican Republic, USA, Canada, Quebec, Basque Country, India, Thailand, Korea, and Indonesia. Unfortunately the one African representative, from Madagascar, was denied a visa. One day was devoted to speeches from most of the Via Campesina delegates. The second Encuentro did not have a session devoted to the Intergalactica, and in fact there was almost no mention of the Intergalactica, clearly a deliberate decision on the part of the Zapatistas. On the other hand, there was an important unofficial, and self-organized, side meeting which involved around 50 people living in the US, and one of the major themes of the discussion in this meeting was the need to have a similar process to the Other Campaign within the USA itself, which rather than focusing on supporting and participating in the process within Mexico (itself a very important task), would aim to start a long term process to building a form of grassroots political process that goes beyond electoral politics within the USA itself. Mexicans and non-Mexicans alike were proposing this.

In a number of ways the second Encuentro built on the first, slowly deepening the global process that these Encuentros aim to be constructing. In addition to a more in depth presentation of how the Zapatistas have organized over the last years, the second Encuentro was a space for greater participation from different Zapatista communities, with people from each municipality presenting, and in three different Caracoles instead of only one. This was an important space to give large numbers of Zapatistas direct experience with international meetings, with the many different forms of participation that this involved, from speaking on a panel before thousands of people, to preparing cultural events, to organizing the logistical side of large international gatherings, to international "baile popular" (popular dance). Perhaps the most important deepening of the process could be seen in the Via Campesina participation, giving the Encuentro the international scope and presence of mass-based grass roots organizations that the first Encuentro had lacked to a degree (in the first Encuentro there were few, if any, participants from Asia and none from Africa). This process of building specific sectoral alliances along the road to the Intergalactica had been building over time, with Via Campesina having distributed Zapatista corn at the World Forum on Food Sovereignty which took place in Mali earlier this year. The decision to have an indigenous peoples Encuentro and a women's Encuentro later in the year is a further step to building important sectoral links, taking the time necessary to ensure that the process is firmly anchored in real struggles before moving on to the Intergalactica itself.

Another important progression was the deepening of the revolutionary discourse. First of all it is important to point out that neither the Sixth Declaration nor the Encuentros themselves have any trace of lobbying about them, nor of defining people in relation to the state. The word "citizen" is refreshingly completely absent. The first Encuentro repeatedly stressed the need for resistance to find ways of self organizing in order to come together in common struggle. An emphasis was on the need to organize resistance which is already occurring throughout the world. The second Encuentro started with a pre-Encuentro event the night before the Encuentro itself at the indigenous training center, University of the Land in Chiapas in San Cristobal, which in no uncertain terms laid out the terms of struggle, setting the scene for the main Encuentro. The Zapatistas recognize that there are three main ways of embarking on anti-capitalist struggle: establishing alternative consumption patterns, establishing alternative trade patterns or establishing alternative production relations. They have decided to go for establishing alternative production relations, namely collectively taking over the means of production. Having taken over the land, they stressed the importance of rural and urban unity in struggle, so that in addition to taking over land, it will become possible to take over factories in the future.

Whilst respectful of the other methods of trying to create non-capitalist relations, taking over the means of production is, in their opinion, the most direct way of struggling against capitalism and creating alternative social relations. For an Intergalactica coming "from below and to the left", such a shift in rhetoric is a very important challenge to global movements who seem very timid around discussing (and above all acting on) the question of means of production. It is an especially challenging discourse for struggles in the capitalist core countries, where that idea was abandoned years ago in favor of some form of social-democratic welfarism.

On a more critical note, there was virtually no one present from Africa, or the Middle East and Arab world. Furthermore, with the exception of the large Via Campesina organizations, large numbers of the participants came representing small collectives and individuals (who are completely welcome in the process). Another weak point was the proposals made for the Intergalactica during the first Encuentro, the majority of which were quite chaotic, confused and still very superficial, as well as predominantly coming from individuals or small collectives with no real organizational backing. Frustratingly, the Zapatistas remained mysteriously quiet about their own proposals for the Intergalactica, proposals that judging by how the Other Campaign has developed to date in Mexico and how the two international Encuentros have gone, are almost certain to be very highly thought out and inspiring. However, the process, which is a very ambitious one, is only just beginning, so none of these criticisms are either very surprising, or very worrying.

### **Next steps towards the Intergalactica**

For the Intergalactica to turn into a long term process that significantly contributes to building new social relations at the global level, it will be important that it is a participatory process, driven forward by struggles across the world, constructed through a process of dialogue and exchange. The Zapatistas have set the ball rolling, with a directed invitation. However, the Intergalactica is not just the responsibility of the Zapatistas but of all those who identify with it throughout the world. Active rather than passive participation from these different struggles will be what gives the process real depth and meaning. This includes the need for a collective global discussion and preparation process, based in decentralization and autonomous self-organization that aims to define *who* will participate in the Intergalactic, the *process* by which it is organized, *what* its purpose and contents will be, *where* it will take place and *when*.

As mentioned above, it will be particularly important to make efforts to include people from struggles in Arab countries, Africa, China and countries whose governments have mutually hostile relations with one another. This is likely to require going beyond existing contacts, making special efforts at both linguistic and political/cultural translation. It will also be important to include undocumented migrants, especially from areas of the world where there are strong movements, such as in the USA, Canada, European Union countries and Australia. Wherever the Intergalactica takes place, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for undocumented migrants to attend. Solutions to this problem could include making efforts to have participation from as many delegated representatives of undocumented migrants who are able to travel at the Encuentro as possible, as well as organizing parallel and linked Encuentros in countries with large numbers of undocumented migrants for those unable to travel due to their undocumented status. Discussions and proposals from these more localized Encuentros could feed into the main Intergalactica process, and vice versa. In fact, such a proposal was one of the more interesting proposals which came out of the first Encuentro of the Zapatista Peoples with the Peoples of the World in the session on the Intergalactica.

Based on the above analysis, I would like to propose that it would seem to make sense for a number of broad thematic strands which could form the basis of the Intergalactica discussions, based on *long term strategic* and *organizational* concerns.

- 1) How to both *expand* and *deepen* global networks, on the one hand to include geographical (as well as sectoral) areas that are scarcely part of global networks, and on the other hand increasing the functional strength of existing networks, so that they can move beyond exchange of information and coordination of protest towards building long term autonomous and decentralized livelihoods based on collective relations of production, exchange and consumption. This could include initiatives aimed to develop concrete tools for deepening connections between movements, such as: long term activist exchanges (especially South-South), language training, and exchanges about international networking processes etc.
- 2) Exchange of experience on how to avoid, prepare for and respond to repression: including the assertion of the right to armed self-defense against aggression, both from internal repression and from external military aggression.

- 3) Exchange of experiences on how to avoid cooptation – especially new forms of protectionism and racist deals, dangers of regional integration, reforms that grant reforms but do not challenge global market, etc.
- 4) Exchange of experience about differing approaches to the state. Rather than having absolutes about taking state power, or not taking state power, a discussion process about what actually works, how organizations make decisions in terms of how to approach the state, factors to take into account, compromises to make, etc.

However, beyond general frameworks, the contents and methodology of the Intergalactica will need to be decided on through a slow but solid collective and participatory discussion process involving movements from many different social sectors and many different countries, rather than being dreamed up by a few individuals in an office somewhere. This means that it will be important to take the time to build such a grassroots global process long before the Intergalactica occurs. It is unlikely to be effective if it is a last minute process, with organizations, groups and individuals deciding to go to the Intergalactica only one week in advance. Rather, the preparation process itself needs to be built up from really existing relationships, relationships that in many cases perhaps still do not exist, relationships based on real human contact, familiarity and trust, especially between organizations from Southern Countries. This could include, for instance, a series of prior visits and face to face exchanges between different struggles, as well as possible language training to facilitate the process and cut out the need for intermediaries (who normally come from Western Europe and North America). Such a process, in addition to being time consuming and difficult, is also likely to be very expensive, which is another reason for starting early on the global process of slowly constructing the Intergalactica from below and to the left. Above all, this preparation process should not be seen as just the responsibility of the Zapatistas themselves, nor just of Zapatista solidarity organizations, but of all those organizations and individuals who see themselves as adherents of, or inspired by, the Sixth Declaration.

Similarly, the date and location of the Intergalactica cannot just be dreamed up out of thin air. For it to be an effective and meaningful process, movements themselves will need to offer to host it, and propose the time and location according to a realistic assessment of whether, where and when they themselves are able to organize it. The proposal should not come from outside a country, or a movement. For instance, some of the earlier proposals that were read at the first Encuentro, were Europeans

proposing that the Intergalactica should take place in Bolivia and other similar, ill-thought out proposals.

Concrete immediate steps could include:

- Continuing with already existing efforts at translating and, above all, disseminating of the 6<sup>th</sup> Declaration and Encuentro materials in different languages. It is already circulating well in the Spanish and English speaking world. Arabic and Chinese could be important next steps.
- Deepening already existing collective discussion processes about what people see as the purpose of the Intergalactica.
- Initiating contact-making visits and exchanges.
- Organizations discussing whether they would like to offer to host the Encuentro, and if so, when.
- Starting on fundraising for travel costs, etc.

The above does not need to be implemented in a centralized way, but rather can take place in a decentralized and autonomous way. However, coordination will be important. The more that different organizations take it on themselves to do inspiring efforts towards the Intergalactica, the faster the ball is likely to roll.

## Related Publications by CACIM Members and Associates

Jai Sen and Peter Waterman, eds, September 2008 – *World Social Forum : Challenging Empires*, second edition. Montréal : Black Rose Books

Peter Waterman, April 2008 – *Recovering Internationalism, Creating the New Global Solidarity : Labour, Social Movements and Emancipation in the 21st Century*. First Edition on the Choike Website: [http://www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/6439.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/6439.html)

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