

Preface

This book is a fruit of my political experience in the Metro Network for Social Justice throughout the 1990s. As a social justice worker at Church of the Holy Trinity in downtown Toronto, and later as a program director at the Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto, I participated in the founding of the MNSJ and served on its steering committee from 1992 to 1997. I continued to be involved in the network after returning to graduate school.

I began to write about the MNSJ as a doctoral student in the Political Science Department of York University. I wanted first to produce an account that respected and reflected the perceptions of the people whose history it is. Too often, activists do not recognize themselves in accounts that purport to describe and analyze the social movements in which they were key agents. Two rounds of interviews with MNSJ activists (in June of 1998 and the winter of 2001) and their reactions to drafts have been indispensable in both refining the historical account, elucidating its meaning and sharpening the central issues and arguments. Thanks to Rick Egan, Beth Jones, Pramila Aggarwal, Marnie Hayes, Bill Howes, Brent Patterson, Stefan Kipfer, Stacey Papernick, Elisse Zack, Peter Clutterbuck, Bernadette Beaupre, P. Rajagopal, Andy Ranachan, Karen Wirsig, Mike Antoniadis, Lee Cormie, Judy Tsao and Ann Curry and to members of the “Alternatives” Study Group in fall–winter 1997–98.

This is the first major attempt to produce an account of the MNSJ and it is, of course, a partial one. The MNSJ still exists, although the praxis that is described here does not. This study of the MNSJ is confined to the period from 1992 to 1997. I have drawn on the written records produced in the heat of its organizing, my own vivid memories of my participation and my discussions with other activists for their memories of how it happened, of what we thought then, and of what we think now.

I have also roamed far and wide in social theory, searching for adequate ways to narrate, interpret and theorize this practice and others like it. I hope that the fruits of this intellectual journey, notably around identity, place and knowledge, will be useful for others who are exploring

the making and meaning of social movements in our time and re-writing social theory in that light.

Even as I incorporate the voices of a range of activists as subjects of this history, the project is also and unavoidably reflective of my own biography. I am an activist, informed and nurtured by the socialist tradition but also by my Catholic Christian roots, by socialist and popular feminisms and by my exposure to social movements in Latin America, to liberation theology and to Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed." Most immediately, I am informed by fifteen years of work in social movements in Toronto, in antipoverty and women's movements, in cross-sectoral social justice coalitions and currently in the Toronto Social Forum. The worldwide eruption of antiglobalization and antiwar movements have been sources of great hope and renewed commitment and have challenged me to rethink the MNSJ's praxis in their light.

There are so many experiences to be grateful for and people to thank—most recently the people at Fernwood Publishing for reading, risking and applying their crafts to make this the best book it could be—thanks to Errol Sharpe, Lydia Perovic, Donna Davis, Beverley Rach, Larissa Holman and Brenda Conroy.

My love and appreciation go also to John Saul, for his humour, intelligence and trust in me as my dissertation director at York.

Finally and especially, thank you to Lee for his love, steadfastness and commitment to our common life.

This book is for all those who were the MNSJ, 1992–97.

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Introduction

The Making and Meaning of Antiglobalization Movements

With the November 1999 mobilization that shut down the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, the antiglobalization movement erupted onto the world stage. Between it and the events of September 11, 2001, massive and growing antiglobalization demonstrations confronted neoliberal elites wherever they convened. Amid rising confrontation and repression, the agenda of world trade liberalization was in jeopardy.

On September 11, 2001, two hijacked jet liners crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York City, downing the towers and claiming the lives of over three thousand people. In a matter of hours, the seemingly unstoppable momentum of the antiglobalization mobilizations ground to a halt. An endless war on terrorism was declared, and a new era of American unilateral interventionism—which some people call “empire”—has begun. Is the “New American Century” our common destiny? The future of the world depends on the answer.

This book is about the making and meaning of antiglobalization movements—those grassroots social forces proliferating on every continent at every scale, contesting the US-led neoliberal project and insisting that another world is possible. The future of the world rests on these movements—for peace, human rights, equality, democracy, ecological sustainability, cultural diversity, biodiversity and economic and social self-determination.

This book is also about a particular movement, the Metro Network for Social Justice, based in Toronto in the 1990s. Like so many of the constitutive parts of what we now call the antiglobalization movement, the MNSJ is small, place-based, scandalously particular and seemingly insignificant. But in the decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the onset of Bush the Elder’s new world order, MNSJ activists forged an innovative praxis, which, with thousands of others like it, created the conditions for the eruptions of Seattle and elsewhere at the end of the century and on which hope for the future of our world now rests.

Through the story of the MNSJ, this book charts the making of a new

movement amid the wreckage of welfare states in the North, “structural adjustment” in the South and the seeming global triumph of neoliberalism. I argue that social movements such as the MNSJ produce knowledges and that, in practice and through experimentation, these knowledges are forging post-neoliberal alternatives. Progressive social movements and their knowledges are central to any possibility for an alternative, democratic and humane future. They are indispensable to the creation of another world with the space for many worlds. From the *encuentros* (international gatherings) of the Zapatistas in the jungles of Chiapas, to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to the spaces of the MNSJ in Toronto, a new world has been in the making. In the discourses and practices of these new social movements, in both their frontal contestations with hegemonic power and their growing new ways of thinking and living in and around the spaces of power, lie hope for the future—not certainty, but hope.

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Considering the Antiglobalization Movement

The worldwide eruption of popular protest and resistance to neoliberal globalization that became so visible in Seattle did not come out of nowhere. It has been in formation for at least two decades. For indigenous peoples, it is continuous with anticolonial struggles of the last five hundred years. There are many origin stories and movement genealogies still to be written and there are hazards in attempting any survey. But both commentators and activists agree that the antiglobalization movement is a “movement of movements” with diverse roots, North and South, global in scope. Consider the following as illustrative rather than comprehensive.

In the South, movements resisting structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and the burden of Third World debt have been under way since the early 1980s. They have protested the privatization of state-owned resources and public services and have organized in the *maquiladoras* (free-trade zones). Women especially have been at the forefront of reorganizing social life for survival and subsistence in both urban shantytowns and rural villages (Naples and Desai 2002; Rowbotham and Linkogle 2001). There are also growing movements against the World Bank’s mega-development projects, which are financed through loans and which bring SAP conditionality, environmental degradation, the displacement of peoples and destruction of subsistence economies. The communities of the Narmada Valley in India are probably the best known example of this

(Kothari 2002). Increasingly, local populations are confronting multinational corporations directly. A community-based movement in Cochabamba, Bolivia, prevented Bechtel from claiming ownership of its water system. The Ogoni people in Nigeria have been engaged in a decades-long struggle with Shell that is simultaneously an environmental justice, indigenous rights, anticorporate and pro-democracy movement.

Although rooted in particular Southern realities and spawning a wide range of community-based resistance and survival strategies, these movements have fostered long-term international solidarity networks, including some across the North-South divide. Northern partners have embarked on critical development education campaigns in the North, organized lobbies of Northern governments, helped finance Southern organizing and, increasingly over the last decade, engaged in direct pressure on the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the G8, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other emerging institutions of neoliberal global governance. The Jubilee 2000 movement to cancel Third World debt, which was a hugely significant constituency both in the June 1999 anti-G8 demonstrations in Cologne, Germany, and in subsequent antiglobalization demonstrations, was a powerful expression of this much larger phenomenon (Collins et al. 2001).

Grassroots food security initiatives—the foundation of an alternative food system premised on local subsistence and fair trade—are springing up everywhere in the North and the South, in urban and rural communities. European farmers have been successful thus far in keeping genetically modified (GM) foods out of Europe. Indian farmers collect seeds to protect biodiversity—part of their battle against Monsanto and Cargill and the patenting of seeds and other life forms.

In past decades, but especially throughout the 1990s, United Nations conferences have witnessed growing convergence and mounting opposition to neoliberalism among the world's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Although the official processes have been profoundly contradictory, the parallel summits have allowed unprecedented contact and sustained dialogue among NGOs, many of whom are articulated to broader popular movements in their home countries (Desai 2002; Alvarez 1998; Steinstra 2000).

Among the most significant outcomes of these UN processes has been the global proliferation of grassroots feminisms and, throughout the 1990s, an increasingly militant transnational feminism opposed to neoliberalism. One new expression is the World March of Women, a

now permanent mobilizing process and key organizational participant in the World Social Forum. An initiative of the Quebec women's movement, this worldwide women's march was proposed and adopted through the UN conference on women in Beijing in 1994 (Fédération des femmes du Québec 1999).

Realities of exploitation and resistance to neoliberalism which are everywhere in the South exploded onto the world stage in a particularly powerful way in the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas on January 1, 1994. Timed to coincide with the coming into effect of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), it brought together many strands: resisting structural adjustment and interconnected demands for land reform, indigenous rights and cultural autonomy; decrying the loss of national sovereignty; and demanding a renewal of Mexican democracy and citizenship. The Zapatistas declared that a fourth world war was under way, that of neoliberalism against humanity, to which they had responded "Ya Basta!" Enough!

Through their brilliant and erudite spokesperson, Sub-commandante Marcos, the Zapatistas waged their revolution over the Internet and in the international media, generating an enormous global outpouring of support and solidarity. It prevented a bloodbath in Chiapas and forced the Mexican government to negotiate. *Zapatismo* became a global political force. Many attribute the emergence of the antiglobalization movement as a coherent phenomenon to the Zapatista strategy of international *encuentros* and broad-based *consultas* (Callahan 2001). Through these processes, the Zapatistas have appealed to Mexican and international civil society to participate in this movement "for humanity and against neoliberalism," of which they are but one carrier. *Zapatismo* remains an important phenomenon in the contemporary consolidation of the worldwide antiglobalization movement, providing powerful images and compelling, even poetic, political formulations (Midnight Notes 2001; Hayden 2002).

Meanwhile in the North, and specifically in Canada, the struggle against free trade with the US, beginning in the mid-1980s, led to the formation of cross-sectoral coalitions at all scales, including the formation of cross-border networks such as Common Frontiers and, more recently, the Hemispheric Social Alliance. Canadian movement leaders, among them Tony Clarke and Maude Barlow, were key in the 1998 defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) at the OECD. Canadian movement organizations and activists have been central to the consolidation of the global anti-free trade movement, which is a significant element

of the antiglobalization manifestations and the parallel people's summits (Barlow and Clarke 2001).

In Canada, one of the most important legacies of the anti-free trade movement was a new critical vocabulary on economic restructuring. It helped activists across movements link austerity/antideficit politics, cut-backs to social programs, deregulation of labour and environmental practices, privatization and growing gaps in wealth and incomes to the SAPs that had been under way in the South since the early 1980s. It enabled new kinds of integrative politics and new kinds of coalitions. The Days of Action, a series of city-wide strikes in Ontario in 1995–96, organized by city-based community-labour coalitions, was a powerful expression of the possibilities inherent in the new political formations.

As the 1990s proceeded in Canada and elsewhere in the North, activists increasingly identified transnational corporations as primary targets. The shift away from state-centred politics reflected the contraction of democratic space, the growing power of corporations in a new regulatory and technological environment and the increasing visibility of that power to Northern publics. Naomi Klein documented this proliferation of new activisms opposing corporatization of life in her book *No Logo* (2000). Somewhat convergent with these developments was a new student movement that contested the corporate incursion into universities through the funding of research and infrastructure, securing of exclusive food and beverage contracts and contracting out of janitorial and other support services. North American campuses became hotbeds of the new antisweatshop movement when students researched the conditions under which their university apparel was produced and proceeded to educate, demonstrate and occupy presidents' offices in support of alternative labour codes.

Throughout the 1990s, new forms of direct action appeared. A legacy of the antinuclear movement and, before it, the US civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, direct action was reappropriated and recreated by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). In this group, AIDS activists pioneered theatrical, media-savvy, highly effective and absolutely outrageous forms of direct action from which some argue Seattle is in direct lineage (Shepard and Hayduk 2002).

More confrontational forms of political protest were also on the rise in Canada before the events of Seattle. The mid-to-late 1990s saw the emergence of radicalized student and antipoverty movements in many regions of Canada, especially in Quebec (Conway 2003). New forms of direct action were also evident in radical environmentalism, such as

protecting stands of old growth forest in Temagami, Ontario, and Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia. Aboriginal communities forcefully asserted their treaty rights to hunt and fish. In 1990, Mohawk people organized an armed stand-off in Oka, Quebec, over a proposed development project on ancestral lands. In 1995, indigenous people occupied a provincial park to protect a burial ground; during this conflict Dudley George, an unarmed member of Stoney Point First Nation, was shot and killed by Ontario Provincial Police (Vance 2001).

With the November 1999 demonstrations against the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, what we now call the antiglobalization movement gained worldwide recognition. The term “antiglobalization” is, of course, problematic. Coined by the media, it says little about the diverse array of movements now subsumed under its label and what they are for or against. Most strands of the movement, North and South, are opposed to US-led, corporate-dominated neoliberal globalization—not globality per se. Resistance to neoliberal globalization did not begin in Seattle but, in the massive convergence of opposition movements and the successful shut-down of the WTO in November 1999, the movement became visible as a coherent phenomenon to a global public, to the mass media and to its participants. I use the label “antiglobalization” because it continues to be the most widely recognized way of naming this phenomenon. Seattle is rightly identified as a turning point, perhaps the May '68 of the present generation,¹ not least because of its location in the heartland of global capitalism (Yuen 2001).

The massive and growing antiglobalization demonstrations, especially their North American and European variants, are specific forms of activism in the North. It is critical that we not conflate these demonstrations with the incredibly diverse and pluralistic politics and practices of the worldwide movement of movements against neoliberal globalization. Already, too many narratives reproduce US- and Eurocentric political imaginaries, both in their preoccupation with the demonstrations in Europe and North America and in their privileging the strategies and modes of organizing of the direct action wings of the Northern antiglobalization movements. Too many confuse the demonstrations with the movement itself, reducing its power and significance to the efficacy of these specific, important and limited political expressions.

Despite the chilling effects of 9/11 and the “war on terrorism,” there is incredible ferment. It continues under the radar, as most movement activity does. You can be in the middle of it and think that not much is happening.

The MNSJ and the New Social Movements

“Seattle” is unintelligible apart from the forms of grassroots activism against corporate-led globalization that proliferated across North America in the 1990s. In Canada, the massive demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Quebec City in April 2001 would have been impossible without the years of collaboration between community and labour and the histories of coalition work across all the critical social movements, without decades of North-South solidarity work, without years of inculcating a critical common sense in the broader population about neoliberal globalization, without the conviction that people acting with their bodies in the places they find themselves can make a global difference. The Metro Network for Social Justice (MNSJ) was about all this and more in the Toronto of the 1990s. Activisms such as those in the MNSJ help explain the deep purchase of the antiglobalization movement in the Canadian context.

The new century and its movements also pose questions and challenges to the praxis of the MNSJ and to coalition politics as it was practised in Canada for twenty years before the battle of Seattle. In a climate of rising global crises, a sense of urgency felt most intensely by the young has propelled the development of new modes of organization and action and new codes of solidarity. The new practices in the Canadian antiglobalization movement embody a critique of prevailing forms of organization, participation, representation and action in Canadian social movements (Conway 2003). One of the most marked features of the new movements in North America, especially among young people, is the emphasis on direct democracy and the embrace of affinity groups as the preferred organizational form. Neither is new in the sense that both were prominent in the theory and practice of Quakers, feminists and ecologists and both flowered in the antinuclear movement of the 1970s and '80s (Kauffman 2002; Sturgeon 1995; Yuen 2001). Both are a response to elitist and overly bureaucratic modes of social movement organizing, and both offer important, challenging and welcome correctives. Militant youth movements have also challenged long-standing traditions of “non-violence” as moralistic and authoritarian. In the name of creativity, resistance and democracy, many antiglobalization activists advocate respect for diversity of tactics as a non-negotiable basis of unity. This is a very important debate, and, as we shall see, debates and conflicts about modes of political struggle were under way in the MNSJ from the mid-1990s on.

The innovations, strengths and limits of the MNSJ's praxis also pose questions and challenges both to the prevailing modes of action and

organization in the predominantly white student and youth movements at the centre of the mass antiglobalization mobilizations² and more generally to our thinking about antiglobalization movements in the world today. The praxis of the MNSJ is not simply a pre-figuration of Seattle. Its meaning should not be reduced to illuminating the mass movement that followed. From the MNSJ's praxis in its own right we can draw insights and lessons about the making and meaning of social movements and social change in our time.

The Argument and the Ethnography

This book is about the knowledge arising from activist practice and its significance for understanding social movements, social order and social change, for generating post-neoliberal alternatives and for reimagining democratic politics. Social movements produce knowledge. Through their everyday practices of survival, resistance and solidarity, progressive social movements are producing new and distinct knowledges about the world as it is and as it might/should be, and how to change it. Movement-based knowledge is largely tacit, practical and unsystematized. It is partial and situated, grounded in activist practice, arising from concrete engagement in social struggle and embedded in specific times and places.

Coalitions of social movements are a particularly fertile location for the production of social movement knowledge. They are political spaces where the sustained encounter across constituencies and issues produces new cultural, political and organizational practices. Coalitions are spaces of experimentation, and this is especially important in a period of flux and uncertainty in both practice and theory. Because coalitions are constituted by a fundamental recognition of diversity and respect for pluralism, the knowledges that arise in and through coalition politics are particularly prescient for the building of a world with the space for many worlds within it. The knowledges produced in coalitions demonstrate the possibility of action premised on partial and provisional knowing—on politics that is simultaneously committed and open to what it does not yet know.

Social movement knowledges are central to the renewal of emancipatory politics. They are privileged knowledges for building a world characterized by the visions and values of progressive social movements. The role and place of knowledge and knowledge production are contentious in left politics and are arenas of ongoing challenge and conflict, however. This is because a commitment to democratic knowledge production implies a commitment to the capacity building³ of people and organizations in civil society in a “long revolution” for social change via