

The Quebec camp from 2003 to 2004.

First I believe it would be relevant to recall that the campement québécois (Quebec Youth Camp) results from the meetings of the RRG, in PoA, in 2003. Many of us thought that organising a camp in Quebec would facilitate the convergence and the networking of social forces which act in the québécois/canadian context, and that the project has an excellent potential for mobilization. But the québécois context is very different from the Brazilian context, in particular regarding the generational identity, or the role of "youth" in the political development.

We don't have here political cohesion within youth, and the voices of the youths most present are the youth wings of the traditional political parties (all more or less of right-wing), and the corporatists students union (FEUQ, FECQ), also relatively on the right. On the other hand, the articulation of the youth on the left coincides more or less with the difficult emergence of the UFP (new progressist party taking its roots in old, more traditional formations) and the emancipation of the global justice movement since the Summit of the Americas in 2001, in particular with various more radical anticapitalists groups (CLAC, ASSÉ, etc.).

In short, the resources for the organisation of a self-managed camp with political objectives are not obvious to converge, in a context where progressist politics are still marginal, and divided amongst themselves.

Therefore, from the very start of the organisational process of the camp, conflicts of perception and orientation emerged. For a long time, the meetings were devoted to a false debate about whether "organizations" (ONGs, trade unions, etc.) could take part in the organisation of the camp, or if it should be on an "individual" basis (militant activists, groups, citizens, etc.) that the organisational process should rely.

The true debate, in my opinion, was never to know if the "organizations" or "institutions" could take part in the organisation, but rather if the organisation of the event were to be entrusted to the institutions which, by definition, have more resources. At the end of long process of beating around the bush, it was concluded democratically that the organisation of the event was to remain free of any official institutional affiliation, but that no group should be excluded from the process. Above all, the emphasis was put on the grassroots aspect of the project.

In other words, the "groups" which wish to take part in the organisation of the camp are welcome, but the project should in no case be recuperated by a stronger element. This decision could imply, of course, a slower growth, but we believed that fidelity with the organisational principles of decentralization and horizontality will attract a greater diversity of participants and will be able more effectively to include a diversity of analysis and of long-term tactic, more representative of the movement.

To make more tangible this decision, we also adopted a No-logo policy. It is at this time, unfortunately, that some of the influential "organizations", notably NGO Alternatives, "informally" withdrew from the process, without explanation, to continue their own project. They subsequently obtained considerable sums of money from the government to organize a "camping of the youth", which never saw the day. There remains some tensions between the organizing committee of the Camp and Alternatives following these intrigues. We had, and always have, the very unpleasant impression that Alternatives sought to co-opt the project.

(It should be said that the "inclusive" approach is very rare within the québécois "left". There is here a very clear cleavage between the more orthodox alternatives, embodied by NGOs, mammoth trade unions, "the new" parties and the institutional co-operative movements, on one part, and the radical and anti-capitalists, relatively intransigent, groups, inspired by anarchism and revolutionary Communism. This division is not exclusive to Quebec, but it is extremely difficult to build a project of convergence which wants to be at the same time radical and inclusive. It is there that lies the challenge of the Camp, in a social and political context marked by lack of political culture and apathy, how can we expect young citizens to be interested in progressist politics, if the actors of these politics are themselves aggressively divided?)

The first edition of the Campement québécois de la jeunesse was held during 10 days in August 2003, with a budget of 400\$. The first camp attracted some 150 people, which can appear modest in comparison with PoA or Annemasse, but taking into account the fact that the camp did not follow any external agenda and practically did not have any resource of mobilization, nor institutional support, we came out from this first experiment with great satisfaction.

The difficulty, during the last year, was to sustain the interest for the project with the participants. How to make so that the participants of the camp, get actively involved in the ORGANISATION of the next camp. At the first post-camp meeting, in 2003, there were 60 people. But gradually the project lost of its concrete aspect, and we found ourselves ten people, sometimes less, to support the organisational process.

I will return later on the camp 2004 itself.

The regional and national context.

Throughout the last year, the negotiations for the organisation of a Social Forum Canada-Quebec-First Nations were stalled, for various reasons, and could only lead to general confusion. The large trade-unions, to be honest, more or less stopped the process and made so that the momentum was exhausted. Their "campaign" against the Liberal Charest government served as a pretext for the unions to disengage from the organisation of a Forum. Impossible for them, apparently, to carry out two projects simultaneously. The possibility of a national Social Forum is thus deferred indefinitely.

In spite of that, among those which took part in these exchanges (among which the organizing committee of the camp) certain groups decided to go ahead and to launch various projects of "citizens summits" or similar events. These events make their way, and it is not my purpose to describe them here.

(Interesting fact, the Libéral government of Jean Charest also announced a series of " Citizens Summits ", or public consultations. It goes without saying that these consultations are smoke screens being used to give to the government a democratic air. Truth is, the current government of Quebec carries out the worst neoliberal offensive our population has ever known. They are rapidly liquidating the public services, whereas the population sleeps placidly in front of the TV.)

No Canadian Social Forum on the horizon.

CQJ2004

Now regarding the camp (the process resulting from PoA and being enriched by the participation to the RRG), we are disappointed that there is not more cohesion within the québéco-Canadian social movement and not more respect for diversity, not more conviction in resistance, but we are not waiting for the goodwill of anybody to go ahead with what we judge just and urgent.

Since we had decided a long time ago not to follow the agenda of others, well rather to create our own agenda, we continued to organize and progress. That's what made the second edition of the Campement a beautiful success.

Of all the elements which the philosophy of the AIJ comprises (as conceived and put into practice at PoA) emphasis was put by the participants on:

- Self-management of the process and the space;
- political and economic independence; grassroots organisation
- Decentralization in organisation; horizontality at all costs;

- The perpetual and constant reflexion on the political process and the orientations of the movement, as much at the global level that local;
- Convergence and popular education; promotion and practical application of the alternatives;
- Creative resistance as a central element of the movement;
- mobilization;

This year, the camp had the chance to associate with the collective of artistic creation Vichama Collectif. (For those who wonder, there is indeed a direct bond with Vichama Peru!) The members of this collective occupy a farm, at approximately one hour from Montreal, which is also used as convalescent home for people in difficulty. It is there, in South Durham, that was held the second youth camp.

This time, contrary to last year, we had an operational budget of 3000\$ dollars, which we collected by self-financing and by the means of a donation from the Autonomous Regrouping of the Youth (RAJ) (money comes from an "independent" agency, the SACA, itself tributary of the State...). We hardly touched this amount. We made tremendous efforts to spend the least money possible (donations, recovery, re-use, etc) and, after estimates, although we had more infrastructures, larger and more solid than the first year, the second camp cost approximately 500\$.

The only required contribution was of 5\$cnd by person per day, to cover the costs of food. (For the next camp, we aim for total gratuity)

There were some 250 participants this year, neraly the double of the first edition. The camp lasted 10 days, from the 13 to August 23. The first days were devoted to the construction of the infrastructures. Quietly, naturally, a reflexion operated on the raison d'être and the orientations of the project, especially among the people who were not familiar with the process. These discussions were rich and perspired through all the activities of the camp.

We sought to make so that the concerns of the RRG are omnipresent in the discussions and the meetings, and not only the exclusive field of some initiates. The reflexion on the camps and their role is omnipresent.

I will talk later about the principal elements which remained of the last general assembly.

The programming of the workshops was very diversified: libertarian ideal, human rights, situation in Latin America, militant cinema, collective creation, women's conditions, primitive semantic, urban alternatives, rural alternatives, "reingenery" of the québécois state, disinterest of the young people vis-a-vis the political parties, civil disobedience, etc.

Like last year, we laid a particular stress on the ecological conscience. Natural toilets, rationing of water, organic food, recycled building material and re-use, etc.

The cultural element was much more developed than last year. There were several bands and the artistic dimension was really present.

There also were 2 meetings devoted more or less to the RRG. The first was rather introductory. The second merged with the closing plenary of the camp.

Results and prospects

In continuity with the RRG, we had wished that this camp serves as a stepping stone, not only for the networking but also for autonomous activism for next mobilizations. Our companions who were in Quito transmitted to us the call for one day continental action to take place 2 days before the american presidential elections.

It was agreed that the participants of the camp should help and mobilise for this day of action, with an emphasis on creative resistance.

One of the first acknowledgment for us to make, is that, between the activists, the creative ones, more moderated militants, the radicals, the specific or targeted struggles, the ordinary citizens and the merely curious, there is enormous mutual misunderstanding and/or lack of communication. Consequently, the "popular education" dimension becomes paramount.

Second report: in spite of the diversity of backgrounds or ideological affiliation, a generational cohesion, an identity, is taking shape little by little. Youth are more and more conscious of their role in the movement of global resistance.

There are clear points of convergence:

- Ecological conscience; the safeguarding of the natural riches is at the core of our concerns;
- The traditional referents of the left are less and less relevant for our generation; Marxist analysis is respected but it does not represent an absolute referent anymore;
- Our movement must be, festive, funny, creative, merry, inventive, innovating, alive, diversified, respectful and motivated by love, not by hatred;
- Slow but certain radicalisation of the analysis; a will to identify the root causes of the problems of globalisation;
- A will to "de-compartmentalize" the fights and to make resistances converge;
- The importance of international solidarity; a new internationalism supported by experience more than theory;

At the end of the second camp québécois, interest for the project is stronger than ever. And what seems to interest above all the participants, is not proposals for miraculous macro-solutions, but rather the exploration itself of new ways of communicating and organising.

Thus, another report which was emitted by certain participants of the camp is that it is not necessary for the camp as such to grow bigger and grow bigger always more. There is more importance granted to quality and diversity of the exchanges than the quantity of the participants.

Of course we wish that more young people get interested with the project and with the ideals which underlie it, but the impact in the long run cannot measure itself by the success of *this one project* only. Consequently, we reiterated the importance not to regard THIS Camp as THE camp, but rather to try to multiply the experiments of direct democracy and self-management. The camp should not become the "Week of Self-management", on the contrary it is necessary that the principles which animate the camp disseminate and grow in the daily activity of the participants, and they should build similar or complementary projects.

It is by the multiplication of the initiatives that this movement will take its real force and will have a historical impact.

We realized that direct democracy is possible and necessary, but also that horizontal, decentralized and really inclusive organization can only function in relatively small groups and federations.

We were not sufficiently many this year to organize in "barrios" but this solution seems essential with the expansion of the movement and the correct operation of the camp.

Continuations of the camp and questioning...

I would like to continue my message by some reflexions, all personal, relating to the state of progressist forces, and the prospects for social forums and the role of the camps in all that. It is here my personal opinion, which undoubtedly will ruffle some people. But, in the light of certain informations

which I have just received concerning the WSF'05 and the AIJ, I believe that it is necessary to launch a discussion.

One week after the end of the Camp, the NGO Alternatives (member of the international council of the WSF) organized its annual Journées d'étude (days of study ?). It is the opportunity for the members to meet, take part in thematic workshops and to hold their general assembly. And to have fun, obviously. It is a little like a semi-private Social Forum. Last year, several participants of the Camp went to the journées d'étude to share their experiment, invite to the participation, to show that it is possible to articulate alternatives without being locked in ideological orthodoxies and rigid structures, or to depend on the State for resources, and especially to show that it is necessary **TO LIVE THE ALTERNATIVES AND NOT ONLY TALK ABOUT THEM**. The experience was very appreciated, and several people even said that the workshop on the camp had been the most stimulating event of the days.

I don't have the intention to dirty Alternatives' reputation with the members of this network. For 10 years, this organization has carried out a remarkable work in the field of the "international co-operation".

But on the other hand, Alternatives kind of embodies the left in Quebec and, in several respects, they also embody what is wrong with the left in Quebec and in the world. Their economic dependence with respect to the State, their enormous operational budget and the domination of their infrastructure by hierarchical functioning reflect perfectly the dynamic specific with the traditional parties (be it so-called social-democrats or even vaguely "progressists") and with the gigantic trade-unions. Moreover they do not evolve, or they do so very very slowly. There are much complacency and intellectual masturbation, but very little concrete actions.

The real problem is that these organizations monopolize and synthesize the progressist idea. It is like if the global justice movement, the new incarnation of progressivism, was entirely represented by the WSF. We all know very well that that is not the case. Let us ask EZLN what they think about this?

Personally official alternatives really worry me. And I have the feeling that it is exactly what Alternatives seeks to be in Quebec, and the WSF on the total level. This, plus the fact that the interminable and redundant palaver is used to cover inaction, pushes me to seriously question the nature of the WSF and these "moderate" groups which make it up.

It seems to me more and more that the WSF, maybe unconsciously, is useful in fact to slow down the emergence and the progression of a genuinely revolutionary popular movement. And I am not one of those which align themselves with reactionnary dogmas anchored in the theories and practices of another century. I am only observant.

That brings me to comment on information which comes to me from Brazil. The comrade Isabelle tells me that there is serious talk that the WSF'05 is going to be held at Parque Harmonia. I lengthily discussed with Fernando, last January, about the relevance for the AIJ to join the International Council officially. It came out from our exchanges that the best way of circulating our ideas within the WSF is to have a voice within the council. That is well.

But what about a Camp that is amalgamated with the WSF? What happens when the WSF BECOMES the camp? Does the camp still exists then? Which form does it take? Especially, does it preserve its already relative independence? Its slightly more "radical" position?

If the Indian experience is a sign of things to come, that becomes worrying.

For me, one of the principal raisons d'être of the AIJ/RRG is to question the structures of power within movement. Is this role still filled? Is it always of primary importance? Am I mistaken in taking this role for granted?

Are we serious when we speak about decentralization, horizontality, self-management, inclusivity and direct democracy as bases for "another world possible"? Or are we merely the flavour of the month, the rebels of passage who will merge with the antiquated structures as soon as the context lends itself to it?

And the taboo question: where does the money really come from? The rumours multiply, and not only within the anarchists and maoists circles! Are the social forums financed indirectly by the imperial powers? Is this paranoia? Are there in this polemic the germs of a fundamental questioning of the relation the WSF really entertains with Power and Capital?

I'm not hiding the fact that this questioning comes from a radical perspective. I am a libertarian, and I recall very well those occurrences in recent history where our own contributions to social progress have been crushed mercilessly by "official alternatives", so to speak. We're incessantly criticised for our tendency to exclude ourselves from these processes, but when our ideas do make that much noise, it is not long before we are actually bullied out of any process.

Am I wrong to assume that this process is different ?

My skepticism grows each time I hear someone say that "it is not the role of the WSF to lead to actions". But where does this blasted Forum go? And if it's going to Parque Harmonia, how can we change the forum from inside? Is it even possible? Am I mistaking to believe that "youth" has the historical duty to denounce the masquerades and to act for an authentic international social justice?

Isn't the RRG precisely the space where these questions should be discussed?

Web site

To conclude, comrades, because I assumed this responsibility, I would like to reconsider the question of the Web site. It is obvious that the situation developed very little since Mumbai. Since I haven't taken part in the virtual meeting where it was decided that Wiki was the best solution, I will give my opinion now.

The principal difference between a CMS (content managing system) such as Drupal or SPIP and a WIKI, is that the wiki allows for ANYONE to come and MAKE A MESS while playing in the code. It is very difficult to preserve order in an active WIKI, so much so that, sooner or later, it becomes necessary that one or several people undertake regular clean up, and that can become a considerable task.

Moreover, the WIKI is perhaps ultra-democratic, but it is also, paradoxically, relatively elitist, since it is necessary to know the rudiments of programming to be able to use it adequately.

Plus, the wiki doesn't resolve the problem of languages.

And finally, if the usage of the current site means anything, I don't have the feeling that the Wiki will be used a whole lot more... Wiki is not simpler to use than a dynamic site, people, on the contrary!

On the other hand, a CMS well built and well used, allows for the interaction on the contents as well as the collective management of the site, just like Wiki. Personally, I don't have technical training necessary to develop the current site according to our needs. But I am trying to put together a work committee in Quebec.

I thus propose that we activate a technical work committee starting from this list. We will be able to create a list of discussion for the questions relating to the development of the site. The access permissions with the server will be given to all those which will wish to join the committee.

I am sincerely sorry that the development of the site was not done more quickly, but I really believe that we will get there! We just need people who are knowledgeable. This network needs a functional communications tool !

Finally, it is increasingly improbable that I will be able to travel to Brazil in January. My activism has caught up with me and I am persecuted by (in)justice. This saddens me deeply but I know that several

comrades from Quebec and Canada will be in Porto Alegre to continue and nourish this extraordinary movement.

All this is not in vain.

Companeros, companeras,

My heart is with you,

Patrick Cadorette