

Oxfam and other development NGOs from the ranks of its critics.

Take the case of the World Bank. The Fifty Years is Enough campaign of 1994 was a prototype of Seattle (complete with activists invading the meeting halls). Now the NGOs are surprisingly quiet about the World Bank. The reason is that the Bank has made a huge effort to co-opt them.

Through intensified dialogues with the respectable face of dissent, Wolfensohn had successfully “diluted the strength of ‘mobilisation networks’ and increased the relative power of technical NGOs (for it is mostly these that the Bank has co-opted).”¹¹¹

Fortress Quebec City: Tattle the Fence or March to Nowhere?

The protests in Quebec City in April 2001 against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) were the largest anti-globalization street protests in Canada. Leaders of 34 nations (Cuba was excluded) were meeting at the Summit of the Americas to negotiate a hemispheric trade agreement, which critics dubbed “NAFTA on steroids.” Some 60,000 people gathered to oppose the deal and express their outrage at the heavily fortified, closed-door meetings.

The more radical elements were led by the *Convergence des Luites Anti-Capitalistes* (CLAC—Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles) and the *Comité d’Accueil du Sommet des Amériques* (CASA—Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee), which brought together anarchists, students, anti-poverty activists, radical feminists and environmentalists. The moderate wing was represented by the *Réseau québécois sur l’intégration continentale* (RQIC), a platform of Quebec labour unions and NGOs, and Common Frontiers, its counterpart from English Canada. In contrast to Vancouver, development NGOs had a large presence in Quebec City and were well represented in the moderate coalitions: the RQIC included Alternatives, *Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale* (AQOCI), CUSO-Québec and Development & Peace while Common Frontiers included Americas Policy Group of the CCIC, Inter Pares, Oxfam Canada, the Canadian Consortium for International Social Development and Rights & Democracy.

In many respects, the Summit of the Americas was a replay of the APEC summit in Vancouver on a much larger scale. Continuing the “co-opt and crackdown” strategy unveiled in Vancouver, the federal and

provincial governments provided over \$300,000 in funding to the RQIC to host a parallel People's Summit. Alternatives in particular played a key role in the organization of the Summit. Alternatives negotiated with the government for funding of the Summit, provided the coordination team for the "People's Summit" and had staff working as spokespeople for the RQIC. Alternatives "met frequently" with the prime minister's summit representative as well as with other government representatives in the months leading up to the protests.¹¹² A government spokesperson explained that the government wanted to "ensure there is a dialogue with the public," and claimed that the parallel summit would "give citizens the opportunity to present their concerns to government."¹¹³

These groups were courted by the government because they "support the balanced agenda of the Summit of the Americas process but want to see more emphasis on the implementation of commitments made in pursuit of equitable trade and social inclusion," as Marc Lortie, the Prime Minister's personal representative at the FTAA meeting, put it. Oxfam Quebec and Oxfam Canada, for instance, blandly urged the Canadian government to "harness trade for development" and ensure that the Agreement supported "development goals."¹¹⁴ The RQIC's demands prior to the Summit centred on the inclusion of labour and environmental clauses and its public statements focused on the exclusion of its members from the negotiations.¹¹⁵ The tactics favoured by the RQIC—"large-scale parallel events and massive, peaceful demonstrations," in the words of Lortie—also aligned with the objectives of the authorities, who desperately wanted to avoid or at least minimize Seattle-style confrontations. Generous government funding allowed the NGOs and their demands for inclusion to occupy the media spotlight in the run up to the protests, marginalizing the views of anti-capitalist organizations calling for a rejection of the FTAA. Thanks to government funding, Lortie noted with some satisfaction, the People's Summit and its organizers, "enjoyed wide coverage, in part because the main media set up on the site of the People's Summit throughout the week, where they covered activities and conducted live interviews."¹¹⁶

There was a "Plan B" for those groups that did not support the "balanced agenda" of the FTAA. In anticipation of the protests, the Canadian government mobilized a squad of 6,700 riot police to guard the Summit of the Americas, "wielding an arsenal of tear gas, water cannons, batons, concussion-grenades, pepper spray, and rubber bullets."¹¹⁷ A fortress-like 3.9-kilometre fence, which came to be known as the "Wall of Shame," swallowed up a major portion of Quebec City's picturesque downtown core. Local jails were emptied and officials ramped up their intimidating

rhetoric. "If you want peace, you must prepare for war," Serge Menard, Quebec's Minister for Public Security, explained to the press. With a price tag of over \$100 million, policing for the Summit was the most costly peacetime security operation in Canadian history up to that point.¹¹⁸

Months before the Summit, tensions between the two tendencies flared up, frustrating attempts to organize a common demonstration or to collaborate on public outreach. Representatives of the RQIC and other reformist groups insisted on tightly-controlled forms of protest. The moderates demanded that all organizations adhere to a strict code of "nonviolent discipline," which was defined as excluding not only physical violence but property damage, wearing masks or hoods and even "verbal violence, including insults."¹¹⁹ CLAC and other groups refused to accept these conditions and insisted on the right of protesters to stand their ground rather than capitulate when attacked by police. CLAC, CASA and other radical groups argued for "an escalation and a diversification of tactics beyond both the routines of lobbying and of legal, stage-managed demonstrations," and promoted "a return to more militant and confrontational tactics, including direct action and civil disobedience." The NGO members of the RQIC, on the other hand, worked alongside the *Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec* (FTQ) and other "traditional allies of the governing *Parti Québécois*" who "wanted to keep the demonstrations under their control and minimize embarrassment to the Quebec government."¹²⁰

Consequently, the radical groups were excluded (and excluded themselves) from the People's Summit. The radicals organized a separate "Carnival against Capitalism." They held their own teach-ins and organizing meetings, and planned their own marches. They made links with the local population and sponsored a popular education caravan against the FTAA that traveled throughout Quebec, Ontario and the Northeast of the U.S. Protester and radio journalist Shawn Ewald claimed that "the most important work (organizing the effort to either stop or disrupt the summit, and build community support) was done by CLAC and CASA." Alternatives and the RQIC, on the other hand, "while having one hundred times the resources of CLAC and CASA, did not do one tenth of the organizing that CLAC and CASA did." Instead, they appeared to have "spent more energy trying to marginalize CLAC and CASA ... [than] doing any real organizing work on the ground."¹²¹

If the government's purpose in funding the People's Summit was to co-opt the moderate elements of the movement, the People's Summit itself was co-opted by an increasingly radical rank-and-file. The 2,000-3,000

delegates in attendance roundly rejected the draft statement proposed by the organizers calling for the inclusion of social clauses in the FTAA in favour of a position much closer to that of the radical anti-globalization groups. Delegates voted for an unequivocal "No to the FTAA" stance and refused to endorse the RQIC's preferred strategy of *concertation* with government or business.¹²² To the embarrassment of the RQIC, the counter-summit's final declaration was "admittedly quite radical and ... rejected not only the proposed FTAA but also the very principle of free trade because of the supremacy of the capitalist system."¹²³

A Tale of Two Marches

On Friday, April 20 the radical-led march explicitly set out to shut down the FTAA negotiations, as protesters had done less than two years earlier in Seattle. The People's Summit organizers did not support the demonstration and instead chose to hold a day-long teach-in on the FTAA. The organizers promised the teach-in would "highlight civil society's capacity for resistance" and "deliver a public political challenge" to the FTAA leaders.¹²⁴ Some key participants in the People's Summit, however, refused to accept the criminalization of dissent and judged that taking to the streets was a better way of delivering a message to the globalizers than sitting in a day-long conference. Led by the more militant Canadian labour unions and the Council of Canadians, hundreds of People's Summit delegates deserted the teach-in and joined the 10,000-strong march in a show of solidarity with the radicals' opposition to the "Wall of Shame."

The Friday march produced the most iconic image of the Summit, as protesters directed their rage at the chain link fence erected to protect the Summit from the anti-globalization hordes. The crowd quickly toppled large sections of the fence, but was subsequently beaten back by lines of riot cops and volleys of tear gas. The police response was indiscriminate and brutal, targeting not just those engaging in direct action against the wall in the "red zones," but those in the non-confrontational "green" and "yellow" protest zones as well. Police fired over 5,000 tear gas canisters (so many they had to order more from their U.S. supplier during the Summit) and nearly 1,000 plastic bullets at the crowds. Several protesters were seriously injured by police-fired projectiles. Maude Barlow was shocked by the "random, government-endorsed brutality being waged against innocent protesters" she saw after the Council of Canadians' delegation joined the protests at the fence:

For the next two days, into the small hours of the morning, the police directed a merciless tear gas assault against the several thousand protesters anywhere in the vicinity of the wall. Four hundred and sixty-three were arrested, some having been picked up by police in unmarked vans, and were held in filthy conditions inside the jail. Women were stripped and doused with disinfectant by male guards and people were squeezed into tiny cells without toilet facilities or food. ... The terms “green” or “yellow” immediately became irrelevant. Anyone standing peacefully within the vicinity was a target of tear gas, water cannon and even plastic bullets.¹²⁵

After the wall came down and protesters clashed with police, Prime Minister Jean Chretien claimed the action was “carried out by a small group of extremists” and was “contrary to all democratic principles that are so dear to us.”¹²⁶ The RQIC leadership reacted with much the same horror, publicly decrying the “violence” of the “anarchists.”¹²⁷ Few in the crowd shared the outrage of the RQIC at the assault on the fence or vandalism, reported journalist Lance Tapley. “The rather widespread acceptance of ‘violence’ was striking. ... ‘Look at the violence of the police and globalization!’ so many people told me when I brought up the subject of the Black Block’s [sic] activities.”¹²⁸ Indeed, a handful of anarchists were not the only ones engaged in “violence” at the wall:

Perhaps more surprising than the nearly 5000 tear gas canisters that police fired at demonstrators in Quebec was the willingness of the crowds to hold their ground. By the second day, it wasn’t just black-clad anarchists and nihilist street kids dashing into the fray to hurl back the fuming, red-hot canisters, but ordinary college kids, angry locals, even a mother with a child on her back, incensed that the cops had fired into her group of peaceful demonstrators. The summit became a lesson in how indiscriminate force can radicalize a movement.¹²⁹

On the Saturday, the RQIC held their own protest, the “March of the Americas” which drew over 60,000 protesters, overwhelmingly from the ranks of trade unions. In contrast to the radicals who protested at the fence and sought ways to breach or tear down the fence throughout the Summit, the RQIC and Common Frontiers scrupulously avoided challenging the state’s right to wall off the city from dissent. With the radical groups and students maintaining a presence of thousands at the fence, and facing a

brutal police assault, the support of the huge labour contingent might have decisively turned the clashes in favour of the protesters.

Unbeknownst to many participants, they were on a "March to Nowhere." The "legal" protest route had been chosen by the People's Summit organizers and their labour allies to avoid any possible confrontations at the fence:

Rather than marching towards the perimeter fence and the Summit of the Americas meetings, march organizers chose a route that marched from the People's Summit away from the fence, through largely empty residential areas to the parking lot of a stadium in a vacant area several miles away. ... One thousand marshals from the FTQ kept very tight control over the march. When the march came to the point where some activists planned to split off and go up the hill to the fence, FTQ marshals signalled the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) contingent walking behind CUPE to sit down and stop the march so that FTQ marshals could lock arms and prevent others from leaving the official march route.¹³⁰

Many union members were incredulous and outraged that the People's Summit organizers had led their protest away from the wall. Carol Phillips, director of the international department of the CAW, explained, "It's been very difficult for our members to keep them on this route [away from the fence]." According to Phillips, many members of her union were disappointed and embarrassed when they found out that they were marching away from the perimeter fence.¹³¹ One CAW member said about the "legal" march: "Why was the 'legal protest' conducted miles away from the security perimeter? Had I known I was marching towards a parking lot, I would have stayed home and done that at the fucking mall."¹³² Another labour activist bitterly denounced the cowardice of the leadership's "decision to avoid meaningful protest":

The process of expedience and concession that came up with the plan to avoid the fence is beyond my understanding. It was as if the Second World War generals, who were preparing to drive the Nazis out of Europe, turned around and launched an attack in the direction of Baffin Island.¹³³

Thousands of union protesters ultimately joined the protests at the fence, and "the idea of marching on the perimeter was extremely popular with the vast majority of rank-and-file union members and others who did not

break off the main march on Saturday.” As the parking lot rally came to a close, a huge cheer went up through the crowd when it was announced that six points in the perimeter had been breached.¹³⁴

Sporadic reinforcements from the labour march were not enough to turn the tide in favour of the protesters at the fence. A few trade meetings were delayed or cancelled, but police were able to contain the protests and the FTAA Summit went on as planned. Leaders nonetheless left Quebec City feeling rattled. Enrique Iglesias, the head of the Inter-American Development Bank, attended the FTAA meetings and told the press afterward: “We cannot ignore these kinds of things. The image demonstrators create can undermine the capacity of leaders to implant free trade.”¹³⁵ Despite efforts by both government officials and development NGOs to isolate and demonize the “extremists,” direct action protesters had clearly won the sympathy and respect of both local residents and the broader Canadian public. Opinion polls found that 74 percent of Canadians favoured a popular vote on any such trade agreement before the federal government signed on to it, and more than 1 in 5 Canadians over the age of 18 said they would have joined the protests in Quebec City if time and money permitted.¹³⁶ Even Prime Minister Chrétien was forced to admit: “Democracies face a crisis of legitimacy and relevancy.”¹³⁷ Police may have won the battle, but the globalizers were losing the war.

What Could NGOs Have Done Differently?

Some argue that a productive division of labour between NGOs at the negotiating table and radicals in the street may have been possible, pointing to positive aspects of NGOs’ involvement in the anti-globalization movement. Though NGOs did little to mobilize their members for the street protests and direct actions against the globalization agenda, NGO resources did trickle down to activists groups for campaigns not sanctioned by donors. NGOs also provided useful research and educational tools. Whatever limited contributions NGOs made to the movement, however, the ultimate impact of NGO activities was to further the globalizers’ agenda.

When NGOs belatedly joined the anti-globalization movement, they devoted substantial resources to promoting reformist strategies while marginalizing radical goals and analyses. Much of the development NGOs literature on “globalization” was critical, but it tended at the same time to “studiously avoid confronting fundamental issues like imperialism, capitalism or colonisation in any substantive way,” notes Aziz Choudry: