

Of course the new Latin American governments, despite their merits, fall short in many areas. This is why Ms. Harnacker insists in the right of free criticism as a necessity for building 21st Century Socialism. Without criticism there is no possibility for society to correct its mistakes. The vision she holds out is one of decentralized, federated communities and self-managed enterprises, interacting with a government whose policies are designed to promote such developments. Gramsci is another point of reference, and Ms. Harnacker engages with the task of creating a

new hegemony, above all a cultural one, that is necessary for the process of social transformation.

A World to Build is a solid work full of advanced theoretical insights mixed with lessons derived from concrete, world-historical struggles. This is a deeply rewarding book to read on a number of levels. Whether or not the current left advances in Latin America can be defended and extended is something that only future events can reveal. There are still important things to be learned, which can be applied elsewhere. *A World to Build* is a book where one may start learning these lessons.

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... it is vitally important to recover the original socialist thinking ...

Until the Rulers Obey

Learning from Latin America's Social Movements

by Clifton Ross and Marcy Rein

An excerpt from the introduction to *Until the Rulers Obey: Voices of from Latin American Social Movements*, edited by Clifton Ross and Marcy Rein (Oakland: PM Press, 2014).

A wave of change rolled through Latin America at the turn of the 21st century, sweeping away neoliberal two-party governments, bringing calls to refound the states based on broad participation and democratically drafted constitutions. The power and motion of this wave, often referred to as the “Pink Tide,” came from the social movements that had been gathering force for over a decade—rebuilding in spaces opened by the fall of US-backed military dictatorships, rethinking in the spaces opened by the crumbling of the Soviet socialist models.

These movements galvanized long-silent—or silenced—sectors of society: indigenous people, campesinos, students, the LGBT community, the unemployed and all those left out of the promised utopia of a globalized economy. They have deployed a wide array of strategies and actions to some common ends. They march against mines and agribusiness; they occupy physical spaces, rural and urban, and social space won through recognition of language, culture, and equal participation; they mobilize villages, towns, cities and even nations for community and environmental survival. They are sloughing off the skin of the 20th-century bipolar world, synthesizing old ways of working and finding new paths into an uncertain future.

Same story, different century

The Conquest of the Americas continues as an ongoing process of “primitive accumulation,” that is, through brutal dispossession, only changed in detail. The looting, once only of gold and silver picked or shoveled from mines by slaves to satisfy the greed of Conquistadores, has increased exponentially in recent decades to feed transnational Capital. This behemoth has left behind the sword to devastate the region with an arsenal of new tools for plunder: strip-mining “megaprojects” with giant machines

that dig for lithium, copper and gold, laying waste to landscapes; countless drills for oil, poisoning rivers; dams for hydroelectric power that flood indigenous lands; battalions of tractors sowing industrial soy for cattle and biofuel, or cane for sugar and biofuel, or eucalyptus for paper mills, or other monocultures that raze entire ecosystems and steal peoples’ ways of life.

The United States, of course, has played a major role in the modernization of the instruments of domination for plunder, only in recent years so “humanely” refined. During the more savage era of the

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Cold War, Washington fomented coups to dislodge nationalist and socialist governments across the continent—Arbenz in Guatemala, 1954; Goulart in Brazil, 1964; Allende in Chile, 1973—installing military dictatorships in their place. By the mid-1970s, most of Central and South America was under the rule of dictatorships armed, trained, directed and financed by the United States. Hundreds of thousands were tortured, murdered and disappeared, in some cases decapitating an entire generation of artists, writers, intellectuals and activists. [1]

These dictatorships imposed a particularly virulent form of capitalism on the people of Latin Amer-

ica. Years before neoliberalism came to the United States and Europe, “the restructuring of the Latin American economies had begun in earnest when Pinochet invited the ‘Chicago boys,’ neoliberal academics from the USA, to run the dictatorship’s economic policy. The socio-economic consequence for the majority in Latin America was catastrophic devastation.” [2]

By the 1980s these military regimes had already begun to collapse and give way to democratic governments, beginning in Central America with the overthrow of Nicaragua’s Somoza dictatorship by the Sandinistas (FSLN) in 1979 and in South America with the fall of Argentina’s military dictatorship in 1983. Nevertheless, the dictatorships left behind massive debts, devastated economies, decimated social movements, traumatized societies, and neoliberal constitutions, some of which continue to direct national policies to this day.

New movements born from the ashes of the old

The 1989 collapse of the USSR set off a worldwide “crisis of the left,” which had dramatic repercussions in Latin America. Cuba underwent the “Special Period,” its government forced to concern itself more with survival than with extending solidarity to international revolutionary struggles. In Nicaragua the Sandinistas lost power in elections in February 1990, after fighting what the International Court of Justice in 1986 ruled to be US “terrorism” for several years. Within just a few years, the armed movements in El Salvador and Guatemala negotiated agreements with their respective governments, leaving only Colombia’s ELN (National Liberation Army) and FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of

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Colombia), the first and last of the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas battling the United States “hyper-empire.”

The region’s labor unions and workers’ movements, which had anchored the left up to that moment, were struggling for survival, their leaders and membership still suffering from the blows of Operation Condor and other similar programs [3] and the gutting of the state sector and manufacturing infrastructure under neoliberal programs.

With the end of the Cold War there was a “shift from ‘straight power concepts’” such as dictatorships “to ‘persuasion’... predicated on a new component in US foreign policy: what policymakers call the ‘promotion of democracy.’” [4] New democratic governments—often with “left” parties at the helm—obediently continued the policies of neoliberal austerity throughout the region. Union membership, activity and power dropped significantly from 1991–2001 as governments pursued privatization, trade liberalization and price stabilization, and the contingent workforce swelled. [5]

The neoliberal model, expressed as TINA (There Is No Alternative) by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and affirmed by her US counterparts Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, reigned supreme as opponents experienced “the collapse of the class-based model of the traditional

...socialism...is embedded in the cultural matrix of the entire southern continent...

left.” [6] However, despite this collapse, what a majority of Latin Americans envisioned in its place was another kind of “left,” since capitalism has never been, as it once was in the United States, a “popular” ideology advanced even by the working class.

Some form of socialism or communitarianism is embedded in the cultural matrix of the entire southern continent, in the indigenous concept of the “minga,” “minka,” or “cayapa,” meaning “community work for the collective good without self-interest.” The Roman Catholic Church—especially Liberation Theology—posed community as the way to redemption, unlike Protestantism in which salvation has generally been considered an individual matter.

When left to their own devices, Latin Americans have often chosen communal forms of mutual aid and populist, corporatist or even socialist governments that advocated for the interests of the working majority. In any case, in the neoliberal globalizing world of TINA, Latin America seemed not to have gotten the memo that socialism was dead and Capital was writing history’s final chapter.

Even before the empire wrote that memo, the situation was changing in Latin America and not going well for its neoliberal governments of “democratic transition.” Tens of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets in February 1989, their tolerance for neoliberal policies pushed past the breaking point by an increase in transit fares. Police and military killed an unknown number in what later became known as the “Caracazo,” but the event began a slow-moving transformation that would have profound consequences within a few years.

In neighboring Ecuador a little over a year later, in June of 1990, thousands of indigenous people rose up and marched on the capital under the banner, “Never again a nation without us,” and small, local mobilizations that became national marches began in Bolivia, uniting lowlands indigenous people with the highland Aymara.

Meanwhile, indigenous people from all the Americas began to gear up for the Intercontinental Chaski for Self-Determination and other actions to protest 500 years of genocide and celebrate 500 years of resistance. Environmentalists began linking up with native peoples to protest everything from logging of virgin forests to mining on native lands. These bonds and a widening circle of concerns that incorporated new actors led to the founding of Via

Campesina in 1993, bringing concerns for healthy, humane food production and food producers to public consciousness.

Remaining workers' movements and unions in the United States and Mexico began to organize against the imperial agenda behind "globalization" in the form of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) being pushed by then-President Bill Clinton. Their efforts failed, but as the treaty went into effect, precisely at midnight on January 1, 1994, the Zapatistas (EZLN, Zapatista National Liberation Army) emerged from the jungles of Chiapas, Mexico to take five small towns and capture the left imagination by presenting a "counter power" to what seemed an invincible unipolar empire in expansion.

The Zapatistas were a new kind of guerrilla, emerging out of the encounter between left (Maoist) and indigenous people in the backwoods of Southern Mexico, and they quickly began to occupy not

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only largely indigenous towns in Chiapas but also the newly created territory of cyberspace. The Zapatista spokesperson, Subcommander Marcos, called for social movements from all over the world to gather in territory liberated by the EZLN for the First International Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in 1996, which became the basis of the later World Social Forum gatherings, beginning in 2001.

The anti-globalization movements, inspired by the Zapatistas and other emerging actors in what was to be the "autonomist" side of a new left movement, joined forces with labor, environmental groups, and an array of social justice organizations to battle the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and other institutions of domination used by international capital.

The rising "Pink Tide" and the new movements

Hugo Chávez and his *Polo Patriótico* movement won the Venezuelan election in 1998, setting the stage for the whole cast of new governments that came to power in the first decade of the new century, aided by the social movements that flourished again in the new context. With Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, "Lula," as its candidate for the presidency, the Workers' Party took power in Brazil in 2002. Next door in Uruguay the left coalition Frente Amplio (Broad Front) beat the traditional Red (Colorado) and White parties and won with their candidate, Tabaré Vazquez, in 2005.

In early 2006 Evo Morales was inaugurated as Bolivia's first indigenous president; later that same year Rafael Correa was elected president of Ecuador under the party he formed, "Alianza País." In 2008, Fernando Lugo, known as the "Red Bishop," won

the presidency in Paraguay with the help of massive social mobilizations, although his term came to an abrupt end with a June 2012 impeachment, which many saw as a *golpe* (coup).

These governments of the "Pink Tide" surged to power on the backs of social movements—both the new activism that arose from the changed circumstances of the 1990s, and organizing like that of the Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil (MST) and other groups that dated back to the 1970s and had grown and adapted since. Many new left groups and grassroots community organizations began to occupy and flourish in the spaces vacated by the old left parties.

At the core of these new movements is a diverse cross-section of the marginalized and the excluded: slum dwellers, the unemployed, indigenous people, disaffected urban youth, LGBT communities, women, Afro-descendants, students, and many more "invisibilized" new actors, now determined to take center stage in their world. While it would be impossible to generalize about such a varied collection of people, some common themes emerge in many of the movements in Latin America.

First, they often attempt to occupy a "territory." Facing displacement by the modern-day enclosures that come with the extractive economy, poor people, campesinos and indigenous, stake claims to land for their very survival: Witness the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the MST across vast swaths of Brazil, indigenous defending ancestral and sacred lands, and slum-dwellers throughout Latin America. In these liberated territories, protagonists redesign their society outside the control of capital, and promote a "dispersed" autonomy that facilitates a strengthened resistance.

As the members of the Galpón de Corrales, an anarchist community center in Montevideo, Uruguay, tell us, many of these territories organize horizontal relationships of power, often implementing a concept of "leadership as service." In this model, dramatically different from the democratic centralism of a vanguard organization, leadership arises from the base and is accountable to its base. It serves; it does not rule. This is consistent with the influential Liberation Theology that emerged in the 1970s in Latin America, as well as with indigenous ideas of leadership. As the Zapatistas put it, leaders are to "govern by obeying."

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As they stake out their territories, these movements sink ideological roots in local wisdom and symbol systems. Heroes of history and myth reinvent themselves in the emerging millions who relive the old stories, determined to write a new ending to the master narrative of the Conquest. The new movements see themselves as part of a heritage stretching back through more than 500 years of resistance.

Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari inspire the activists of Peru and Bolivia just as Rumiñahui is present in the struggle of indigenous Ecuadorans. Votan

Zapata, an invention of the Zapatistas, blends Tzeltal Mayan myth with the hero of the Mexican Revolution from Chiapas, Emiliano Zapata. Subcommander Marcos seems to be as comfortable quoting the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón as he does Marx, or more so, as do members of MORENA (the movement coming out of Andres M.L. Obrador's bid for the Mexican presidency in 2012), not to mention those of Oaxaca, birthplace of Magón, where the image of the martyred anarchist was resurrected as protective and inspirational symbol in the 2006 uprising.

This phenomenon is region-wide, with Venezuelans referring back to Bolivar, the Honduran resistance to Francisco Morazán, and Nicaraguans to Augusto Sandino, etc. This isn't a new phenomenon, but in the absence of a dominant Communist Party and its hegemonic symbology, regional systems of thought and histories have emerged into the foreground.

The new social movements also value the work of formation and education. This is at the core of both the Zapatista struggle and the MST, but it plays a role in all the social movements. Not only do they emphasize the

formation of their members, but they also carry political education into the community at large. This has been an important corrective to much of the old left approach that downplayed the "subjective" elements of struggle in favor of the "transformation of material conditions." Without taking the other extreme and focusing exclusively on the subjective and affective dimensions of social change, the new movements work to transform individual subjectivities (through education) as well as objective conditions and social structures.

The new movements share a practice of unity in diversity. The urban social movements represent every corner in the margins of the city: LGBT, squatters, unemployed, the "contingent" and self-employed workers such as recyclers, etc. There are indigenous movements like CONAIE or ECUARUNARI and other similar organizations that incorporate diverse tribes and peoples and make alliances across ethnicities.

Just as the new social movements have no single guiding ideology nor a single type of actor, neither do they work with a single form of organization or structure. While most movements tend to favor "horizontal" or non-hierarchical forms of organization, organizational models are extremely diverse.

Beyond binaries

Debate rages among social movement scholars over the most effective relations between movements and the state. For the most part, their opinions break down along the historic fault line in the left

between the anarchists, libertarian or "autonomist," and the socialists and communists who contest for state power. This is what some have called the "pseudo-debate," [7] but the problem is real, though it need not—and should not—be understood as a binary. William I. Robinson frames it better as a problem to be resolved when he writes, "At some point, the popular movements must work out how the vertical and horizontal intersect." [8] At present, as revealed in the interviews presented in this book, activists and movement intellectuals are generally conscious of this problem to which they take a pragmatic, nuanced approach, keeping a sober critique of capitalism and its power always in view....

Most of the nations represented in this book have "progressive" governments, but none are in a "revolutionary process" in which a vanguard party controls state power and the mass of social forces submit to its authority and integrate themselves into that "process." The states in the 15 countries represented here range from quasi-military "democracies" of the right (Guatemala) to governments that say they are "on the road to socialism," but which are actually "reformist" at best. [9] They, as well as their political parties, also claim to represent "the people." But in fact, the interests of civil society, as organized in social movements, rarely converge with those of parties and states, because reformist states must respond to the pressures of international capital, local oligarchies and other forces that directly oppose the interests of the majority. [10]

This situation often leads to conflicts between even the most "progressive" governments and social movements, most often over the government's development model. Most of the leaders of these states, particularly Correa in Ecuador and Morales in Bolivia, have expressed concern for "Pachamama" (Mother Earth) and adopted the language of "the socialism of the 21st century" promoted by Venezuelan President Chávez and now his successor, Nicolas Maduro. But none of the Latin American governments are making a serious attempt to develop socialism. Instead, they are building welfare states, following the model of Robert McNamara when he served as president of the World Bank (after his tenure as Secretary of Defense in the Johnson administration, where he helped design the genocide of the Vietnam War).

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There's little reason to believe that these social welfare programs are working any better now in Latin America than they did in the context where they were designed as counterinsurgency programs in the United States in the 1960s under the rubric of "the War on Poverty." [11]

As a matter of fact, poverty, inequality, and landlessness actually increased in Brazil under Lula, whose “Zero Fome (Zero Hunger) and Bolsa Familia (Family Basket) programs were financed by taxing the middle class and stable workers, as were the social welfare payment plans in Argentina and Uruguay.” [12]

None of the Pink Tide states have structurally challenged the roots of poverty, and their social programs, while certainly more helpful to the people than the austerity regimes of prior neoliberal governments, nevertheless serve to mask the real problem of

wealth. “These programs. . . tend to weaken autonomous mobilization from below by depoliticizing the question of poverty, turning inequality into an administrative problem, and creating a support base for the state independent of unions and social movements,” Robinson writes. [13]

The solution, obviously, is not to withdraw support for the poor and marginalized but to contend with the “real problem, which is wealth” (Zibechi) and attack the basic structural problem. The progressive governments operate in a system that is geared exclusively to accumulate wealth for the transnational capitalist class (TCC). In the absence of powerful, critical and autonomous social movements, “the structural power of global capital can impose itself on direct state power and impose its project of global capitalism.” [14]

As for the environmental policies of the “progressive” governments, there doesn’t seem to be much improvement over their neoliberal predecessors. Despite talk of “the rights of Pachamama,” the progressive governments are hostage to the resource exploitation practices of the TCC. This contradiction is sharpest in Bolivia, where the government of Evo Morales attempted to build a highway through the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure*, or TIPNIS) that critics argue would serve first and foremost Brazilian capital.

Scholar and activist Silvia Rivera calls this another “discrepancy between discourse and practice, because [the Morales government] has talked about the Pachamama, this great Pachamama, as an enlightened position internationally, but internally what they want is a developmentalist policy with hydroelectric [dams] that would drown indigenous lands, forests and highways all for an alliance with Brazil. They’re betting on serving the interests of Brazil. So it’s a new colonialism.” [15] Venezuela has nationalized gold “and given it to the multinational corporations, those same ones qualified as ‘savage capitalists’” by the government, indigenous Pemon activist Alexis Romero observes. [16]

In Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina vast swaths of the countryside are planted in cane and genetically modified soy for export, and transnationals are invading indigenous lands, destroying unique eco-

systems to plant other crops for biofuels. Mining companies have exercised their muscle over governments, says Claudia Acuña of the *lavaca* collective. The mining companies “held a meeting at the Government House and forced the state in some kind of mining coup against the Government, which we’re now living through,” Acuña told us. [17]

Wherever they are pursued, development policies based on resource extraction not only destroy the environment, original cultures and peoples; they can also gut and corrupt social movements that let go of their ability to criticize and protest. Thus, the movements often see the need to maintain a critical, autonomous stance toward these governments to navigate the gap between the rhetoric of “democracy” and the actual practice—and to recognize the governments’ tactics for subverting and co-opting the social and grassroots organizations.

Examples of the attempts of governments to co-opt the movements abound in the interviews in this book. Julieta Ojeda of *Mujeres Creando* talks of MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, Evo Morales’ party) having “penetrated certain organizations and divided them. They formed their own parallel organizations...entered these social movement spaces and divided.” Franco Basualdo of Argentina’s *Prensa de Frente* talks about a “government claiming to have a new policy that is apparently encouraging participation but there is no opening, no room for political participation or discussion.”

Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa accused indigenous activist Monica Chuji of being an “infiltrator” after she spoke critically in the Constitutional

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Assembly. This showed Chuji that “the power is once again in the executive. Once again the citizens have no opportunity to say anything.” Arturo Albarán and María Vicenta Dávila express concern that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez generated new structures to serve as stepping stones to the “socialism of the 21st century,” but ignored deep-rooted community organizations in the process. Orlando Chirino has an even harsher critique, contending that the “socialism of the 21st century” has been nothing more than a charade behind which to dismantle worker’s organizations.

And so these contradictions between discourse and practice have rightly warned the social movements to maintain a certain critical distance from the progressive states. Activists have also learned this lesson from painful historical experience. Those who have been through the tantalizing dance with power, people like Diógenes Lucio and Humberto Cholango, will tell us it’s crucial to work with “progressive” governments, but without losing autonomy. Lucio and Cholango point out that CONAIE

and Pachakutik lost much of their credibility and their ability to organize resistance to President Lucio Gutiérrez's neoliberal policies when they entered into a power alliance with his government and he betrayed them. Even now, 10 years later, those in organizations that were former collaborators with Gutiérrez are working very hard to regain the trust of their communities. [18]

Autonomy and necessity

In times of acute social crisis—and in the permanent crisis that globalization has created for the poor and the working class—people have created alternative institutions, liberated spaces, simply to enable them to survive. Most famously, the Zapatistas set up their autonomous municipalities in the Lacandon jungle, claiming land for the long-dispossessed indigenous residents of Chiapas. When industrial agriculture began displacing thousands of rural families in Brazil, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) started occupying fallow land as a way of acquiring it, and organized their liberated spaces along radically democratic lines. City dwellers have done the same thing all over the continent, from Quito to Bahia. Argentina saw an explosion of organizing after the 2001 collapse. With the economy in shards, jobs and savings gone, people took over factories, schools and clinics to keep basic services going, organizing their projects collectively, horizontally.

Globalization will continue to make survival more difficult, as industrial agriculture snatches land from subsistence farmers and indigenous people, trade agreements wreck local economies, and manufacturing migrates around the world in search of the most exploitable work forces. Some form of autonomous space will be an essential base from which to struggle.

But autonomy, creation of “counterpowers” as an exclusive strategy, poses problems of its own. Movements that choose to build autonomous zones under alternative “good governments” are still vulnerable to the whims of the official state; even a movement as large as the MST has had to contend with harassment from the Workers' Party government in Brazil. By withdrawing into autonomous zones, the movements may not only lose the ability to affect the larger political debate, as some argue the Zapatistas did, but they might lose even their autonomous spaces, as Occupy in the United States did in the fall of 2011. [19]

Autonomy, therefore, has to be carefully crafted to bring critical social movements into the center of the struggles with the state and not to further marginalize the forces built from marginalization. Only the combined power of autonomous social movements willing to engage with states and political powers beyond “liberated zones” can prevent, for

example, a “progressive” FMLN government in El Salvador from giving in to the pressure of the TCC and granting concessions to Pacific Rim to mine gold in its national territory.

Building autonomous spaces to organize and experiment with alternatives is an important step toward building a movement that might challenge “progressive” governments to transform national structures in such a way that people's movements can gain footing in the larger struggle against the TCC.

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Until the Rulers Obey: Voices From Latin American Social Movements, edited by Clifton Ross and Marcy Rein, now available from PM Press. Follow updates on social movements in Latin America at www.latinamericansocialmovements.org, #rulersobey. Contact by phone 510-859-4097

Notes:

1. See Greg Grandin, *The Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York, Holt Paperbacks, 2006)
2. Francisco Dominguez, The Latin Americanization of the Politics of Emancipation, in Geraldine Lievesley and Steve Ludlam, *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy* (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 46. See also Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*.
3. Operation Condor was a counter-insurgency terror-murder program designed particularly for the Southern Cone and other parts of South America in large part by the United States and modeled after the Phoenix Program in Vietnam, responsible for tens of thousands of lives. In South America it also took similarly large tolls on the population.
4. William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.
5. Nora Lustig, Luis F. Lopez-Calva, Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez, Declining Inequality in Latin America in the 2000s: The Cases of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, (ECINEQ 2012-266 September 2012 found at www.ecineq.org).
6. Albo, *ibid*.
7. Patrick Bennet, Daniel Chávez and Cesar Rodriguez-Garavito, eds, *The New Latin American Left: Utopia Reborn* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 37.
8. William I. Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 2008), 342.
9. Even inside Venezuela the question of whether or not the Bolivarian process is “revolutionary” or “reformist” continues to be hotly debated. Whatever the outcome, the process has clearly been one built from reforms, some coming quickly, others slowly, but the Bolivarians have yet to gain complete “hegemony” or total control of the state and its institutions, even if they eventually “reform” their way there.
10. See Bennet, Chávez and Garavito, *ibid*, 33–37. They conclude their discussion on this complex topic by saying that “the distinct logics driving movements, parties and governments can thus give rise to diverse relationships of collaboration or confrontation.”

By withdrawing into autonomous zones, the movements may lose the ability to affect the larger political debate.

11. Raúl Zibechi, *Progre-Sismo: La domesticación de los conflictos sociales* (Santiago: Editorial Quimantú, 2010), in particular “Introducción a la edición Chilena” and Chapter 1, “La ‘lucha contra la pobreza’ como contrainsurgencia”
12. Robinson, 2008, p. 292.
13. *Ibid*, p. 346.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Clifton Ross and Marcy Rein, *Until the Rulers Obey: Voices from Latin American Social Movements* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014) p. 318–319

- http://www.upsidedownworld.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5060:until-the-rulers-obey-learning-from-latin-americas-social-movements&catid=30:international&Itemid=60
16. *Ibid*, pgs. 201–204.
 17. *Ibid*, p. 405.
 18. Raúl Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 276–278. Also Robinson 2008, 344–345.
 19. Robinson, 2008, 343.

Thinking Economically

Are Economic Growth and Social Justice Incompatible?

by Jason Hickel and Alnoor Ladha

This is an excerpt from a discussion between Dr. Jason Hickel of the London School of Economics (LSE) and Alnoor Ladha of /The Rules that took place at the LSE in early 2014.

Alnoor Ladha (AL): Economic growth is one of the most powerful and pervasive ideas of our time. We’re told that it’s essential to improving our well-being and to reducing poverty. It’s always cast as a win-win situation: it has the status of an absolute truth. It’s never questioned. But it doesn’t take much thought to realize that we have a model of economic growth that is in fact profoundly destructive.

Consider the fact that for every dollar of new wealth that has been created in the United States since the financial crisis, 93 cents has gone to the top 1%. So in this sense economic growth itself is driving inequality. And consider the fact that because our present economy is fuelled almost entirely by carbon, all growth contributes to climate change.

Jason Hickel (JH): We’re constantly bombarded with the claim that we have to keep the global economy growing at 3% per year. Anything less than that and economists tell us we’re in crisis. But think about what this means: it means that next year we have to turn more than \$2 trillion worth of natural resources and human labor into commodities and sell them. That’s the size of the entire global economy in 1970. It’s mind-boggling, really. In order to achieve this rate of growth year on year, we’re going to cause catastrophic climate change and massive resource depletion. Clearly there’s something wrong with this model.

One of the reasons that our model of economic

the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and so on, all backed up by the military power of the United States and other dominant countries. In other words, you need an enormous expression of state power in order to force countries around the world to liberalize their markets against their will.

What exactly are the “free market” policies that this system imposes? Monetarist policy that targets low inflation, which usually means increasing unemployment. Cutting public spending and channeling the savings to creditors on Wall Street. Privatizing public services and assets and selling them off to foreign companies. Curbing labor regulations to reduce wages. Eliminating trade barriers to allow multinational corporations to expand into new markets, undercutting local producers. When these policies were imposed on the developing world in the 1980s and 1990s, they cut per capita income growth in half and caused widespread poverty. Developing countries lost around \$480 billion per year in potential GDP.

AL: The result of this process is that we have a global economic system that favors the biggest corporations; it grants them access to ever-cheaper resources and labor around the world. The system bends in favor of maximizing corporate profits at the expense of everything else. That’s why of the 175 largest economic entities in the world, 110 are corporations, not countries. The revenues of mega-corporations such as Shell and Walmart are greater than the GDP of countries like Argentina, South Africa and Thailand. In other words, much more economic power is in private hands than public.

We’re told that we should be grateful to corporations for creating jobs for the masses. But this is a

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growth has become so destructive has to do with the shift to neoliberalism. People commonly think of neoliberalism as an ideology that promotes totally free markets, where the state retreats from the scene and abandons interventionist policies. But in reality, it’s just a different kind of interventionism. Think about it. In order to create a global free market order you have to invent a totalizing global bureaucracy: