

Expansion, Exclusion, Concentration

Ana Fiol

In Latin America concentration of wealth and the gap between rich and the poor have increased with recessive tributary systems and legislation made in corporate interests. During the '90s many services including telecommunications were cut back, made vulnerable or sold off.

The communications sector went through processes of expansion, massive technification and the concentration of media ownership.

According to CEPAL (Centre for Studies on Latin America) the number of poor people, that in 1980 was 135 million, reached 200 million in 1990 despite macroeconomic growth in the same period and reached 224 million in 1999, of which 90 million were living in extreme poverty.

With this background, in April 34 ministers of economy from all over the continent, except Cuba, meet in Buenos Aires to define the text of the agreement of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, FTAA, the local version of the WTO, and will be convert current tendencies to laws.

Though the contents of FTAA are secret it is known that their aim is the liberalisation of everything from health to education, prison security, water and tourism, even culture, knowledge and communication. It will oblige states to open economic, and social, aspects of the life of their populations to the decisions of the world market. The citizen will be replaced by the consumer and only those who can pay will achieve access to basic services that until now have been considered public goods.

It is said that Latin America was converted to modernity through schooling, urbanisation and cultural industries and that it is profoundly hetrogenous. Industry doesn't eliminate crafts, democratisation doesn't substitute authoritarian customs and the written word doesn't wipe out oral communication.

The Zapatistas marched for their autonomy: political autonomy to represent themselves, community control over their lands (economic autonomy) and rights to protect their cultures and languages (cultural autonomy that allows them to go into the world as themselves). They want a

place in the Mexican State from which to fight another national insertion in globalised world. The Ecuadorian indigenous people, the Brazilian Landless, the Peruvian Women's movements that dress in black to mourn democracy and wash the steps to Congress, the Chilean Mapuches that resist eviction from their own land by multinational companies, the unemployed picketing in Argentina, the civil society organisations in Ecuador that receive Colombians fleeing from war between the FARC and the State that Plan Colombia worsens, the urban feminists, the Trade Unions, this wide array of struggle and protest all seeks the same thing.

Our social movements all want to be part of the State. They want to be visible, autonomous, to participate as citizens. They want more State, not less. They want another State. One which doesn't pact with FTAA behind their back, one that agrees some limit to the power of the corporations. They are more horizontal than our traditional leftwing, they are regionalists and defy the absence or distortion - at times even moral panics- which the media corporations report. They are building a dialogue, globalising strategies, localising strengths.

For José Saramago utopias are objective - utopian wishes - in the unrenouncable, critical sense of what should be. They are rational formulations, they are historical recapitulations. That is why the Global Social Forum assembled with the affirmation that "Another World is Possible"

For info from AMARC on how the FTAA will effect communications contact elvira.truglia@amarc.org Elvira Truglia will be discussing the role of Community Radio in Peacemaking at WACC's world Congress in July.