

## IMF and World Bank Protest Journal

This is the author's personal experience of the history-making Mobilization for Global Justice movement that brought more than 50,000 activists to the streets, churches, synagogues, and universities of Washington, D.C. from April 8 – 17, 2000.

I arrived in Washington early Friday afternoon, April 14, after a short trek from my home in south central Pennsylvania. Sierra Club pack on my back and yellow and green protest sign in hand, I checked in first at the Mobilization Convergence Center on Florida Avenue to pick-up the latest events listings among the tables full of flyers and announcements. Members of dozens of environmental, labor, student and social justice organizations were taking part in the actions. Signs, slogans, banners and buttons were everywhere. Several hundred people milled about outside enjoying a vegetarian lunch prepared by the meal crew at the Center.

I had to decide among numerous teach-ins and rallies being held that day and the next, which included:

- Teach-In on the Devastating Effects of the IMF and the World Bank
- Latin America Solidarity Conference
- Keep Space for Peace
- Sweatshops: Globalizing the Resistance
- National Student Day of Action to Lift the Economic Sanctions on Iraq
- Issues forums at American University, University of the District of Columbia, All Soul's Church and the Convergence Center on Disarmament, Corporate Globalization, Narmada Valley, Climate Change
- Impacts of Globalization on the Environment and Human Rights
- Justice in Health Care
- A demonstration at the Treasury Department and the White House addressing the enormous waste of our tax dollars on Star Wars Development
- A protest at the Mexican Embassy against Mexico's military policy against autonomous indigenous communities in Chiapas and to support the Zapatista challenge to World Bank/IMF land policies.

I headed off for the Foundry United Methodist Church for the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) Teach-In but found the church already filled to capacity. Buying the half-price ticket, I joined the over-spill crowd in a church down the street where the speakers were being viewed on a big video screen. The event had begun at 9:00 am and would continue on until 10:30 that night. Every one of the speakers I heard was dynamic and highly informative. The line-up of 30 speakers that day at just the IFG venue included:

- Maude Barlow, Council of Canadians, Canada
- Walden Bello, Focus on the South, Thailand
- Catherine Caufield, Author
- John Cavanagh, Institute for Policy Studies
- Herman Daly, University of Maryland
- Kevin Danaher, Global Exchange
- Oronto Douglas, Environmental Rights, Nigeria
- Susan George, Transnational Institute, France
- Martin Khor, Third World Network, Malaysia
- Andrew Kimbrell, Center for Technology Assessment
- David Korten, People-Centered Development Forum
- Jerry Mander, International Forum on Globalization
- Robert McChesney, University of Illinois
- Anuradha Mittal, Food First
- Njoki Njehu, 50 Years is Enough, Kenya
- Vandana Shiva, Research Foundation for Science & Ecology, India
- Lori Wallach, Public Citizen

Strolling in front of the White House after leaving the IFG Forum at about 6:00 pm, I struck up a conversation with a DC policeman sitting in his squad car. He was genuinely interested in what the protests were all about, listening carefully as I described concerns for the worldwide maldistribution of wealth, the burdensome debt and structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank and the kind of people/planet finance system that could replace those institutions. Tears came to his eyes as he said he wished he could be doing something more meaningful with his life. I urged him to organize talks and discussions on these issues with his fellow police officers. He graciously took my information packet, said he would be in touch with me by email to learn more, and cautioned me to be careful.

Arriving at the tail end of the kick-off for Ralph Nader's Presidential Candidacy, a drinks and snacks fundraiser with Ralph at the Luna Grill on Connecticut Avenue, I chatted tax policy issues with Green Party and Jubilee Justice activists before continuing a few steps further to Othellos. A room had been reserved there for DC land value tax advocates and interested others to discuss together how we

could better organize so our message could be heard in this mass movement. Those around the table included:

- Deb Katz, director of the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities
- Cheryl Cort, president of the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities
- Anne Goeke, local-to-global Green Party and Women in Black leader
- Adamou Garba from Nigeria who serves as President of the African Federation of Green Parties
- June Lang, originally from Zimbabwe, now a peace and justice activist from Lancaster
- Jeff Hammond, formerly with Redefining Progress and editor of the book *Tax Waste Not Work*, now a congressional aide
- Sam Hussein, Communications Director for the Institute for Public Accuracy
- Jim Schulman, Director of Sustainable Community Initiatives
- Joshua Vincent, Director of the Center for Economic Studies
- Walt Rybeck, Director of Center for Public Dialog and wife Erica
- Rick Rybeck, with the Washington Planning Department and wife Ellen
- Alanna Hartzok, your reporter and UN NGO Representative for the International Union for Land Value Taxation

Over Italian food and red wine, this “table of people who are working to save the world,” as the waiters called us, networked and discussed the relevance that a shift to land and resource based taxes had to the Jubilee 2000 movement and the establishment of equitable public finance systems in DC and worldwide. After a good nights sleep at the comfortable home of Washington friends, I bid farewell to my gracious hosts and headed off for my teach-in choice of the day, the Latin America Solidarity Conference at St. Steven of the Incarnation Episcopal Church. Soon six or seven hundred people had arrived to attend this daylong educational event.

The morning session began with an announcement that at 8:45 a.m. fire wardens had declared that the Mobilization’s Convergence Center on Florida Avenue had unsafe electrical wiring and thus was a fire hazard. Their pronouncement was backed up by 200 police officers that closed the Center down, confiscating the big street theatre puppets, signs, food and the three food trucks. As closing doors were locking out hundreds, a few who spoke up against search and seizure without warrants were arrested. Some pondered why response by officials to similar conditions concerning public safety in the housing units of poor neighborhoods was so rare in comparison.

The morning good news was that a group of 25 people, 20 of whom were from 11 countries from the global south, had arrived at 6:30 a.m. at the doorstep of

the home of World Bank President James Wolfensohn. Displaying “Wake Up World Bank” signs, this delegation sang songs of peace and justice under the watchful eyes of police and plainclothes security officers and a bevy of media. Wolfensohn appeared and cautiously approached the protestors. Dr. Vineeta Gupta, who has documented numerous examples of human and environmental exploitation resulting from World Bank policies, presented him with a letter. Wolfensohn said he would read it later. This small and brave Indian woman said, “No, I will tell you what it says NOW!” and proceeded to do so.

We continued on with the Latin American Solidarity Teach-In. Organizers put before us a feast of 24 workshops and plenary session speakers that included:

- Kevin Danaher, Co-Founder of Global Exchange and Editor of Corporations are Gonna Get Your Mama and 50 Years is Enough
- Bertha Lujan, Frente Autentico del Trabajo, Mexico
- Camille Chalmers, Haitian Platform to Advocate Alternative Development
- Peter Mott, Interconnect
- Jennifer Harbury, Global Exchange
- Arturo Griffiths, Center for Community change
- Chuck Kauffman, Nicaragua Network

To give you a further impression of the vast range of issues of concern discussed in just this one teach-in of the April 15 day at the Mobilization, here are some of the topics of the 24 workshops presented at the Latin American Solidarity Teach-In:

- Fair Trade/Alternatives
- The CIA in Latin America
- Environmental Challenges in Latin America
- New Visions and Challenges to Democracy
- Workers Resisting Privatization, Downsizing and Union-Busting
- The Drug War in Latin America
- Sweatshops without Walls (U.S. Farmworkers)
- Indigenous Struggles in Latin America
- Labor Organizing in Defiance of Corporate Control
- Land and Peasant Issues
- US-Cuban Relations
- North American Free Trade Agreement/WTO
- Women and Globalization: The Brunt of the Burden, the Force for Change
- IMF/World Bank
- International Campaign for Human Rights
- Immigration
- Human Rights: The Violations Continue
- Militarization

- Haiti
- Debt
- Fighting the Global Sweatshop
- Non-Violence Training
- Hot Spot: Bolivia

In the workshops I attended, I learned about the vision of democracy of the Zapatista and Pro-Democracy Movements in Mexico and Peru, land struggles in Central and South America, the plan of the World Bank to give loans for the poor to purchase land (with interest of course, any way to make a buck), and the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers of Bolivia. The latter, led by Oscar Olivera, were among the groups of workers and church leaders who successfully rallied against water-price hikes and privatization. Oscar was forced into hiding, escaping detention hours before President Hugo Banzer imposed a state of emergency and rounded up protest leaders. After four days of hopping between safe houses, Olivera emerged on April 12 after verbal assurances he would not be arrested and traveled the next day to the Mobilization in Washington.

At the Bolivia workshop, I linked up with Georgeane Potter who is also in the middle of the struggles there. Georgeane leads the Jubilee 2000 movement in Bolivia, was schooled at George Washington University and has written two books on the IMF/World Bank. We got in her car and headed downtown for the scheduled Press Conference with Olivera. In this very fluid Mobilization, the press was instead trailing the crowd who were protesting against the U.S. prison-industrial complex and in support of a retrial of Mumia Abu Jamal. On a corner just down from the IMF and World Bank buildings, we waited on alert amidst chants of "Whose Streets? Our Streets!" Word passed our way that the police had corralled a number of protestors. Neither Georgeane nor I intended to be arrested for civil disobedience, so when numbers of protestors started pressing towards us we thought it was a good time to get back to the car. On the news that evening we learned that 600 had been arrested shortly thereafter and carted off to jail.

After the two-hour wrap-up strategy discussion back at the Latin American Solidarity Conference, I returned again to my friend's warm hospitality for a pleasant nights rest. The next day was to be the Big One.

Some of the early-bird protestors were out at the perimeter at 6:30 a.m., necessitating the arrival of some IMF/World Bank officials by buses and vans at an even earlier hour, or having to find ways to get to their meeting rooms through tunnels connecting the buildings. This was quite a departure from their normally unimpeded routine of arriving by limousine.

Georgeane picked me up around 10:00 on Sunday morning, April 16. We decided to drive as far as we could towards the Rally Against the IMF/WB at the Ellipse between the White House and the Mall. After parking the car, we scouted

around a while, observing protest scenes at every intersection around the perimeter established by the police as a shield around the IMF/WB buildings where meetings were being held Sunday and Monday. The “Old Grannies” of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom were out doing their funny but serious songs, protest banners were unfurled hither and yon, and numerous groups were performing skits or chanting and drumming. I talked with members of Black Family Farmers about the problems of that were forcing them off their farms and into low-wage jobs. I learned about their lawsuit and protests of the USDA, that black owned farms were going out of business at a rate five times that of white farmers in 1990, and that Black farmers, who are less than 1% of U.S. farmers and owning less than one million acres, are now on the verge of extinction.

Heading off to for the epicenter at the Ellipse, we found ourselves on a corner with David and Fran Korten (When Corporations Rule the World, YES Magazine) and Vandana Shiva, a powerful Indian leader, the Gandhi of our times. Although I had met both David and Vandana several times before, these luminaries were considerably more interested in Georgiane than in me, Bolivia news being hot as it is at the moment and all. But as they walked and talked along I held high my brightly colored “The Earth Belongs to Everyone - People/Planet Finance” sign, with its Earth People picture from an embroidery by a women’s craft cooperative in El Salvador. As it worked out, several people took pictures of my sign that day and I did two radio interviews.

Among the throngs of this Festival of Resistance, we wound our way up to the fence right in front of the speakers and performers platforms on the Ellipse. Michael Moore had just started, and we all chuckled about the threat to the established order posed by the “dangerous” puppets that were confiscated the day before.

A few yards away I noticed the Kensington Welfare Rights Union folks in their black “Up and Out of Poverty in Pennsylvania” tee-shirts that I had last seen at the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference last May. Sure enough, Cherie Honkala, one of the leaders of this Philadelphia based movement, was there in the middle of them.

Walking over, I told Cherie I had been trying to catch up with her to have a talk for four years. Last time she had cancelled because of a HUD boarded-up housing take-over the day of our scheduled meeting. I told her I had finally figured out a way to get to talk with her, which would be to join her in a squat. She laughed and gave me a hug saying, *that will work!* I figure it is either meet with her in jail for an illegal housing takeover for the homeless or become a police officer and book her, as Cherie has been arrested for non-violent civil disobedience more often than anyone else that I know.

One of the speakers that day was a woman from Ghana who had come to the USA to be a domestic worker for a World Bank official. She told of working as a slave and being treated like an animal from early in the morning until late at night.

Not allowed to leave the house and without pay for four months, she was taken to the airport and told she would be paid once she was on the plane back to Ghana. Knowing she would never be paid, she managed to escape the airport and eventually made her way to a domestic workers support organization.

When she contacted her mother in Ghana, her mother told her the family there was being harassed by the World Bank because she was speaking out about the abuse she had experienced in the US. This woman thankfully now has lawyers working on her case. Her story is just one example of the kinds of slavery and exploitation we are hearing about now, and yet another reflection of the arrogance and domination that working people the world over are experiencing from those heading up these global financial institutions.

Still hanging with Georgeane after hearing the Ghana lady and other labor union and environmental activists speak to the crowd of now tens of thousands (estimates ran as high as 50,000 on this sunny Sunday), we decided to scout about the scenes around the perimeter. While Georgeane was telling me about how she happened to be in Berlin when they took the Wall apart with small hammers and screwdrivers, I spotted a giant cardboard Trojan Horse with the words IMF/World Bank scrawled on its sides, piloted underneath by shopping cart pushers. Nearby a huge pink pig was chowing down on an earth globe. Around the next corner appeared a giant set of teeth powered by a conglomerated contraption calling itself the IMF/WB pulverizer.

Passing a street intersection now covered with a huge woven multicolored yarn spiderweb and a group of hoola-hoopers, Georgiane expressed her concern that it all looked perhaps a bit too frivolous and playful. Her protest movement in Bolivia used barbed wire blockades rather than yarn and plastic toys and soap bubbles. But she grew less concerned about that when we smelled a bit of tear gas or pepper spray now and then.

Shortly thereafter we paused with a group sitting on a little grassy oasis dabbling their feet in the basin of a water fountain. We were sharing my one remaining peanut butter and jelly tortilla when we struck up a conversation with a group of young people from Montana wearing nose rings and buffalo tee shirts. After talking a bit about the connections between the shooting of national park escaped buffaloes to preserve grazing land for cattle and corporate control and IMF/WB policy (they admitted the connections were a bit of a stretch, but the bottom line was greed for profits above all else), we noticed that one of the buffalo nose-ringer kids had his hand wrapped in bandages and a finger splint. He told us that a policeman had beaten his hand with a baton as he was grabbing onto a metal barrier that morning. The Mobilization medics had applied the bandages.

The perimeter barriers were the areas of the most intense confrontation throughout the days of the protest. The perimeter barriers and blockades were also the focal points of important dialog between police and protestors, and occasionally IMF/WB officials, protestors and the media. We were near one such scene when cameras started running as protestors surrounded two men trying to get into

the meetings. One official began a speech announcing his rights to move freely. Protestors shouted back, asking if he had the right to freely put in place policies that were increasing poverty, human misery and displacement all over the world. After shouts back and forth, the suited men retreated as the barrier held.

I caught up with one of them who informed me he was from Liberia and that the people inside the IMF/WB buildings were not corrupt like his own government. A few steps later someone put a microphone in his face and he stated that his people needed money to get out of poverty. When I shouted “but you just said your own government was corrupt” he walked away in frustration.

Georgiane left for her car shortly thereafter, needing to conserve some energy for her participation the next day. I joined the march with my sign and my flute and got a bit of a chant going of “Whose Earth? Our Earth!” Many blocks long, the tens of thousands of colorful, playful, serious and determined Festival of Resistance protestors flowed back down into the Ellipse. I collapsed for a rest under a shade tree on the grassy lawn, now playing my flute along with the drumbeats of an African brother sitting on the other side of the same tree.

The beautifully painted mural was still standing, a visual focus for the many well-informed, socially concerned, compassionate and dynamic speakers who had come from all over the world to sound their voices against institutions of inequity and exploitation and for a world that works for everyone. The mural showed two large hands, each with metal cuffs and chains, outstretched towards the earth. On the left handcuff were the words World Bank/IMF and on the side, Break the Bank. On the right handcuff the words Corporate Colonialism and on that side, Dump the Fund.

As musicians and singers with global justice theme songs performed on the stage in front of the mural, I took some time to jot down some of the messages on the signs and tee shirts passing all around me. My favorite one, near a giant green turtle, was Turtles and Teamsters United at Last. Here are some of the others:

- Make the Global Economy Work for Working Families
- Stop Washington’s War on the Worlds Poor
- Mobilize for Justice
- More World Less Bank
- Down with the Babylon System
- Real Men Do Not Abuse Women and Children
- Drop the Debt and the Bondage
- Workers of the World, Unite and Fight
- Morally Bankrupt
- Organize, Demand Justice for All
- Close School of the Americas
- Jobs with Justice



- Stop Corporate Greed
- End Exploitation of Domestic Workers
- This Is What Democracy Looks Like\*

Walking into a Metro station with Rita Jane Leasure, president of the School of Living, a land trust friend I had spotted dancing on the Ellipse at the end of the day, a security guard told me I was not allowed to carry my sign on into the subway because it had a stick. He told me the stick was dangerous. He said that was the rule. So I broke the stick off over my knee, but he said that the four inches remaining was still a stick. So I broke that off with my hand and he said, “that is good enough for me” and allowed me to pass into the Metro.

I think it is a rather strange world, when my taxpayer dollars pay for bombs and attack Apache helicopters and fighter planes and police batons and tear gas, but the stick on my little pretty protest sign that says “The Earth Belongs to Everyone” is considered a threat to public safety.

Arriving home late Sunday evening, I slept in a bit and took a hot relaxing bath in the morning. After feeding our two cats, ten biodiverse free-range happy hens, and Snowflake the goat, I was ready to watch the Monday, April 17, Mobilization for Global Justice action from a distance. There on C-Span, giving press interviews at the Carnegie Institute and elsewhere, were a number of wonderful global citizen activists, several of whom I had met or heard speak during the past three days:

- Njoki Njehu from Kenya. Director of the 50 Years is Enough
- Trevor Nwagane, a political leader and veteran of the anti-apartheid movement from Johannesburg, South Africa
- Walden Bello, author and activist from Thailand and the Philippines
- Robert Weissman, Co-Director, Essential Action
- Mark Weisbrot, Co-Director, Center for Economic and Policy Research
- Jonah Goka, Chair, Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development
- Tony Mazzocchi, Labor Party National Organizer
- Oronto Douglas, Environmental Rights Action, Nigeria
- Chris Clement, a Howard University student
- Tanya Margolin, a George Washington University student
- Maitet Pascual, President of the Freedom from Debt Coalition, Philippines
- Steve Kretzman, Mobilization for Global Justice
- Celia Olario, Independent Media Center
- Dr. Vineeta Gupta, the social justice researcher from India
- Actors Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins

All spoke with dignity, fervor and knowledge, from a place of heartfelt compassion and concern. All spoke with determination to bring an end to hunger, homelessness, poverty and exploitation everywhere. All spoke with courage to build a world that works for everyone.

One of the reporters asked, "How can you use us to help you, now that we have awakened? There is clearly a deep, deep flaw in Western civilization."

The philosopher Joseph Campbell once said that there is a new myth arising, a new story around which people everywhere will rally. This is the story of the one earth and the one human family. A beautiful introduction to this story unfolded this week in Washington.



A lone figure dressed in orange with a black hood protests the abuse of prisoners of war in front of the White House in Washington, D.C.