

Is there an Alternative to Globalization? Questions and Answers from Olympia1

WOMAN: You mentioned earlier that our focus on anti-globalization had to be on a worldwide scale. Isn't this important when it's focusing on US intervention abroad? Can you maybe speak to a few instances of what you mean?

GK: During the war in Kosovo, Belgrade was being bombed at the same time that the Socialist Scholars Conference opened, a yearly gathering of several thousand socialist scholars and activists in New York. The Friday night plenary featured Cornell West, Noam Chomsky, and other people that have a lot to say. Yet, not a word was uttered from the stage about the bombing of a heavily populated city. Even when some people from the audience raised the issue, Bogdan Denitch, the chair of the conference, deferred any discussion until a workshop first thing the next morning in Auditorium A. Of course, Auditorium A was packed. When I got there, no more people were being allowed to go in. Boris Kagarlitsky was also outside. Noticing he was absolutely aghast, I asked him what was wrong. To his great dismay, he announced that nobody on the stage was going to speak against the bombing. Only people who supported the bombing were invited to be speakers. If you think about it, even if you did support the US intervention, I should say US and European intervention, you have to wonder why the critics were silenced there.

The destruction of Belgrade is an example of globalization's self-righteousness. What's the character of globalization in the former Yugoslavia? Essentially, it's the Germans who are taking control of the area from the Russians and doing it with US money and US military power. The Germans, led by Joschka Fischer and the Green Party, have sent combat troops outside Germany for the first time since World War II. The national governments of Germany and the US were both able to implement their particular agenda by exaggerating the level of atrocities inside Serbia. I think of Noam Chomsky's excellent work on this, comparing for instance, how many people were killed in Colombia in the same period of time and asking why the US didn't even consider intervening to stop those murders. In fact, it's our allies who are committing many of those murders, so let's not hear about that. The media were able to portray what's happening in Kosovo as of utmost importance to US interests.

WOMAN: Could you elaborate on the differences between the style of activism or the impression of activism in the 1960s and what we need to be doing now?

GK: The Sixties movement was much more flamboyant. It was much more individually focused. Leaders like Huey Newton, Jerry Rubin and Ho Chi Minh were at the center of people's attention. Today, it's much more of a collective entity of some kind: anti-globalization protestors or the Direct Action Network rather than a focus on individual leaders. That's a real strength, not only because of the affirmation of the collective energies of people. It also means that the police can't go after certain individuals to crush the

1 This Q&A session transpired after George Katsiaficas gave a talk at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington on November 17, 2000.

movement. In the Sixties, what happened very often was that any group that emerged doing something effective had to then spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and focus its attention on getting its leaders out of jail. Or its leaders were killed by the police. Fred Hampton of the Black Panther Party in Chicago was murdered while asleep after having been drugged by an FBI agent the night before. The 28 dead Panthers required many people to stop what they were doing and focus on fighting the repression against the Black Panther Party. That re-focusing was immensely important in building interracial solidarity, but it also meant that the movement's own agenda suffered.

The movement today is much more able to understand problems of sexism, racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. Yet simultaneously, people can still get very sectarian today, as with some overzealous people in the violence/non-violence debate after N30. I've heard stories of people with masks in Seattle being unmasked by non-violent protestors so that they wouldn't feel the freedom to break windows. That reminds me of people in PL, Progressive Labor, in the 1960s--Marxist-Leninists who infiltrated and helped destroy SDS. They were always holier than thou. After the 1968 Tet offensive, the Americans agreed to negotiate with the Vietnamese for the first time. In Paris, peace talks began. In 1969, PL came out with the line that Ho Chi Minh was a traitor to the Vietnamese people because he was negotiating with the United States. It's strange behavior. How do you explain it? How do you understand a non-violent person putting their hands on somebody's neck?

MAN: I'm wondering if you could talk more about finding some common ground between people advocating mild tactics and people who are willing to use more militant tactics and how they might work together. You also mentioned that you didn't think some of the more militant tactics would work here in the US because police would respond by using live ammo. What kind of militant tactics do you think would work here?

GK: There is a real synergy among these various levels. In Prague, for example, they divided into three: the Blues -- the Germans and the Poles --were most militant and threw rocks and built barricades; the Yellows were semi-militant; and the Pinks were more passive. By separating, they were able to confuse the police. To the police, everybody seems the same, right? They're all anti-globalization protestors. The police didn't understand the differences within the movement.

Similarly, during the German Wackersdorf struggle against a nuclear reprocessing plant that would have given Germany the ability to take waste from its many nuclear power plants and convert it into bomb-grade plutonium, the local farmers were extremely conservative but they united with punk rockers from Berlin and others to defeat the plant. German newspapers featured photos of punk rockers wearing black masks and farmers with pitchforks fighting side-by-side against the police. Pacifists were also extremely important. Because Wackersdorf was in the countryside, there was enough space for the pacifists to have demonstrations where they didn't get hurt and could be peacefully arrested by the hundreds while others could use different tactics. More militant people reached the fence and tried to breach it, and the police had to be flown in by helicopters to stop them, like a major military campaign. Simultaneous actions stretched the police lines thin.

It was possible to articulate different ways for people to participate. I don't know that that happened in Seattle. That might have been part of the reason that things became confused afterwards in Seattle. There hadn't been the discussion beforehand about how to separate out some of these actions. Could it have happened as in Germany? I don't know.

WOMAN: One of the tactics that they tried in Seattle was separating different colored flags for basically arrest risk. There was a green flag, a really low arrest risk. And then there were three other different color flags. Red was the hottest.

MAN: I completely agree that, in terms of the internationalization of capital and its mobility, we need to be international in the way we organize. But that means putting forth an alternative productive, economic, political and organizing system. What do you see possibly as a regionalist alternative? How can you be bioregionalist and, at the same time, internationalist in the way you're organizing?

GK: When you say bioregional, you raise an extremely important alternative to globalization. In my lifetime, if I saw perestroika in the United States, I'd be very happy. That should our goal: to do away with the federal government in Washington and have several regional governments. I don't know exactly how many. The Soviet Union restructured their government, and they have suffered tremendously for it because there was no corresponding change in the rest of the world. They went from one country to 17. Could the United States have a similar devolution? It would be very hard. It was tried once before in the Civil War. This government will do anything to maintain control of the territory that it has been able to amass. By living bioregionally, by creating the networks, the ties, the economic ways for people to live productively and in harmony with the earth, by building up those networks from the grassroots, we create an infrastructure, and the infrastructure then leads to levels of struggle that I don't think we can understand without having the infrastructure in place.

It seems that, for instance, Olympia and Eugene have developed into major centers for the US movement. In the Sixties, Berkeley was like the center, yet today Berkeley's not so much a focal point. What happened? I'm not sure, but it seems the revolutionary subject, as Marcuse said, emerges in the course of revolution. Regions are another way of organizing ourselves, and they would emerge in the course of making themselves real. We can't just have our alternative to globalization emerge full-blown from our brains. Some people have attempted to create models for how this country could be organized. I'm not sure that's the way. I think the way is for people to do it, to actually reorganize, live it.

WOMAN: I want to respond to what you said about the Sixties as another person who came through the Sixties. Eugene was certainly a center in the Sixties and has remained a center. A lot of what you ascribe to the Sixties happened to a large degree spontaneously. Because of visible errors of leadership, of certain problems within the movements that were discussed, the movements as they continued don't have to reinvent the wheel, don't have to make those same mistakes over. What happened in the Sixties was very necessary, visibly, so people don't have to do that.

There is today a much more spontaneous, diverse, non-specific leadership, much more broad-based. There isn't a leadership quality to what's going on now. That model isn't followed anymore. But if that hadn't happened in the Sixties, this might not and probably would not be happening in the same way. The way the Sixties movement was diffused and attacked because certain people were so visible doesn't have to happen again. That is not happening now, but I'm saying if that hadn't happened so visibly then, perhaps what's happening now wouldn't be happening in the same way with the same strength. And I do feel that because of what happened in the Sixties and those of us who came through it, our children and now their children, our grandchildren, have a very different consciousness because they saw it happening in their families. Someone like Abbie Hoffman maybe turned a page. Over time, more people turned the page than not but, also, there are always more people who take the next page freely. See what I'm saying? Not everyone signed away.

The Sixties as represented in the media are different than the Sixties to those of who were actually participants. And believe me, the media have been very derogatory and very misrepresentational of many of us who were in the Sixties. We're regular people. We're family people. We were raising children. We were working. We were single mothers, whatever, and we haven't changed our points of view, and we didn't turn the page and sign over to something else. We continue to be here, and that's how I'm here at this meeting. [APPLAUSE]

GK: In fact, all the studies of the Central America activists showed how more than half were Sixties activists, and we kept the US from intervening in Central America more militantly than it did.

MAN: One thing that I picked out of your *Subversion of Politics* book was how the Greens functioned as a recuperative force against the more militant tactics and the movement as a whole. You talked about them not as the movement in the government but the government in the movement. What I've been thinking about lately is how that pushes out into not only when you have representative democracy or you try to throw candidates out there but also just in how people are organized and how people function in like a mental framework of the governmental idea in this activist circle. One thing in which I hope that today's movement differs from the Sixties is that it grows out, like it's hopefully shedding this governmental structure of how we organize ourselves and so we're not being able to be co-opted later on by having people become a Green Party or like a lot of the '68ers from Paris who are now in the government. Could you talk a little bit about the governmental structures and how autonomous politics tries to throw those out and ways that people organize that aren't governmental.

GK: The first thing is not to rely on the police, and when I say that it doesn't just mean at demonstrations. It means in our everyday lives. How do we enact justice? What is justice? If something is happening, if a woman has been raped and we know about it, shouldn't we do something about it? Why aren't there structures inside our circles to deal with issues of justice? Similarly, how do we deal with police infiltration? Again, people's attitude is to look the other way and to defer to the police. That abrogation of responsibility is the

beginning of relying on the government for everything, of letting the government run your life, run our lives. Of course, that's one of the most difficult pieces of freeing ourselves because the government won't allow dual power to happen. If you have a trial and hold this person who raped a woman or infiltrated the movement, they're going to charge you with kidnapping, they're going to go all the way. So how do you enact these levels of dual power?

We begin with the police but I think we need to build up alternative institutions--schools, co-ops, bookstores, information centers, web sites, all of that. They have to be really autonomous. It has to be thought out as being built up in a self-reliant fashion to the greatest extent possible. There have to be these networks. That's the direction I think you're talking about—completely the opposite of the top-down globalization of the WTO, IMF and World Bank.

To some extent, such a process transpired in the cities of Europe where people squatted houses. It seemed to be the case, that as long as a house was illegal, it had a radical edge to it. And once it became legal, once it got a contract, even if it was a \$1 a month rental contract, that edge was gone and people's lives became accommodated to the structures of schools, work, whatever. Even if people shared jobs, which people in a lot of these communes did so they would still have time for activism, even then, the problems that arose were not problems of the movement. I don't quite know why. I'd like to think that the dimension of illegality didn't have to be there for communes to be subversive and at the edge, that there didn't have to be a militant, confrontational edge. But what I've been able to witness is that those two seem to go together very often.

MAN: In *Subversion of Politics*, you also talk about the Greens and the kind of more radical, militant activists as being kind of complementary even though there's like a lot of debate and conflict between them. Do you feel like the same things can happen within the United States with the emerging Green Party and the radical movements? Beyond that, with the more conservative groups like the Sierra Club, do you see them as being complementary more than they are fractious? Do their contradictions outweigh their potential for synergy?

GK: In my own understanding of this contradiction, I always come back to the German state of Lower Saxony. When the Greens were elected to the state government, they got the ministry of environmental affairs and the ministry of interior as their part of the package. At the same time, convoys of trucks carrying nuclear waste were coming into the Gorleben waste disposal site. To stop the trucks, protestors came to the area, dubbed the Free Republic of Wendland, a center of organic food production in Germany with lots of communes. They sat down in all the roads, thousands of people, and the Green minister, who herself had been a protestor there, was put in the position of having to order the police to arrest the protestors. She's from the Green Party who opposed nuclear power and who opposed, officially, the nuclear waste disposal site. But she did, in fact, order the arrest of her friends, comrades and other protestors after she got a call from the federal interior ministry saying: "You must do this, I'm ordering you." She was caught in that web, the Greens must act according to the law. If you go inside the government, that's what you agree to do--to obey the law.

Being outside the government means you have no obligation to obey the law. They may try to force you to do so, but it isn't an obligation. Being outside the government, your obligation is to the earth or to whatever you define as your center of consciousness and conscience.