
Continuing our struggles

Those who were in Rio de Janeiro between June 15 and 23 were able to observe three parallel and different but interconnected processes. The first process, a closed one, was the Conference on Sustainable Development better known as Rio+20, which took place in Riocentro, a conference centre far from the city centre and heavily protected by thousands of police officers and armed forces.

This process was sponsored by the United Nations (UN) and brought together representatives of 188 countries, who concentrated on the joint drafting of an outcome document on the future of the planet and humanity. The proposal included in this document, which was being debated long before the conference itself, provoked so much controversy that the Brazilian government replaced the draft text, a few days before the beginning of the official conference, with a new version. The text that was finally approved by the participating countries can be read at: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>

The document, called “The Future We Want”, was described by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as the “possible consensus”. However, little was added in this “new” draft to what had already been written in previous declarations and multilateral agreements on the environment and related issues. And what is even more serious is that this outcome document, while recognizing the gravity of the environmental crisis and the other crises currently facing humanity, does not oblige the signatory countries to adopt the urgent structural measures needed to confront them.

In the meantime, and specifically with regard to the section on forests, it could be considered a positive result that the document makes few explicit references to market mechanisms like REDD+ and trade in environmental services as means to combat deforestation. As for the subject of biodiversity, the document states, “We reaffirm the intrinsic value of biological diversity.” This statement reflects a certain opposition to the proposal of a “green economy”, which implies the need to place a price on biodiversity and other “environmental services”. This positive result is due to the stance adopted by the countries of the South, and more specifically, the member countries of the G77, who presented a document in these terms prior to Rio+20.

This does not mean, however, that there was no discussion in Rio de Janeiro of proposals for the commodification of nature through trade in “environmental services”. Indeed, this leads us to the second process that took place in the city during those days.

This second process was concentrated in luxury hotels and other plush meeting spaces outside the official UN conference. It comprised a series of side events such as seminars and meetings in which countries and states, national and multilateral banks including the World Bank, conservationist NGOs and corporations discussed initiatives which they labelled as “green” and “sustainable”.

One example was Acre Day, referring to a Brazilian state in the Amazon rainforest region. This was an event organized in the lovely Rio de Janeiro Botanical Gardens to celebrate Acre’s “success”, with the distribution of brochures entitled “Acre+20: A Land of Dreams, a World of Opportunities”. Or, in the words of senator Jorge Viana, brother of the current governor of the state, “an enormous

reserve of carbon credits". After passing legislation to create the "State System of Incentives for Environmental Services", the state of Acre is ready to sell and market these "services" to buyers looking to offset their polluting activities, regardless of the outcomes of the official Rio+20 conference, as various speakers stressed. For example, the government of Italy, represented at the event, publicly expressed interest in signing an agreement with the government of Acre.

During the event, however, activists from Acre denounced the false image of the state as a role model for the "green economy" and presented a report called "The Acre That the Merchants of Nature Hide", which exposes the environmental destruction and social repression resulting from these initiatives (see <http://www.cimi.org.br/pub/Rio20/Dossie-ACRE.pdf>). And this criticism leads us to the third process that took place in Rio de Janeiro that same week in June.

The third process was the People's Summit held in Aterro do Flamengo, a park near the city centre. The preparations for this event began long before Rio+20 through the coordinated efforts of national and international networks and social movements. The People's Summit brought together close to 50,000 people, many from Brazil and Latin America, but also from other continents. Everyone was free to participate in the hundreds of self-run activities that were organized to draw attention to specific and general issues, but also, above all, to revive hope in the struggle.

Nevertheless, within the Summit, there was a crucial central process in which a great many people participated: the plenary sessions aimed at promoting convergence around five previously defined key themes (*), which culminated in three assemblies on the structural causes of the various crises facing humanity and the false solutions put forward to deal with them; our own proposals to confront these crises; and our common agenda of struggles. The participants in the Summit also headed up a massive demonstration march in which more than 50,000 people took to the streets of downtown Rio de Janeiro. Various other mobilizations also took place during the days of the event, most of them to protest corporate power and show solidarity with local communities in Rio affected by the brutal process of the concentration of wealth and privatization that the city is experiencing. An example of this is the situation of the community of Vila Autódromo, threatened with eviction to make way for works planned for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

The final declaration of this process (see cupuladospovos.org.br) seeks to motivate us to keep up the struggle, in a more coordinated manner and with a clearer notion and analysis of the way that the different issues addressed by different movements and organizations are interconnected. While the appropriation and privatization of public land and resources, as in the case of forest regions with REDD projects, concessions for logging or monoculture tree plantations, etc., lead to the expulsion and division of the people, processes like the one that took place at the People's Summit promote ties of solidarity among different organizations, communities, social movements and activists from every corner of the planet.

These events need to be repeated and strengthened, and the common agenda of struggles must be put into practice through direct support for struggles in defence of the rights of communities and nature and against the destruction and commodification of nature; and through the construction of people's solutions – not the "green economy" imposed from the top down to serve the interests of big corporations and maintain a system of excessive and unequal production and consumption, but rather, on the contrary, a bottom-up economy based on collective rights and values.

The first two processes described here, which involved governments and corporations and took place during Rio+20, showed that corporations and their allies, such as the World Bank and other "development" banks, are fulfilling their agendas for the commodification and financialization of

nature, the so-called “green economy”, even if the governments participating in the UN conference did not endorse them in the terms sought by the corporations. But the third process, which involves the peoples, showed that we are capable, working together, of analyzing the current situation, proposing solutions and building a common agenda, in order to advance in the globalization of the struggle for a socially and environmentally just world.

Finally, we reaffirm the conclusion of the final declaration of the People’s Summit (<http://cupuladospovos.org.br/>): “Social transformation demands the convergence of actions, coalitions and common agendas based on the necessary resistance struggles and propositions we are waging in every corner of the planet. The People’s Summit at Rio+20 motivates us to continue our struggles.”

(*) (1) Rights, for social and environmental justice, (2) Defence of the commons against commodification, (3) Food sovereignty, (4) Energy and extractive industries, and (5) Work: for another economy and new paradigms for society