
Winds of change

The month of September has certainly been rich in important events, warranting the active participation of relevant social actors. The ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization in Cancun, Mexico, was doubtlessly the most resounding one, both because of the presence of thousands of people and organizations from all over the world, demonstrating in the streets against the WTO, and because of the firm attitude of some countries from the South, in facing the domineering attitude of certain governments from the North. The world will never be the same after Cancun.

Although at a different level, another important event in September was the World Parks Congress, held in Durban, South Africa. For many years, narrow conservationism served to deprive local populations of their ancestral forests, with the excuse of conservation. However, a growing movement for change is permeating the way of thinking of conservation, which is starting to identify solutions based on recognition of the rights and knowledge of the Indigenous peoples and local communities. Numerous Indigenous representatives, together with their allies were present at Durban, attempting to strengthen this new conception of conservation.

Finally, the third international event taking place in September, was the World Forestry Congress, in Quebec City, Canada. Here too, numerous representatives of civil society were present, seeking to influence mainstream forestry thinking, increasingly isolated in an obsolete vision of forests and forest management, but still reluctant to adapt to new times.

Beyond the differences between the three briefly mentioned events, what is interesting to note is what they have in common regarding civil society participation: the defence of local community interests through measures no longer restricted to traditional lobbying, but which increasingly turn to the streets or to external or parallel events, with the aim of generating opportunities to voice positions that are scantily expressed at the level of official delegates but that are strongly felt at the level of public opinion.

Looking forwards, we hope that these winds of change will also be felt in the climate negotiations to take place in Milan at the beginning of December. We hope that the shameful carbon market that the Convention on Climatic Change has turned into, will be swept away by the wind and substituted by an appropriate environment in which to address the necessary solutions.

We hope that the extraordinary high temperatures suffered in the past European summer will at least serve for governments to take the issue of climate change more seriously. We also hope that the widespread forest fires that covered Europe will serve to show how absurd it is to try to use trees as "carbon sinks" to counteract global warming. The whole world saw on televised news how European forests and plantations released into the atmosphere in a few hours all the carbon accumulated by their biomass over years. If this happens in the technically advanced North, it will certainly happen in the countries of the South. This is --literally-- playing with fire.

However, perhaps the most outstanding feature of what is happening in the world, is the increasing

union of all the struggles against a model that has already shown itself to be socially and environmentally unsustainable. Peasants, Indigenous peoples, workers, environmentalists, social and human rights movements, are only some of the actors in a world where fraternity, solidarity and human dignity are becoming global. The winds of change blow with increasing strength.