Latin America, state power and the challenge to global capital

William I. Robinson interviewed by Honor Brabazon and Peter Brogan in September 2006 (original available at www.leftturn.org)

In this interview Robinson, professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, traverses a wide terrain, from an in-depth historical summation of the sweeping structural changes that have occurred in Latin America over the past few decades to a critical assessment of movements in Bolivia and Mexico. Robinson's publications include: *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Globalization and Social Change* (2003), and *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, State and Class in a Transnational World* (2004), and a new book on Latin America and globalization is forthcoming.

Peter Brogan: Why do you think it's so critical at this juncture to write a book on Latin America and globalisation? Considering the many resistance movements that have emerged in the past decade do you think that Latin America is at a special historical juncture in its resistance to global capitalism?

William I. Robinson: Latin America is at a special historical conjuncture in terms of resistance to global capitalism. The neoliberal model became the dominant model. It achieved hegemony in the Gramscian sense, when it became a consensus among global elites. Elites which might have been opposed to neoliberalism succumbed to the program, and even among some popular forces there was a resignation, a sense that there was no alternative to neoliberalism. But that hegemony cracked in the late '90s and into the early 21st-century. Really one major symbolic turning point is the Argentine crisis. From that point on, neoliberalism is moribund, its hegemony is cracked, it's in crisis. It is moribund worldwide but particularly in Latin America. Thus, when we look worldwide at resistance to global capitalism we can see that Latin America is in the forefront of that resistance and of the breakdown of neo-liberalism's hegemony. It is also in Latin America that the origins of possible alternatives are emerging in the struggles against neoliberalism.

Latin America is in the forefront of the upsurge of social movements, of revolutionary movements, and challenges to the neo-liberal state and to the dominance of global capitalist groups. This is the structural background and what's at stake in Latin America right now. What will replace the neoliberal model? Will it be some type of reformed global capitalism which will allow global capital to gain a new lease on life? Or will neoliberalism be replaced by a more radical alternative, such as what might be under construction in Venezuela or in Bolivia? It's too early to say.

Honor Brabazon: Wherever we look in Latin America popular movements still seem to be facing that classic question of how to engage the state. Given the deep structural

changes that have occurred in these countries since the 1970s with the rise of neoliberalism and a truly global capitalist economy can you discuss how contemporary movements have been dealing with these changing dynamics and how they're engaging with the state and international institutions? Do you see the nation-state as a viable vehicle for revolutionary change today?

Robinson: If I jump to the last thing you said, no, the nation-state does not provide a viable alternative. It's not Bill Robinson saying that, it's the leadership of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. What they have figured out is that their survival, the survival of the popular project of transformation in Venezuela, must be a wider South American and Latin American project. They might not articulate what I'm saying in the same theoretical terms, but the idea that there would be a popular transformation of global capitalism that develops in Venezuela without linking that project to ongoing continental coordinated transformations throughout South America is an idea which doesn't correspond to reality. I think that Venezuelans, by way of example, would agree with this.

Brogan: The Venezuelan case is a very interesting one because in it you see the development of dual power structures outside of the nation-state while at the same time people at the executive level and military are building connections with Bolivia and Cuba in an effort to develop a regional bloc. So in a sense they understand that you can't simply use simply your own national state to create radical change in the global system, but you can use it to create a regional resistance block. What do you think about that?

Robinson: It's not my position that the nation-state is irrelevant. The reality is that we have a global capitalist system which has entered a new phase in the last couple decades which has changed the terms in which we understand the system. Yet, challenges in this new phase are still organised along nation-state lines in terms of political authority and in terms of formal state power. And that's the contradiction.

What this means is that social forces and political forces still need to challenge state power at the national level, to make a bid for state power at that level, and then from there to continue to challenge the global capitalist system. One of the things that's changed fundamentally in Latin America is that the earlier revolutionary strategy took the organisational form of the vanguard party and was aimed at bringing together politically various classes, particularly workers and peasants. It would then use that mobilisation to overthrow the state and then implement a revolutionary transformation of society. We know that this model failed. Yet, in its place grew a similarly failed understanding of what's required to transform society: that there would be no need any more to talk about state power, to talk any longer about political organisations that could operate not just in civil society but also in political society. The height of this kind of thinking is expressed theoretically in John Holloway's book *Changing the World Without Taking Power*, the idea that we can transform fundamentally capitalist social relations and overcome relations of domination and subordination without honing in on the state, just changing things at the level of civil society. Of course I'm caricaturing Holloway a bit, but the thing is that that's the essential argument, and that argument has been bought by some leaders of social and political movements around

the world.

So, we have two extremes. The first is the old model of social and political forces mobilising through political organisations – through a vanguard – in order to overthrow the existing state, take power, and transform society. The other is that you don't need to think about state power at all. But, as Venezuela and Bolivia demonstrate, the key question remains how can popular forces and classes utilise state power to transform social relations, production relations, and so forth. And once you raise that question, you have to talk about what type of political vehicle, what type of political expression, will interface between the popular forces on the one hand and state structures on the other. That's the big question raised by the current round of social and political struggle in Latin America: what's the relation between social movements of the left, the state, and political organisation?

Previously there was a vertical model, but the emphasis for the last 15 or 20 years has been on horizontal relations among different social groups. The indigenous organisations in Latin America have spearheaded the new model of networking and horizontal relations, building much more democratic relations from the ground up. That's great, and I support that politically, and we can analyse its importance, but at some point you need to talk about how vertical and horizontal intersect. This is precisely one of the problems, for example, with the autonomous movements in Argentina, among others. In attempting to overcome the old vertical model of vanguardism and bureaucratism, it's gone to the other extreme. Without any political hammer or political vehicle you can't actually bid for state power, synchronise the forces necessary for radical transformation.

I want to find a balance between these two positions. Take the models of Brazil and Venezuela: in Brazil you have a situation where popular forces, revolutionary forces, represented in the workers' party take state power. But there is no mass autonomous organisation from below. With this lack of autonomous organisation from below the popular classes could not exert the mass pressure, exercise the necessary control, over the Workers Party government so that it would confront global capital and implement a popular program. The Brazilian model shows that, even when revolutionary groups take state power – absent the countervailing force from popular classes below to oblige those groups to respond to their interests from the heights of the state – the structural power of global capital can impose itself on direct state power and impose its project of global capitalism. In other words, global class struggle "passes through" the national state in this way. And the experience of Brazil shows us what happens unless there's a mass mobilisation from below that places permanent pressure on the state even when it's taken over by revolutionary forces.

Now, counterpose Brazil to Venezuela. In Venezuela, you have a situation where similarly radical forces have come to state power and there are tremendous pressures from the global system to moderate and undermine any fundamental structural change. Yet in Venezuela, unlike Brazil, there's mass mobilisation from below and that mass mobilisation pressures the revolutionaries in the state not to succumb to the structural pressures of global capital but rather to carry out a process of social transformation. Of course this is on ongoing process, and both the forces of global capital and those of popular majorities are

constantly in struggle around the direction in which these states will move. You have to have permanent independent pressure of mass social movements from below against the state but at the same time you can't talk about any project of transformation without also taking state power.

Brogan: More than being an incredible inspiration to movements across the world, the popular uprisings in Latin America are serving as an experimental ground where you have Bolivia on the one hand and Venezuela on the other, two very different models of dealing with state power and mass mobilisation from below. Then you have what's happening with the Zapatistas in Mexico right now with the "other campaign," which reflects a quite different way of trying to deal with this national issue in the midst of the election scandal and the mass mobilizations advocating a recount of the presidential election backed by the PRD. What do you think of these three examples, especially considering the social forms resistance takes in each case and how power and agency are being conceptualised and transformed in these three cases?

Robinson: I, along with hundreds of millions of people around the world, am a great admirer of the Zapatistas and have taken tremendous inspiration from the Zapatista struggle. But we need to be realistic about something. The Zapatista project has taken the Holloway argument to the actual real-life, political-historical arena. The problem over the last couple years is that the Zapatistas' principle strategy of mobilising from below and not wanting to get corrupted with the matter of state power — which might have been a correct thing to do in the early '90s, or even up until a couple years ago — is not the correct thing over the last six months. In the current historical moment, the politically necessary thing to do — the only thing to do — was to participate in the struggle that the PRD and Manuel López Obrador were waging around the presidency — especially once we moved into the period when the fraud became clear and of an upsurge of mass struggle against that fraud — despite all his limitations of the PRD and Lopez Obrador, despite everything we could say critically about them.

The only thing a revolutionary could do at that time was to join in and talk about having state power and those elections. And so the Zapatistas, not doing this, stagnated. They have had less and less influence on Mexican society. First of all, the social base of the Zapatistas outside of the indigenous communities in Mexico is increasingly young people, those that may adhere to the World Social Forum process; this is a radical oppositional base but you're not talking about a mass working-class base. The supporters of the Zapatistas outside of the indigenous communities, such as in Mexico City, have stagnated, and inside Chiapas, Zapatismo may still be a force of counter-hegemony or even of hegemony in some communities, but the fact is that global capitalism has made major headway inside Chiapas itself between 1994 and 2006. They don't even have the leverage in Chiapas that they had a few years ago.

So that's the pitfall of following the Holloway model, of everything from below without looking above: it forgets about the state at a particular historic juncture when state power is on the agenda. That's the pitfall and a lesson to take from Mexico. What is the lesson for elsewhere? For Venezuela, Bolivia? The mass organisations, the indigenous organizations and

other popular movements should continue their mobilisation, not pull back and not rest for one moment, continue to pressure the Morales [Bolivian] government, or the Chavez government, inside and outside the state.

Brogan: Just to backup for one second, in talking about the Zapatistas in Mexico in comparison to say the movements in Ecuador or Bolivia what do you think it is about the Zapatistas that explains why they've drawn so much attention from movements around the world? Can you elaborate on their embodiment of this Holloway line on power? What is the real difference between the movements in Ecuador, which is arguably the strongest indigenous movement on the continent, and the Zapatistas and other indigenous groups in Mexico or the groups in Bolivia?

Robinson: While there is are tremendous differences we should first point out that all these organisations are obviously united around a project of ending 500 years of oppression and discrimination, and racism and colonialism. But putting that aside for a minute, what happened in Ecuador is that CONAIE and other indigenous organisations are constantly challenging state power. They overthrew five governments in a row. The Zapatistas on the other hand weren't interested in Mexico City or who was in the presidential palace. In Ecuador, however, where the movements overthrew five governments, things reached a point a few years ago where they realised that they had the capacity to overthrow the government but they didn't have an alternative. They didn't have the capacity, once the government was overthrown, to place in power political forces and state representatives that would defend their interests and implement their program. And so what happened as a result is that CONAIE had to depend on an alliance with Lucio Gutierrez, an army colonel. When Gutierrez betrayed the popular movement, when he turned to neoliberalism and delivered the country to global capitalism, CONAIE got very burnt for having backed him and having brought him into the presidency. That did a lot of damage to CONAIE's credibility with their base, to the strategy of putting somebody in the state who would represent their interests.

So here we can see the complexities of popular and mass struggles at this historic juncture. In the October 2006 elections the indigenous faced again this major dilemma – should they support another candidate and risk getting burned? Should they put forward an indigenous candidate along the Bolivian model? They debated all of this and as you interview me [September 2006] we don't know the outcome. But the point is they never took the Zapatistas' route of saying, we'll stay here in the highlands and the Amazonian region and forget about the government, about state power. The same is true in Bolivia. The organisations there never did that, but rather put Morales in power.

There are a number of reasons why the Zapatista model looks so attractive around the world. I think that one can be traced to a historic moment in the early 1990s, at the height of neoliberalism as a monolithic project where no one could question it. Even some – indeed, many – former revolutionaries adhered to the idea that "there is no alternative," that you just have to get the best deal for your country possible within global capitalism. It's in that environment that the Zapatista uprising of January 1, 1994 took place. It was a wake-up call that said, NO!, the lowest of the low,

the indigenous in Chiapas and by extension the downtrodden everywhere, are going to fight back. There is an alternative future and we're going to try to reach out for it. And that's why the Zapatistas are so inspirational. They represented the beginning of the end of neoliberalism's hegemony. Another reason why the Zapatistas have had such a following worldwide is because anarchism has made a big comeback, and the Zapatistas' feelings on engagement with the state have been attractive to the anarchist current worldwide.

Brogan: The turn the Zapatistas have made with the "Sixth Declaration" and the "other campaign" seems to be putting into question these ideas of not seizing state power and that you can build an alternative outside the state, autonomous enclaves of revolution if you will. It in fact seems to be a recognition of the failure of that kind of approach in that it is trying to build some kind of national project that doesn't say we have the exact blueprint for revolution but are continuing the approach of leading by following, leading by listening. Do you see any kind of hope in these new projects, especially how they are interacting with large mobilisations happening at the time of this interview in support of Obrador and the PRD?

Robinson: I want to reiterate that we are all students and supporters of the Zapatista struggle. I am not dismissing out of hand the Zapatistas political point on the state and social power, but here's the thing: the Zapatistas launched the Sixth Declaration and the Other Campaign at the exact moment at which the political lightning rod in Mexico was shifting to the electoral process. As revolutionaries, you need to be able to shift strategy and tactics as you move along, as history actually unfolds. So that's my criticism: that there is a position of not getting involved with the state, not getting involved with the elections, not going for state power. When you elevate that position to a rigid principle it is a mistake, and that's what's may have happened with the Zapatistas in Mexico.

Brabazon: Can you talk a little bit about these indigenous movements as a whole and what the significance of the rise of them has been and how they are changing the way that we in the North are thinking about power, politics and social change?

Robinson: That's a good question with no short answer. Some argue that revolutionary forces for much of the 20th century and with few exceptions emphasised building as broad a base among popular classes as possible, and in doing so ignored particular ethnic and racial oppression and dismissed the indigenous reality. While the reality of 20th century revolutionary struggles cannot be reduced to this observation, this was indeed quite true regarding the Left, for instance in Guatemala, in Peru, in Colombia, and elsewhere.

But this situation changes with the collapse of the traditional Left project in Latin America after the 1980s. Indigenous communities have organised on a new basis and have been at the forefront of the upsurge in social movements and in devising new ways of organising from below to challenge the oppressions embedded in social and cultural relations and the capitalist-colonial state. Indigenous movements have been at the forefront of popular movements in Latin America over the last 10 or 15 years. Indeed, just look at Colombia right now, where the indigenous have spearheaded the whole national resistance to a Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Of course many problems have yet

to be resolved, including the puzzle of how to move forward, of how you preserve autonomy at the base and make sure that the distinct interests of different communities and different groups can advance. Particularly important is how to address this while at the same time linking together diverse social forces and diverse communities and political forces around a collective project of change.

Brogan: Can you discuss the connections between the rise of indigenous movements to the structural transformations that have taken place in Latin America with the deep penetration of global capital, especially as it relates to the indigenous relationship with resources?

Robinson: Firstly we need to understand the difference between the last round of structural changes in the '60s and '70s to those in the 21st century. Latin America has gone through successive waves of ever-deeper integration into world capitalism. Each time there's a new integration or reintegration to world capitalism there has been a corresponding fundamental change in the social and class structures of Latin America, and the leading economic activities around which social classes and groups have organised and mobilised. So the model that we had in the 20th century was based on industrialisation through import substitution, on traditional agro-exports, on development programs based on a national economy with protective barriers and so forth. This model involved an active role for the state in accumulation and an oligarchical political corporatist coalition. Corporatist populism and import substitution industrialisation was the 20th century model in Latin America. But that model corresponded to the pre-globalisation phase of world capitalism – national corporate capitalism rooted in a Keynesian state that regulated accumulation. All of this was at the nation-state level, as was the social democratic models in advanced capitalist countries.

But the new globalization model of accumulation becomes consolidated in Latin America from the 1980s into the 21st century. In this new model, the commanding heights of accumulation in Latin America are no longer the old traditional agro-exports or national industry.

First, with regard to industry, accumulation is now based on integrated national industrial activity into global production chains as component phases. So we have the maquiladoras, which may have started along the US-Mexico border but have now spread throughout Latin America, especially in the Greater Caribbean Basin. And secondly, small and medium industrial enterprises all over Latin America — known by their Spanish acrynom PYMES — have reoriented from the national to the global market by becoming local subcontractors and outsourcers for transnational corporations and for global production chains.

Secondly, you have the explosive growth of the global tourist industry in Latin America. I have been researching this, and the data shows that this industry is sweeping across Latin America and the world. In fact, tourism was the largest single economic sector worldwide until it was replaced in first place by the energy sector with the rise in oil prices. Every single Latin American country has been swept up into the global tourist industry, which now employs millions of people, accounts for a growing portion of national revenue and gross national product, and penetrates numerous "traditional" communities and brings them into global capitalism. For many countries – including Mexico, Costa

Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, and most of the Caribbean nations, among others – it is the first or second most important source of foreign exchange.

Third, there's a new type of transnational agribusiness that has replaced the old agro-export and domestic agricultural models. Every country – every Latin American national agricultural system – is being swept up in it the new global agribusiness complex. If you go in Brazil or Argentina or Bolivia or Paraguay, in those four countries the biggest export crop now is soy. It's no longer beef coming out of Argentina. It's no longer coffee and sugar coming out of Brazil. It's King Soy. Soy is firstly an industrial product. Secondly it's used as feed for animals all around the world. And third it's increasingly a basic input for the global food industry, for the full range of processed and packaged food going to the global supermarket. And soy plantations set up by transnational agribusiness and run as capitalist "factories in the field" are displacing millions of small holders, eating up the rainforests, and so on. In Mexico, the biggest agricultural activity right now is no longer corn and beans but winter fruits and vegetables for the global supermarket.

The fourth commanding height of accumulation in Latin America now is the export of labor to the global economy. Immigrant labor is exported across Latin America to intensive zones of accumulation and to the global economy, to the United States, Europe, and beyond. In turn, that immigrant Latin American labor sends back remittances. The amount of those remittances is vast, and they can't be underestimated. So you have $40 to $50 billion being sent by immigrants all over the world, particularly from the US and Europe, back to Latin America. What do those remittances do? Those remittances mean that Latin Americans can buy things from the global economy and that their social reproduction is dependent on these global financial flows. In many countries remittances are the number one source of foreign exchange, which means that these countries are inserted ever-deeper into global capitalism. This export of labor and import of remittances inextricably inserts hundreds of millions of Latin Americans into global financial circuits.

To summarise all of this, you have this total changeover in the Latin American political economy. Now the new dominant sectors of accumulation in Latin America are intimately integrated into global accumulation circuits. In comparison to today, in the 1960s there were still massive pockets of society that were pre-capitalist or that at least enjoyed some local autonomy vis-à-vis national and world capitalism. The indigenous, for instance, still had a certain autonomy from world capitalism – not independence, but an autonomy. But 21st-century global capitalism has penetrated just about every nook and cranny of Latin America. In fact, there's almost no autonomous peasantry anywhere in Latin America. Capitalist relations are practically universal now in the region.

Indigenous communities have never stopped resisting in 514 years. But now, they have intensified that resistance in a direct confrontation with transnational capital over the natural resources that are in their communities. For example, the transnational oil companies have invaded even the most remote outposts in Ecuador in the past few decades. So you have the indigenous spearheading resistance to the plunder of Ecuador by the oil transnationals. We could point to the struggles around energy resources in Colombia, national gas

in Bolivia, the contradictory relationship of indigenous and local communities to oil in Venezuela, the confrontation of the indigenous in Guatemala with the transnational mining companies that in the past decade have invaded vast new stretches of that country. All this represents an intensified penetration of global capital around major resources. This is a major structural backdrop to the new round of indigenous struggle, and that struggle is so important because it is a – perhaps the – leading edge of the challenged to transnational capital.

Brogan: To keep on this line of argument, with the integration and penetration of transnational capital with more domestically oriented factions of capital in Latin America I'm reminded of a story the Financial Times ran recently on transnational banks in Venezuela which are making record-level profits. This in conjunction with Venezuelan oil dependency on US markets raises some serious questions around resistance to global capital and a radical project of transformation. Can you speak to these questions, especially in the context of Chavez's declaration that they're creating 21st-century socialism in Venezuela? If this commitment to building socialism is believed to be genuine what does that mean given the kind of integration of the oil sector and transnational banks within Venezuela?

Robinson: You're getting again to the heart of what's at stake here. Earlier you asked me to talk about the nation-state and how it relates to my theory of global capitalism. If all national economies have been reorganised and functionally integrated as component elements of a new global capitalist economy and all peoples experienced heightened dependencies for their very social reproduction on the larger global system, I do not believe it is all that viable to propose individual de-linking, that you can simply break off from global capitalism and create a post-capitalist alternative. China is now integrated into global capitalism, as are the former Soviet Union, the former Third World revolutionary states, and so on. In the case of Venezuela, the oil and financial system is totally integrated into global capitalism. Venezuelan oil goes to the global capitalist market and the country's reproduction passes through the global financial system – inextricably. And so an alternative needs to be transnational; it needs to be something which begins to transform global capitalism. And that's exactly what's at stake here.

But at the same time what this integration points to is the structural power that global capital can exercise and the possibility that this structural power will translate into local political influence. Global capital has local representation everywhere and it translates into local pressure within each state in favor of global capital. This is exactly what you have in Venezuela. There are all sorts of dangers in the sense that those groups most closely tied to global capital, transnationally-oriented business groups, will gain increasing influence and squash a more radical transformative project. Indeed, the real threat to the revolution in Venezuela is not from the right-wing political opposition but that chunks of the revolutionary bloc will develop a deeper stake in defending global capitalism in Venezuela over socialist transformation. You also have the problem that state managers will become bureaucratised as their own reproduction will depend on deepening relations with global capital. To reiterate, that's why a permanent mobilisation from below that forces the state to deepen its transformative project "at home" and its

counter-hegemonic transnational project "abroad" is so crucial. This is our agenda is this new stage of global capitalism. The matter of what can be done in each country, and how the state fits into the picture, is being fleshed out in Latin America and in Venezuela in particular. So I don't have definitive answers for you because this is history unfolding as we speak: That history is not predetermined, and our understanding does not precede but procedes this history.

But let's go back again to Venezuela and the fact that it is selling increasing quantities of oil to China. Here we can see where my analysis of global capitalism differs from those of my critics. These critics see China's increased relations with Latin America and interpret things from the old nation-state/inter-state centric framework. They say that China is competing with the US, emerging as a major rival to the US, which wants to defend its declining hegemony. That's a classic framework; that's the "New Imperialism" school.

But what's going on in China? And how is this linked to Latin America? An increasing portion of world industrial production has shifted into China. China is the industrial workhouse of the world. But this is the workhouse of transnational capital. When I say transnational capital that doesn't mean capital from outside of China against capital inside of China. Transnational capital is just that – it's transnational, meaning that the capitalist investment class operating in China are of Chinese, US, German, Japanese, Brazilian, South Africa, Thai, Indian, and Kuwaiti nationality, among many others. There are investors from all over the world. There are capitalist groups spread all over the world who are concentrating or globalising capitalist accumulation inside China and for the obvious reasons that we already know – massive abundant cheap labor that is also educated, the largest agglomeration economy in the world, a state responsive to the conditions necessary for globalised accumulation, and so forth.

So when China tries to expand its world markets for those goods pouring out of its global workhouse, it is not that the Chinese – people with Chinese passports and speaking Chinese – are competing against people from the US speaking English or people from France speaking French or from Japan speaking Japanese, all competing with one another trying to get new markets in Latin America. That is the classical framework of world capitalism in an earlier stage and it is not what is going on now. Rather, it is global capital trying to open up markets globally, to sustain an accumulation process in which the class contradictions are not national but transnational and in which the fiercest capitalist competition is not among national capitalist groups but among transnational conglomerates. This new global capitalism has a territorial expression particular to it because global capitalism "lands," so to speak, or "zones in on" particular transnationalised territories, such as China's coast, in order to accumulate so for a phase of global accumulation. So again there's no way you're going to understand US-Chinese -Latin American relations from the old nation -state-centered framework. The argument that the US is trying to dominate Latin America and to ward off growing Chinese influence — that these two countries are competing for hegemony in Latin America – totally misses the point.

Latin America is increasingly supplying raw materials to the workplace of the world in China, exporting to the Chinese coastal zones vast quantities of soy, copper, oil and so on. The old-style thinking con-

cludes, "Latin America is breaking away from the US and it's integrating into China and it's the end of US hegemony." But that's not what's going on. When the copper goes from Chile to China or when the oil from Venezuela to China it's going there to feed not "Chinese" but global capitalism in China, to fuel transnational accumulation taking place in Chinese territory. These are not nation-state relations; they are global capitalist relations. If you want to understand Latin America's transnational relations, its relationship to political processes and power structures worldwide, we need to develop a global capitalist and not a nation-state centric framework of analysis.

So to put two and two together, when the indigenous challenge oil extraction from the Amazon by transnational capital they are on the frontline of challenging global capitalism, whether it's in China or the US, no matter where that oil is going to.

Brabazon: I'm wondering if you can talk about how the structural changes should be shaping our resistance here in Canada and the US, both politically and theoretically? What can we learn from movements in Latin America and globally and how our movements can and should respond in terms of the form and content of what they're doing?

Robinson: Increasingly North-South relations, centre-periphery relations are not nation-state or regional relations in the global system, but social relations that are internal to global capitalism. So, for instance, the immigrant rights movement in the US is, at least momentarily, the lightning rod and spearhead for resistance to global capitalism inside the United States in the same way that the July 2006 Mexican elections and their aftermath for a few-month period was the lightning rod and spearhead for resistance to global capitalism in Mexico. And that immigrant rights movement is no different from the indigenous movement in Bolivia or the popular neighborhood movement in Mexico City or the landless workers' movement in Brazil. We need to see popular struggles unfolding in the US and in Canada as part of this same wave.

1968 was a key turning point in that it signaled the rise of a world counter-hegemony, the ideological and political turning point which led capital to conclude that it had to restructure the system. The crisis of capitalism that ensued in the early 1970s gave capital the impetus and the means to initiate that restructuring. Capital went global and unleashed neoliberalism. Now, in the late 20th century and the early 21st century, we are at another crossroad, like 1968, in which the ideological hegemony of global capitalism is cracked. We are in the battle over how the crisis will unravel and what will take the place of neoliberalism.

In terms of strategy and tactics, of lessons from Latin America, we should focus on the fact that the working class worldwide is increasingly informalised, flexiblised. There used to be a working class concentrated at the point of production and in a situation of formality, of regulated labor where trade unions organised at the point of production. Increasingly, capitalist production, the nature of accumulation, is such that the production process is fragmented into thousands of different phases and those different phases draw in some formal workers, some point-of-production centers, along with endless armies of informalised workers who are not even in the formal sense workers. So, increasingly, organising the working class

means organising informal sector workers, it means shifting from the point of production to the point of production and reproduction. That's what the piqueteros do. They say that if you're unemployed you can't organise into trade unions and withhold your labor. If you're structurally unemployed you have to disrupt the daily functioning of the system. Similarly, if you're an informal sector worker you can't make demands on capital in the same way as a formal sector worker. So increasingly, the type of working-class organisation that we need is both production and reproduction – social movement unionism, for instance, linking neighborhood struggles to formal worker centers and so forth. That's the type of struggle that is unfolding in Latin America and the type of struggle that is increasingly unfolding in the US, Canada, and elsewhere. But I think we need to theorise, analyse and strategise on how you organise working classes that are more informal than formal, that participate directly in production at certain times of the year or in certain instances and at other times and instances participate in local community reproduction, or maybe migratory, and so forth.

Brabazon: I'll just ask you to make one final comment that's a little more specific. The AFL-CIO recently launched an initiative to help build workers centers all over the US. I think this is one of the most positive things that the AFL-CIO has done in a long time – moving in the direction of organising immigrant workers who are in the informal sector, casualised workers. What you think about that as a possible model or does it have any potential. What do you think?

Robinson: More than just potential – that's the only way forward. The only demand that would be truly the right demand, the revolutionary demand, the just demand is to end all distinctions between immigrant and national labor. The only ones those distinctions serve is global capital. Global capital accumulation is now dependent on immigrant labor pools whereby the state is the vehicle that reproduces the condition of immigrant labor, and national borders (which are barriers to labor and not to capital) become functional to transnational capital. In this sense, Latino immigrant labor in the US and Chinese immigrant labor on the Chinese coast are no different, which the clarification that in China the immigrants come from the interior of the country – they are Chinese but they are displaced peasants moving on to the coast of China and they face a similar structural situation of distinction and discrimination that Latino immigrants face in the United States.

In Costa Rica there are one million Nicaraguan workers who are second-class citizens, they are immigrant workers and labor under distinct conditions. In Costa Rica there is an intense zone of accumulation linked to globalised circuits. Costa Rica is one of the key centers of global accumulation in that particular area, and that's based on Nicaraguan immigrant labor. You have Bolivians and Peruvians and Ecuadorians migrating to Argentina and Chile and it's not, again, nation-state centric but it's transnational because it's the global working class which is divided into national and immigrant labor and this is the face of global capitalism. So to the extent that the AFL-CIO organises informal sector workers, it is moving forward. Our banner must be an end to all distinctions between national and immigrant (or foreign) labor

Brogan: maybe since we all met in Caracas

in Venezuela during the World Social Forum it might be appropriate to conclude on a note about the role of the World Social Forum in different projects and initiatives that have been coming out of Latin America that can help build global movements and global networks. You have the social forum movement and you have the Zapatistas' new intergalactic initiative coming out of the Sixth Declaration to really build some social relations between groups around the world. Maybe you could talk about some of these projects to build a really transnational movement against global capitalism, the effectiveness and so on of some of these projects and any final comments that you want to make?

Robinson: We obviously need to move beyond the old internationalism, to disregard borders in the sense that organic communities are now transnational and are self-organising transnationallly. For example, my grounding is in southern California where the cutting edge of popular struggle right now is the immigrant rights movement. The immigrant rights movement is a working-class movement. The vast majority of immigrants here are linked to families who themselves migrate back and forth between Mexico and the US or between Central America and the US, or whose families are split transnationally. They send remittances back. So by definition a lot of these struggles we're talking about are increasingly transnational. To give you a concrete example, here in Southern California the "March 25 Coalition" organised and spearheaded the May 1 national strike in the United States and Immigrant Rights Day. When electoral fraud took place in Mexico in July 2006 those same leaders of March 25 Coalition organised a delegation of immigrant rights organisers and representatives of the Latino community to travel to Mexico City and to participate in the protests against that fraud. By definition when people develop their struggles in these transnational circumstances their struggle is transnational. We need to strategise and push forward these modalities of transitional struggle.

To conclude, the novel forms of struggle, of engagement with the state, and so on, that we've been talking about for Latin America are relevant lessons for global society including Canada and the US. But it's not as if these things are happening in Latin America and we should bring them back and try to implement them here. Rather, they are happening here. How can we deepen the transnational character of these worldwide struggles? ★

Where to contact the SACP

Head Office
3rd Floor Cosatu House,
1 Leyds Street,Cnr Biccard,
Braamfontein, Johannesburg 2000
Tel: (011) 339-3621/2
Website: www.sacp.org.za

Eastern Cape Province
178 Buffalo Road,
King William's Town 5601
Tel/Fax: (040) 635-0463
email: ecape@sacp.org.za
Secretary: Mandla 082 419 3336
Admin: Nobubele 078 591 5126

Free State Province
1st Floor Moses Kotane Bldg,
44 Fichardt Str, Bloemfontein 9300
Fax: (051) 448 5584
email: freestate@sacporg,za
Secretary: Phel 082 576 6331
Admin: Dorothy 084 693 9822

Gauteng Province
7th Floor North State Bldg,
Cnr Kruis & Market Str,
Johannesburg 2000
Tel: (011) 333 9177
Fax: (011) 333 6394
email: gauteng@sacp.org.za
Secretary: Zico Tamela 083437 8654
Chair: NKolisile 082 939 4035
Admin: Phindi 083 345 7198

Kwazulu Natal Province
Room 602 General Bldg,
47 Field Str Durban 4000
Tel: (031) 301 3806/304 1169
Fax: (031) 304 1169
email: kzn@sacp.org.za
Secretary: 083 721 0221
Org: F Bhengu 073 928 1586
Admin: Nokulunga 072 010 2602

Mpumalanga Province
NUM Offices, Smart Park Building,
Eddie Street, Nelspruit
Tel: (013) 656 – 2045
Fax: (013) 690 1286/656 0291
email: mpumalanga@sacp.org.za
Secretary: Bonakele Majuba
082 885 5940
Admin: Prudence 072 928 8055

Northern Cape Province
Sanlam Building, 1st Floor,
Johnes Street, Kimberley 8300
Secretary: Norman Shushu
082 376 8311
Organiser: Tsepho 073 094 6027
Tel: (053) 831 2512
Fax: (053) 832 9464/5855

Limpopo Province
1st Floor Mimosa Bldg, Room 22,
58 Market Str, Polokwane
Tel: (015) 291 3672
Fax: (015) 295 7773/ 291 3232
email: limpopo@sacp.org.za
Secretary: Justice Pitso 082 669 3987
Admin: Norman Rapholo 072 807 2352

North West Province
2nd Floor Jacob Bldg,
Cnr Kerk & Boom Str, Klerksdorp 2570
Tel: (018) 462 5675
Fax: (018) 462 4322
email: northwest@sacp.org.za
Secretary: M Sambatha 072 360 6861
Chair: W Sebolai 083 613 1904
Admin: Kelebogile 073 253 4452

Western Cape Province
No1 Church Str, Dumbarton House,
Cape Town 8001
Tel: (021) 425 1950
Fax: (021) 425 1956/424 4667
email: wcape@sacp.org.za
Secretary: Themba 083 303 6988
Org: X Ndongeni 072 290 2153