

NAFTA, according to the Zapatistas, was a death warrant. The Free Trade Area of the Americas is sometimes referred to as NAFTA on steroids, a combination of NAFTA and the WTO. It is a trade agreement which would include – if it passes – 34 nations, that is to say, the entire Western Hemisphere except Cuba. It is, unsurprisingly, being heavily promoted by the US, and its goal is to impose the neoliberal model of new corporate investment, patent protections, trade liberalization, deregulation, and privatization hemisphere-wide. It would also include a secret court modeled after the WTO's trade disputes panel, allowing unelected officials with strong corporate ties to determine trade policy.

The summit organizers made a terrible mistake in choosing Québec City as the site for the Third Summit of the Americas. The people there are friendly, welcoming, and fiercely proud of their unique culture. Those who weren't already against the FTAA became so, as the Government enclosed the heart of the city with a 2.4 mile fence, dubbed the Wall of Shame. Locals queued up to offer housing to visiting protesters, and kept their new-found friends up all night discussing economics and trade. They came in droves to the People's Summit, a conference which focused on alternatives to 'free' trade, and they danced in the streets each night.

During the demonstrations, while police launched tear gas at the rate of more than one canister per minute, local people opened their homes to offer refuge to protesters with children, and ran water hoses out their windows offering relief from the painful tear gas blended with pepper spray. Even the media was on our side, as evidenced by the cover of the main French-language paper. A photograph showing the tear gas blowing away from the demonstrators and engulfing the police sat under the headline, "Un bon vent...." (a good wind)! And indeed, the protest itself was a good wind, which radicalized thousands, and strengthened us in the face of the inevitable repression that followed.

The Bridge at Midnight Trembles

by Starhawk

Under the freeway, they are drumming, picking up sticks and beating on the iron railings, on the metal sculptures that grace this homeless park, on the underpinnings of the overpass that links the lower town to the upper levels of Québec City. They are mostly young and they are angry and jubilant, dancing in the night after two days on the barricades.

From above, the cops fire volleys of tear gas. It billows up in clouds and drifts down like an eerily beautiful, phantom fog, but the dancers keep on dancing. The sound and the rhythm grows and grows, a roar that fills the city, louder than you can imagine, loud enough, it seems, to crack the freeways, bring the old order down. The rumbling of the rapids as you approach the unseen waterfall. A pulsing, throbbing heartbeat of something being born. A carnival, a dance, a battle. No-one has come here expecting a safe or peaceful struggle. Everyone who is here has overcome fear, and must continue to do so moment by moment.

In the chaos, the confusion, the moments of panic, there is also a sweetness, an exuberance. Spring after winter. Freedom. Release. The rough tenderness of a hand holding open an eye to be washed out from tear gas. The kindness of strangers offering their homes to the protesters: come up, use our toilets, eat these muffins we have baked, fill your bottles with water.

We are the Living River: a cluster within the action that sometimes swells to a couple hundred people, sometimes shrinks to 50. Our core is made up of Pagans, who are here because we believe the earth is sacred and that all human beings are part of that living earth. Our goal is to bring attention to issues of water, we say, although our true goal is to embody the element of water under fire.

We carry the Cochabamba Declaration, which was written by a group of people in Bolivia who staged an uprising to retake their water supply after it had been privatized by Bechtel Corporation. They wrote:

“For the right to life, for the respect of nature and the uses and traditions of our ancestors and our peoples, for all time, the following shall be declared as inviolable rights with regard to the uses of water given us by the earth:

1) Water belongs to the earth and all species and is sacred to life; therefore, the world’s water must be conserved, reclaimed, and protected for all future generations, and its natural patterns respected.

2) Water is a fundamental human right and a public trust to be guarded by all levels of government; therefore, it

should not be commodified, privatized, or traded for commercial purposes. These rights must be enshrined at all levels of government. In particular, an international treaty must ensure these principles are non-controvertible.

3) Water is best protected by local communities and citizens who must be respected as equal partners with governments in the protection and regulation of water. Peoples of the earth are the only vehicle to promote earth democracy and save water.”

The Declaration is the alternative. It’s what we are fighting for, not against. Our goal is to bring it into the Congress Center, declare the Free Trade Area of the Americas meeting illegitimate because it is not supported by the people, and suggest they begin negotiating to protect the waters. Failing that, we will get as close as we can, and declare the Declaration wherever we are stopped.

As we are mobilizing, our friends in Bolivia stage a March for Life and Sovereignty, which is violently repressed. Oscar Olivera, one of the framers of the Declaration, is arrested, charged with treason, but then released. As we are tear gassed, so their march is tear

Finland serves up just desserts to the director of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, by splooshing two tofu cream pies in his face during a press conference. A surprised Wolfensohn comments, “Mmmm, tastes good, but I’m on a diet.” ABB Deputy Commander Marzipan expresses great satisfaction at being the first to throw a pie in Finnish history, saying “We managed to cancel the press conference. It’s hard to give an impression of a

respected economic leader with your face covered in soya cream.” Wolfensohn declines to press charges, although the Finnish prime minister’s office later files an official criminal complaint against the two *entarteurs*.

>> **March 29** >> South Africans take to the streets of Durban to protest pharmaceutical companies’ imposition of patents on essential AIDS medicines. Linking their struggle to that in Brazil, where the drug giant Merck

threatens legal action on the same morning as the march, they surrounded Merck’s headquarters and hold a rousing rally, complete with traditional *toyí-toyí* dancing and poetry readings.

>> **March 31** >> Mass demonstrations by unions and civil society groups clog the streets of Istanbul, Turkey, protesting the financial crisis that began in 2000, and the austere IMF bailout package. “Our problems cannot

gassed, again and again. In Bolivia, two people die, one asphyxiated by the gas. In Québec, there are near deaths, a man shot in the trachea by a rubber bullet, asthma attacks from the tear gas, a finger torn off in the assault on the fence. In São Paulo, the youth blockading the Avenida Paulista are brutally attacked and beaten. Broken arms, broken wrists: one of our closest friends is beaten on the head so hard her helmet is split in half, but she refuses to leave because she is a medic. At the private hospital, they refuse to treat the protesters. The police chase them away with live ammunition. Those arrested are tortured, held on their knees for over three hours in tight handcuffs while every fifteen minutes the police come by and beat them on the back. Most are under eighteen.

Friday afternoon. The River has spiralled at the gate at Rene Levésque, where the night before the Women's Action hung our weavings. As we wind up the circle, beginning to raise the power, Evergreen comes up to me with a man in tow who is decked out in the Cuban flag. He is part of a small group of indigenous people who have been holding a vigil at the gate, and our group is so metaphoric, (and we never quite got the signs made that said clearly what we were doing), that somehow he has gotten the impression that we are for the FTAA. We are singing, "The river is flowing," and he is from Honduras and his land is flooded from ecological breakdown and hurricane Mitch, and the only way we can demonstrate our solidarity, he says, is to join him in his chant. "Why not?" I shrug and we begin to chant, "*El pueblo, unido, jamás*

será vencido!" (The people, united, will never be defeated).

We dance on down to St Jean Street, where the news comes from our scouts – the CLAC [Anti Capitalist Convergence – one of the groups organizing actions] march has reached the gate we've just left, and the fence is already down. I literally jump for joy. We advance forward and receive cheers – "Hey, it's the River." Closer to the gate, the cops are firing tear gas at the crowd. Young men run out of the crowd, shadows in the fog, and throw them back. The gas billows up and is blown back onto the police lines. We are still able to breathe, and sing, so we start a spiral. The circle grows: other people join hands and dance with us, moving ever closer to the gate, not running away, not giving ground. All along it has been hard to decide what the action of this direct action should be. Now we all see that the fence is the action.

We spiral and dance, the drums pounding against the thunder of the projectiles as they shoot tear gas canisters overhead, laughing with the sheer liberation and surrealism of it all. Until at last one shot lands close to us, the gas pours out and engulfs us in a stinging, blinding cloud, and we are forced away.

We decide to flow on, to the blockade on the Côte d'Abraham a few blocks away. We hear that that gate could also use some energy, and the mission of the River is to flow, so we go on. We could use ten, a hundred Rivers.

The area has been so heavily gassed that many of us can't stay long. The energy peaks, not into a cone of power, but into a wild dance. Our scouts report that riot cops are massing down the street, heading toward us to clear the

area. The River flows on. Behind us, we can look back and see the spray of the water cannon, arching high in the air, filled with light like a holy and terrible rain that plays upon the black figures who hold their ground below.

Saturday morning: About 20 of us gather in the house where we're staying. Everyone is braver than before. I am awed. Some of us have been activists for decades, and carry into the actions a slow courage that has grown over many, many years. But some of our people have made that internal journey in one night. And it's one thing to decide, in the safety of your home, to go to a demonstration. It's another thing to face the reality of the chaos, the tear gas, the potential for violence.

I am here, I have done my best to inspire and encourage other people to be here with me, because as scared as I might be of the riot cops and the rubber bullets, I'm a thousand times more scared of what will happen if we aren't here, if we don't challenge that meeting going on behind these walls. Even if the River seems placid, I can hear the roar of the waterfall in my

ears. In the beauty of the woods, in the quiet of the morning when I sit outside and listen for the birdsong, in every place that should feel like safety, I know by the feel of the current that we are headed for an irrevocable edge, an ecological/economic/social crash of epic dimensions, for our system is not sustainable and we are running out of room to maneuver. In the meeting we are protesting, protected by the fence, wall, riot cops, and the army, they are planning to unleash the plundering forces and remove all controls. Water, land, forests, energy, health, education, all of the human services communities perform for each other will be confirmed as arenas for corporate profit making, with all of our efforts to regulate the damage undermined.

Saturday afternoon: I am standing in the alley with Juniper who has never been in an action before and with Lisa who has been in many. There is an opening in the wall, but the riot cops stand behind, defending it, their shields down, impermeably masked, padded, and gloved, and holding their long sticks ready to strike.

be solved unless the IMF and World Bank policies are given up," they declare.

>> **April 9 – 12** >> Hundreds of angry black residents of Cincinnati, US storm the local council meeting days after the fifth police killing of a black person in six months, this time, the unarmed 19 year old Timothy Thomas. By end of the night an organic and spontaneous rebellion erupts, lasting over three days and

fueled by the firing of lead pellet bags at mourners leaving Thomas' funeral. 800 arrests and at least 25 hospitalizations occur, as well as some bridge-building between white antiracist activists and the black communities rising up.

>> **April 20-22** >> Global Day of Action, FTAA Québec
>> **April 23** >> A two week long March for Life and Sovereignty, which has gathered 30,000 participants

from across Bolivia, converges in La Paz. Met with tear gas and repression, the marchers are joined in the struggle by retirees staging a hunger strike to demand raises in their pension.

>> **May 8** >> Harvard University students begin a three week occupation of the President of the university's office, demanding that the school pay its employees a minimum hourly wage of \$10.25. A year

Willow moves forward, begins to read the Cochabamba Declaration. The cops interrupt, shouting and moving out from behind the fence. Their clubs are ready to strike: one holds the gun that fires tear gas projectiles and points it at us. Lisa and I look at each other, one eye on the cops, the other on the crowd behind us. "What do we want to do here?" she asks me. The cops begin to advance. "Sit down," someone calls behind us, maybe someone we ourselves trained to sit in this very situation. We sit down. The cops tense. We are holding hands. I consider whether we should link up, make a stronger line.

We pass the Cochabamba Declaration back to someone who speaks French and begins to read it out loud. I pass my drum back, hoping one of my friends will pick it up. I see



The entire city is engulfed in tear gas. Québec City, Canada

Meyer/ Tendence France

one of the cops slightly lower his baton. Another wavers: their perfect line now shows some variation. They are beginning to relax.

From behind, someone passes up flowers. Heather brought them in the morning, saying she wanted to do something nonviolent, give them to the police. I remember thinking that hers was an idea so sweet that it belonged in some other universe than the one I anticipated being in that day. She had not looked too happy when I explained that we intended to follow CLAC and the Black Bloc up to the perimeter. "People might think we're supporting them," she said. "Well, we are supporting them," I explained. At least, for some of us that's what we feel called to do – to be right up there with them in the front lines, holding the magic, grounding the energy, not preaching about nonviolence but just trying to embody it. Now Heather and her flowers are here.

Lisa gets up, holding out her hands to the cops in a gesture of peace, and attempts to give them the Declaration. I watch, holding my breath, ready to back her up if they attack. "We can't take it," one of them whispers to her through clenched teeth. She lays it at his feet. A young man comes forward, lays down a flower. A woman follows with another. Somehow, in that moment, it becomes the perfect gesture.

Everyone relaxes. After a time, we decide to make our exit. The River must flow on. Others move forward to take our place. We snake back to the intersection. Behind us, the young men of our cluster are helping to take down the fence

along the cemetery. We begin a spiral in the intersection; masses of people join in with us. From a rooftop above, two of the local people shower us with confetti. We dance in a jubilant snow. The power rises, and as it does an absolute scream of rage tears out of my throat. I'm drumming and wailing and sending waves and waves of this energy back at the Congress Centre, and at the same time we are dancing and confetti is swirling down while behind us the tear gas flies and the fence comes down.

In front of the gate on St Jean Street, five young men and one woman stand, their backs to the massed groups of riot cops behind the barrier, their feet apart, one arm up in a peace sign, absolutely still in the midst of of chaos, unmasked, unprotected, in a cloud of tear gas so strong we are choking behind our bandanas. We file behind them, read the Cochabamba statement, and then flow on. They remain, holding the space as their eyes tear, steadfast in their silence, their courage, and their power.

When the Bay Bridge fell in the last San Francisco earthquake, we learned that structures resonate to a frequency. A vibration that matches their internal rhythm

can bring them down. Beneath the overpass, they are drumming on the rails. The city is a drum. Massive structures tremble. And a fence is only as strong as its point of attachment to its base.

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Note: This is an excerpt; the complete text is available in Starhawk's book, *Webs of Power: notes from the global uprising*, New Society Publishing, 2002

later, janitors' and security guards' wages increase and raises for food service workers are negotiated.

>> **May 9** >> Five hundred Guatemalan fisherfolk in Retalhuleu begin removing fences installed by privately owned shrimp companies to enclose shrimp breeding grounds. The police open fire on the protesters, killing two young men, 14 and 22 years old, and injuring at least five others.

>> **May 9** >> The Asian Development Bank, relocating from its planned meeting place of Seattle for fear of protest, finds itself greeted by activists on the streets of Honolulu, Hawaii despite the largest domestic security operation in US history, which cost an estimated \$14,000 per protester present.

>> **May 10** >> Panamanians take to the streets against a 66 per cent increase in bus fare and are met with

gunfire from the police. It is apparently the most violent demonstration since the US invasion in 1989.

>> **May 16** >> Years of organizing against the reroute of Highway 55 outside of Minneapolis, US pays off with the passage of a law protecting the flow of Camp Coldwater Spring, sacred to several Native American tribes. The new law forces the Department of Transportation to halt construction for as long as the