

## **CLAC CONSULTA REPORT**

On January 27 and 28, CLAC and CASA held a Consulta that was attended by approximately 200 people from Canada and the US. The Consulta, which was non-decisional was designed to solicit input on their proposed plan of action and was not a place to debate or discuss the CLAC/CASA principles. It was asked that only people who support their principles attend.

This document will attempt to report on what happened as well as some evaluation of the process and the meeting overall. It will also attempt to address in more detail the relationship/dynamics between the organizations calling for direct action at the Summit of Americas.

I have scanned in and attached the handout CLAC/CASA distributed to the participants. This includes an overview, the principles, the plan of action and the script that was used for the tour. (The formatting was lost, it looked much better than the straight text you are receiving.)

### **CONSULTA REPORT:**

The initial agenda was:

#### **Saturday, January 27**

9-12	Activist Tour of Quebec City
12-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2:30	Presentations (Local Struggles/FTAA/Summit of America)
2:30-3:00	Break
3:00-6:00	Plan of Action: Open Discussion
6:00	Dinner at Scanner

#### **Sunday, Jan. 28**

10-12	Before the Summit
12- 1	Lunch
1-3	After the Summit
3-5	Workshops (legal, medical, regional networking)
5 pm	Conclusion

Needless to say, like most gatherings with organizers and activists the agenda turned out to be quite different than originally planned. This was due in part I believe to the fact that good mobilization work was done, but little process or agenda planning seemed to be. The organizers did not anticipate what people attending would want or need and therefore were not able to facilitate the discussion or move proposals that would answer those needs. It is also not clear whether any official notes were taken or ideas recorded in any way.

**ACTIVIST TOUR / PRESENTATIONS:** The activist tour in the morning was a good idea and useful to get a sense of the area. The content, however, was more historical than strategic. It would have been nice to get more of a sense of what open space was public or private, key intersections, roads, buildings, where the tunnels are etc. Lunch was very late, so the afternoon presentations covered only local struggles which was redundant with the tour. The FTAA part was cut.

Other tidbits learned: there are no big corporations or chains in Quebec City although there are some in suburban malls. There is one McDonalds and it will be inside the perimeter. All construction sites will be closed down during the time of the summit and no deliveries will be made. A 100 person Riot Squad from Toronto will be on hand, since there really is no riot squad in Quebec City. It was said that cell phones will be made illegal during that time, but I'm unclear about that. The police say they will not use pepper spray and have rented most of the empty apartments to house police. The figures mentioned at the Consulta are 5000 cops, 800 in riot gear.

**PLAN OF ACTION:** This section proved to be more frustrating than useful. It was stated in the handout that the "consulta cannot be decisional. The point is not to decide on a strict schedule for the plan of action...but instead define basic orientations." "The consulta is really important because it will be on the orientations that the action committee would elaborate the plan of action."

The process set up for the session was rotating men and women speakers from two lines on the floor. There were no specific proposals other than the principle of the 3 blocs (no overall strategy, time frames, places, etc).

What happened as a result was a long series of people giving their ideas, perspectives on tactics and the zone plan.

There were a lot of concerns raised about the three zones. Some felt they wanted to see everybody united in one action and that the divisions just made some more vulnerable than others. Some thought the zones were a good idea but should be set by time not geography. Some raised concerns about diversity of tactics and what did that really mean. There was increasing frustration in this process, with some calling for a more open brainstorm to envision what we might actually do. Others called for small group discussion by zones or just small groups in general. This idea of breaking into smaller groups gained a lot of support and it was agreed to divide up the next morning. The end time was near and it was decided that those who wanted to stay and brainstorm could. Many left feeling frustrated that no effort was made to synthesize or build consensus from all the random thoughts. Nor was it clear what if anything would happen with the various ideas or concerns.

About 1/3 of the people stayed for the brainstorm which turned out to be very positive and some said it was the most productive part of the whole Consulta. The ideas generated included:

It would have been helpful if CLAC/CASA had tried to develop some recommendations or proposals or ideas that could then have been taken back to the decision making assemblies and to our local communities and organizations.

### **SATURDAY EVENING:**

-  
At around 8:30 a special session was held to discuss Strategies and Tactics for the Summit of Americas and the Anti-Capitalist Movement. This time was set aside because it was learned that numerous members of Operation SALAMI would be attending the Consulta and CLAC did not want a discussion about their diversity of tactics principle during the afternoon session. So, to their credit, they set up the evening session for this purpose.

Unfortunately again, they did nothing in advance to prepare for or think through how to

make this session useful. Agenda, facilitation and translation were put together at the last minute. The discussion that night brought to light the deep divisions and animosity within the movement there, particularly between CLAC and SalAMI. What was clear, is that there were people/organizations at the Consulta (beyond SalAMI) that had serious concerns about the diversity of tactics principle and the impact it was and is having on movement building. There were also people who felt very strongly that if the police attacked that we had every right to defend ourselves. And there were people who felt that pro-actively engaging the police and property were legitimate tactics that should be supported and defended.

Instead of using this gathering as an opportunity to agree to disagree and find ways to chill the public and private antagonisms, some people instead took righteous and disrespectful positions. It seemed to me that both groups have entrenched themselves more in reaction to each other than because of the positions they hold. This division creates huge distrust and vulnerability.

What is also clear is that there are strong male leaders of CLAC, CASA and SalAMI and that the personalities

## **Sunday Morning**

What started as a US caucus at 9:00 turned into a broader discussion with many of the Canadians who attended about what people felt they needed coming out of the Consulta. (I was not at this). Both US and Canada activists expressed their frustration to the CLAC/CASA organizers about not having any thing tangible of any kind to bring home. They was also a proposal emerging to have a non-partisan spokes council or coordinating group to link the various direct actions and insure that various logistical issues were getting addressed.

This discussion, then flowed into the morning session and it was agreed to do breakouts in smaller groups that would talk about what would happen during the action and how we would coordinate leading up to the action.

In the small group I attended, the focus was mostly on coordinating structures. At one point a CLAC leader was asked if they were planning to set up an infrastructure to support these actions and he could not answer, only replied that it would have to go back to the CLAC assembly which is where decisions were made. This made me feel uneasy.

Each of the four groups reported back. An array of random action ideas and a coordinating spokescouncil emerge. Again, none of this was synthesized nor were any conclusions drawn or consensus built.

The final session of the day focused on how to coordinate leading up to the Summit. OQP put forward a proposal that working with CASA they would host a call. The facilitators created two lines, people speaking for or against. The issue was raised about whether this group had to support a diversity of tactics and be anti-capitalist. This went back and forth. OQP could not deliver that since, they have already taken a position not to endorse the diversity of tactics position. The CLAC people were adamant, spoke strongly against OQP and essentially shot it down. OQP then withdrew their proposal. The meeting was breaking down at this point and it was left that sometime soon CLAC/CASA would put out a call of

some kind – to be determined. And that’s how the Consulta ended....

## **Questions/Concerns/Suggestion for CLAC**

**1. Strategy, Tactics, Plan:** CLAC established diversity of tactics as a core principle.

Tactics however are usually chosen to achieve one’s strategy. SaAMI has a strategy of nonviolence and mass movement building aimed at the secrecy of the FTAA process. CLAC has no discernable strategy for the Summit itself. The handout for the Consulta has asserted the “general assemblies have adopted the principle of forming three blocs in organizing the actions. Strategy ideas in the handout include: actions that “would disrupt the Summit and city in an important manner. These actions could be directed at local emblems of capitalism.” “Another idea would be to cut ourselves a part of the city in order to reclaim it and where it be possible to experience all kinds of artistic actions.” “ It could also be possible to organize actions some times before or after the Summit, for example at the arrival or departure of the official delegates.”

Many people at the Consulta urged CLAC/CASA to develop a proposed strategy and plan as quickly as possible.

**2. Power and Decision-Making:** It would have been good to have the Consulta build some consensus on key questions like goals, framework, times etc to propose back to the assemblies. The lack of a clear process of decision-making undermined people’s confidence. Like many groups strong male leadership was apparent both in CLAC and CASA who constantly referred everything back to the general assemblies. As a result, many people felt disempowered. Since CLAC/CASA had no plan for coordination or communication, people again left feeling unclear about how decision would be made or implemented. *Again, CLAC/CASA need to quickly decide how people will stay connected and if/when they will be given any real input or decision-making authority.*

**Vulnerability/Security/Responsibility:** if we were organizing in the same way as CLAC/CASA in the US, I have no doubt people would be picked up for conspiracy to commit a riot. The plan of action and discussion related to it is clearly risky, especially at a time of such intense infiltration and repression. Also, as organizers for a major day of action, it is not enough to just call an action. People may self-organize into affinity groups but they will be looking for a clear scenario and good logistic support. As organizers we need to be responsible to cover the bases to help insure success.

(I recognize it is still about 2 months away and there is plenty of time to get much of this figured out, however, it will require greater attention to process and planning than CLAC/CASA had demonstrated to date. )

## **EVALUATION**

Apparently the planning for this Consulta fell primarily on the shoulders of one woman. Since CLAC/CASA saw this Consulta as non-decisional, they did not do the necessary planning to make it a success. There were no proposals or clear process to move people through the discussions. It was unclear how decisions would be made or by who. Maybe it is the anti-authoritarian principle that makes people feel they can't or shouldn't organize. For example, one CASA person stated that we just need to keep things loose, call the action and people will self-organize. I do not believe that this is the reality and is an irresponsible approach. Perhaps it was this approach that led to the style at the Consulta. If anything it led to a chaotic and unproductive meeting.

Yes, lots of good networking was done and networking is good, but not enough. No real organizing advanced.

CLAC/CASA take the position that if you don't agree then don't participate. This was one of the problems with the Consulta. CLAC has put out, to the world, a call for a Day of Action. So everyone who wants to be connected to direct action came. CLAC has also put out this principle on diversity of tactics but has never said what that means other than rejecting reform, and supporting public education to direct action. When talking to people in CLAC/CASA you get many different opinions, what is clear is that they do not evaluate, critique or recommend/or discourage any tactic over any other. Anything goes in their book and it is not up to them to tell people what to do. Another line heard a lot is people are going to do shit no matter what we do, so we might as well accommodate it.

Which leads me to another issue, CLAC has made diversity of tactics a core principle, unfortunately they have no strategy. Generally speaking groups develop a strategy and then pick the tactics that will achieve it.

At the Consulta any issues or concerns people had about the principles or process had no real way of being addressed. No one was/is empowered to have any real say--only the assemblies - which are generally 50-60 people, which is a very small % of the people who will be participating, yet they have enormous power.

Since CLAC/CASA have not proposal or idea on how to coordinate this action beyond their assemblies,

Other dynamics at play was that despite the principle of anti-patriarchy, it was clear that there are two male leaders- one in CLAC, one in CASA that were really driving much of what occurred. If there were other CLAC/CASA people there, no one spoke up.