

Cancun Report, August 2003,

Lisa Fithian and Starhawk from RANT went to Mexico from July 27th - August 7th where we met with organizers and local activists in Cancun and with campesino organizers in Felipe Carillo Puerto, three hours south. We went to Mexico City on Aug. 1st and spent the weekend with students at an encampment focused on the WTO and then attend a three day gathering meeting of Via Campesino. We also met with lawyers coordinating the legal support for the September mobilization. Our primary interest was plans for nonviolent direct action. Here is a quick summary of what we learned:

In Cancun itself:

Cancun is a new city that was created as a tourist center for the Mexican economy. As such there is no history of social movements or many activist based organizations. And thus few organizers have much direct action experience.

The **Comite de Bienvenida** or the Welcoming Committee in Cancun is focusing on logistics - finding spaces for camping and the forums as well as food. They are also working with the global network of NGO¹s called Our World is Not for Sale in organizing the forums, fair trade fair, etc. There is more than enough work for what is basically a small group of people and they have been having trouble locking down specifics. They are negotiating with the city but there are only so many places for up to 10,000 people to camp.

Another local Cancun group, more youth and arts is emerging and they are focused on organizing youth and beginning to do outreach and mobilization in the local community. They are very interested in bring a cultural component to the streets in the form of puppets, drum processions and so on. They have a base that hang in the Parque las Palapas which is the cultural center of Cancun City

Puente de Cancun is a small group of internationals sponsored by Global Exchange that is 1) providing info bulletins to the world, 2) organizing the media convergence and 3) serving as a link to internationals.

We felt that a convergence space for organizing and supporting the street actions is needed, and Mike, who was working with the Puente, was very, very helpful to us, and is looking into housing/convergence space. We are fundraising to help cover the costs and people can make donations to RANT in order to secure one. More info below.

Two of the students from Mexico City are also going down to Cancun this week and will be on the ground organizing from now on. They both have a good bit of direct action experience which is great.

Finally on Cancun the criminalization campaign has begun. There were daily articles about foreign instigators, over 200,000 coming, about folks bringing explosives and so on. The usual. But this all has a chilling effect. Also two years ago at the WEF protests the police were pretty brutal so there is a memory of that and some desire on the part of the Comite not to see direct actions. All of this is evolving however as it is clear that there are different sectors with different visions and plans.

Students:

The student activists we worked with are great and inspiring and experienced, sophisticated organizers. Over the weekend encampment, they formed a new group, Alianza Global

S-9/Global Alliance S-9, to be a coordinating body for all the groups planning street actions particularly on the 9th.

They came from numerous groups and several cities and have some clear ideas about what they would like to see happen. While many want to go it is very expensive since the whole trip will be about 10 days with bus travel and all. The students are hoping that international activist will contribute to help reduce the individual cost thereby allowing more to go.

They are writing a letter and where people can send money, but short of that RANT is also willing to help get money where it needs to go. (Info below)

Campesinos:

Via Campesino and its related Mexican campesino organizations, (UNORCA being one of the main ones) are planning to mobilize 5-10,000 people. Again, numbers depend partly on money. They are organizing their own forums on the 8th and 9th and then planning a day of action on the 10th which is the opening day of the Ministerial and the day focused on agriculture.

They are planning actions across the hemisphere to disrupt international commerce as well as a plan to march to the Convention Center to deliver a declaration. Their intention is to get inside to read it.

They will march on September 10 and probably support whatever actions take place on September 9 although it seems unlikely that they will take a major role in them. The student made a proposal to them and they have a big meeting soon to make a final determination on their plans.

The rough calendar:

8/30 Festival in Cancun, Student trainings in Mexico Citu
9/1 Convergence Center opens we hope
9/2 Alternative Media-Tech Convergence
9/4 Student busses leave Guadalajara.
9/5 Student busses leave Mexico City.
9/6 Training Weekend, evening assemblies/spokes begin
9/8 Students arrive in Cancun, evening Assembly to plan actions. Compesino Forums begins
9/9 WTO delegates begin to arrive. Proposed action day. Actions will depend on numbers and logistics, but some powerful ideas are in the works. Compesino forums begin, NGO Opening Forum.
9/10 Ministerial Opens, focus on agriculture. March and possible actions by Via Campesino.
Alternative Trade Fair through the 12th out on the island
9/ 11 Zapatista Encuentro
Dia de la lutoMemorials for victims of war and violence, anniversary of the coup in Chile as well as 9-11 in U.S., Street processions, offrendas, cacerolazo (beating pots and pansDa South American political tradition), and a Chilean pena at night are suggestions.

9/12 Services under discussion at ministerial: suggestion to be in the streets of Cancun City offering services to people—free food, water, medical care, etc.
9/13 Mass March against War and Free Trade.
9/ 14 Ministerial Closes, possible Fiesta on the beaches?
9/15 Mexican Independence Day

Other aspects:

Legal: Legal support is being organized by a Mexican human rights organization. We met with their representatives who seem to have a great plan. They will aid internationals who have problems with immigration and provide support for the actions, and they seem to have this base well covered. A legal Handbook is almost complete that will be translated into English and put on line on the Comité's webpage.

Medical: Various teams of street medics are coming down from the U.S. and we believe that this, too, will be well covered.

Housing: Campsites for the major mobilizations of campesinos and students are still being negotiated. We have people looking for houses to rent for groups of internationals and for a convergence space, but don't yet have anything confirmed.

Visas: The Mexican government is requiring a special visa for accredited journalists and delegates who will be entering the Conference Center area, but we have been told that unaccredited people should just come on a regular tourist visa. Passports are required for those flying into Mexico.

Weather hot, hot, hot, oppressive or rain, rain, rain. Come prepared! Mosquitos also can be a problem, so some good nontoxic bug juice could come in handy.

Theft: Theft is a big problem in Cancun and Mexico City. We recommend an under-your-shirt money belt for your passport and cash and a wary eye when on busses, the subway, or in crowds. Don't bring anything of real value or consider insuring it. The Puente House was just broken into and computer equipment etc stolen.

There are cheap internet café's everywhere!

What's Needed from Internationals: Being there! Cancun is hard to get to for a lot of Mexicans, and internationals are needed and welcome in order to get the numbers we need for a large-scale mobilization. Internationals present will also change the dynamic with the police the Mexicans believe.

Action Support and Coordination: Experienced people who can help coordinate actions, run communications, and act as legal observers or to help staff the legal office will be extremely useful. Bilingual support needed!

Fundraising: Funding is needed to bring more students and campesinos to the actions. Anyone who can't come is encouraged to make as big or as small a donation as possible. RANT will help get the money to Mexican student organizations or convergence space.

Tax deductible donations can be made to:
Daughters/Sisters Project. (Make check out to Daughters/Sisters, earmark it RANT/CANCUN)

PO Box 4492
Rolling Bay, WA 98061
EIN: 91-188-5041A

OR if you do not need a tax-deduction send checks made out to RANT , fill in the memo line with what you want it contribute to: convergence, student buses, rant work, permie village etc....

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A few links:

Comite de Bienvenida www.cancuncommittee.org

Indymedia Cancun: <http://chiapas.mediosindependientes.org/>

Mexican Space / NGO¹s <http://www.rmalc.org.mx/>

Fair Trade Symposium: <http://laneta.apc.org/pipermail/acancun-l/2003June/000176.html>

The WTO official web-site (<http://www.wto.org/>)