

**March to Miami
Presentation of Assessment
April 19, 2005**

Origins and Purposes

Introduction

The March to Miami was a series of approximately 30 educational events, rallies and marches in 23 cities and 15 states along a 5500 mile route from Seattle to Miami between the end of September to mid-November, 2003, organized by the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment (ASJE) and its allies.

The main purpose of the March was to educate about and protest the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that was to be negotiated by the 34 nations of Latin America in Miami during the 3rd week of November. The March to Miami events were linked by an ASJE sponsored “Blue-Green Machine” biodiesel bus on which six people traveled and three others accompanied. This team of nine, including the “Not Ready for Free Trade Players” gave talks, organized skits (The Race to the Bottom), provided information on the FTAA, did advance press work and sang songs.

I served as Executive Director of ASJE during this time period. I proposed the March and was its lead organizer.

Historical Context: The New World Order and Global Resistance

George Bush, Senior, announced a New World Order in this speech to a Joint Session of Congress on September 11, 1990. This New World Order had two parts:

1. Resource Wars to implement the Carter Doctrine that was written by Carter’s security advisor, Henry Kissinger. This doctrine said that a threat to oil supply was a threat to our National Security issue and such threats could be responded to with military force. (Iraq had invaded Kuwait in August, 1990) (Gulf War I)

“An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” (1980 following invasion of Afghanistan by USSR).

2. Economic Order. -- a new economic order composed of regional trading blocs The US would take the lead with its Enterprise for the Americas Initiative in Latin America. The EU would expand into Eastern Europe. Japan would organize the East (APEC). – a post USSR expansion of global capitalism.

Historical Context: Attempting to Implement the New World Order's Economy

The first step in this new order was the NAFTA – which he signed in 1993, later implemented by Clinton in January 1994. The second step was the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995. The third step was the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which was to begin in 1995 with its first summit in Miami.

These trade agreements embodied the principles of neo-liberalism which were implemented during the 1980s in the US domestic economy and then in the 1990s they were to be exported to the rest of the post USSR world via trade agreements.

A recognition that corporate interest superceded all other social matters

An elimination of a unionized workforce (no recognition of basic rights)

An elimination of governmental regulation (government measures) that restrict present or future profit taking

A privatization of public resources (Public education, public knowledge, water)

A concentration of social wealth to the top echelon of society

Historical Context: Global Resistance to New World Order's Economic Model

These agreements are a part of capitalism's strategic effort to expand control globally in a post USSR world in which the North "services" the resource extraction of the "South." They are aimed at dismantling many of the beneficial institutions that working people fought for and created here in the US and elsewhere in the world. They reflect a world that is trying to regulate the interactions of transnational corporations, the main mechanism of social and economic distribution. .

The effects of these trade agreements and their global reach (job loss, plant dislocation, environmental degradation, weakening of sovereignty, unrestricted extraction, etc) allowed for broad international social movements of resistance to develop. This global resistance has been successful, at a minimum, of slowing down the implementation of these policies. This successful resistance developed an accurate critique of corporate rule and identified a corporate enemy to unite against and a social vision to unite for (World Social Forum Agenda, for example).

The historical context for the March to Miami was thus the successful resistance that has stopped the World Trade Organization's agenda in Seattle in November, 1999 and had prevented the FTAA from being negotiated since 1995. A main goal of the March to Miami was to ensure the failure of the Miami negotiations on the FTAA. The March slogan was: Remember Seattle, March to Miami.

Organizational Context: The Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment Origins and Purposes.

Background on the formation of the ASJE.

Kaiser Steel was purchased by a Houston based corporation called Maxxam. Around October, 1998, Maxxam locked out its workers in its Spokane and Tacoma plants. These workers were members of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). EarthFirst! activists had been fighting Pacific Lumber in northern California. Pacific Lumber was cutting old growth timber. Pacific Lumber was also owned by Maxxam.

As rank and file members of the USWA became increasingly frustrated by being locked out they began to take joint actions against Pacific Lumber... even setting up a pick line outside its headquarters in northern California. This led to Earthfirst! activists taking action to shut down the Port of Tacoma where ships were bringing in materials to Kaiser.

These joint actions built and were solidified in the WTO protests in Seattle where many of that rank and file, locked out Steelworkers were in the forefront of protests from Sunday through Friday. In 2000, the Alliance was formalized with a California nonprofit that gained a federal IRS c-4 status and a year later, an Oregon nonprofit with a federal IRS C-3 status was formed.

ASJE had demonstrated in its various projects (Restoration Jobs; Longshore Lock Out; Oregon Steel Campaign, etc) that it could organize this collaboration and dialogue successfully among two typically opposed movements (labor and environmental)

ASJE and the March to Miami

ASJE organized the March to Miami to foster this dialogue in communities across this country, to push itself beyond its base, to search for structures that would maintain it (blue/green alliances) and to build a series of "movement centers" that could exercise a new political power against corporate rule. (Aldon Morris: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement)

In terms of generalizing this experience, I think mechanisms for dialogue among people who have a long term commitment to work together against a common enemy is necessary to build and maintain solidarity. No social movement builds without an internal communication system that creates culture and facilitates discussion about what to do next.

Specifically, ASJE organized the March to Miami because:

We wanted to build a domestic social movement which will resist corporate capital and we think this movement must be grounded in local communities

The proposed FTAA was a point of unity among various social groups and because it was easy to explain – an expanded NAFTA. We did not think this discussion would take place in Miami itself.

Organizationally, we wanted to expand ASJE's reach and its model of blue/green organizing.

We thought, due to the policies of Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina, that FTAA negotiations in Miami would not be successful. We believed it's important to lead people into successful, "movement building" campaigns.

Preparation

The ASJE Board of Directors agreed to the March to Miami in April, 2003 and we worked to link up with allies.

We sought and secured strategic alliances with District 11 (Northwestern United States), District 7 (Indiana and Illinois) and District 9 (Alabama) of the USWA, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (Florida) and the Miami Worker Center. These alliances produced our route.

We, through the offices of District 11, coordinated weekly conference calls for over three months (July to September) – our internal communication.

We expanded our allies on the conference call via phone calls, mailings, etc: JWW chapters, Sierra Clubs, SEIU Locals, student organizations at community colleges and universities.

We developed a map that showed the route and the dates that would allow time for a "link" between planned sites.

We encouraged an educational forum and then a march or rally at each site

We found a bus (the Blue/Green Machine) to make the "link" and raised initial funds to pay for driver and insurance.

We organized a "Strategy School" to pull key organizers together and finalized details of the March to Miami in August, 2003, at The Evergreen State College.

We continually searched for funds and raised most of it on or during the March itself.

Financing

We started out with a \$25,000 budget. We raised \$19,000 mostly from friends, ASJE members, unions and on the road donations from people at the rallies. The biggest donor was the Service Employees International Union (\$5,000). The next largest donor was the “pass the hat folks” – about \$3700. This was quite a surprise for me.

The point, however, is not to let the absence of money get in your way. You need money, but you need to do something to get it. Not one “national group” – those with PO Boxes in Washington, D.C. – would give ASJE a dime to get the March to Miami going. Once we got it organized, however, national groups in Washington, D.C. organized a press conference to say they were full support of the March, but they still didn’t give dime one to ASJE’s March to Miami. Lots of “national groups” can not imagine significant action outside the Beltway

My point is that more than half of our \$19,000 came to us **after** we had gotten on the bus and headed east. The other thing to remember is that while lots of groups can’t or won’t give you cash, they can help with in-kind donations.

In kind-resources. In early summer, we engaged District 11 and District 7 of the USWA in ASJE’s March to Miami. These two Districts mobilized their staff and resources to create March to Miami events. Our bus was also filled with literature printed at no expense to us at a union’s print shop in Tukwila, Washington

Staff Requirements

ASJE

As Executive Director I worked on this march from April, 2003, through January, 2004. I was assisted by a part time staff member who helped develop both the ASJE website and newsletter that promoted the March.

Regional Allies

The USWA District offices of 11 (Mineapolis) and 7 in Gary Indiana assigned two staff members (Tara Widner and Bill Carey) who worked closely with me on the overall organization of the March

Local Allies

Each of the 30 events had a lead organizer who was based in the local area. Organizers from the USWA regions (11,7,9), Jobs with Justice (JWJ) organizers, student organizations at Notre Dame, Transylvania, Spokane Community college. Environmental organizations, like Silver Valley Coalition in Idaho or the Resource Councils in the Dakotas, fair trade organizations, etc.

Internal Discipline and Culture

The Bus People

The six people who were the core of what became known on the road as “the bus people” were old friends from the Olympia area. Of these six people, only Dan and the bus driver, Rick Fellows, were receiving a salary. Harry and Melissa were traveling for fun and expenses. Rachel was on a contract to make a film. Emily joined us in Chicago to replace Bethany Weidner who had returned to Olympia.

We had another couple who traveled on their own and acted as advance people, as well as a former ASJE Board member and founder who traveled with us in her own car.

Our Roles

Dan connected us up to the up-coming event and negotiated our role in that event via cell phone and in person. Harry and Melissa organized the theater and songs at each event. Rachel filmed and interviews with help from Bethany and Emily. Rick drove the bus, raised local funds and talked with the commercial media. Bethany, Emily, and Chris set up the literature tables and loaded and unloaded the bus. All of us, except Rick, led the FTAA song.

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Entertainment

Harry Levine said that the bus trip and the march could be fun. He and Melissa Roberts created the theater and the songs as we went along. This entertainment was, I think, one of the best aspects of our contributions to the March culture. The FTAA song, which we sang at each event, was the “national hit” of the March.

External Relations with Broader Community

There were some reactions that seemed uniform no matter where we went.

People were curious about the bus, its history, functioning, where we slept, how it road, what biodiesel fuel was, etc. Reporters wanted to talk to the driver. Print and TV media wanted to use it for background shots. One reporter even told us to get the ASJE website painted on the bus which we did immediately.

Organizers, especially, but people in general were a little fearful of participating in our skit (Race to the Bottom) and weren’t sure about singing our song (FTTA No Way to the turn of YMCA). Nevertheless, every time we did the skit and sang the song, it was the hit of the event. People are generally really tired of being an “audience” and whether they know it or not, they want to be up and active.

People feel isolated from other communities and other struggles, even within their own state. They were happy to be part of something happening nationally. I didn’t expect this,

but there definitely was a feeling of isolation out there and, believe it or not, the bus helped to break this down and unify people.

I've always said that movements and their organizers need to move horizontally and tell stories from the previous town. This bus tour reinforced that belief. What became clear to me, however, was that the bus nationalized the local event. Usually it is the reverse, i.e. local events create national ones.

People don't know what to do about all this job loss and threat to their livelihoods and futures. They see the loss; they can't believe it; they can't believe how these US led trade agreements are facilitating the corporate move to cheaper labor, but they're not sure how to stop it except to defeat Bush.

Reactions to us did vary a good deal in each community and I think it had to do with whether they knew us before hand. Our March to Miami suffered a good deal from the lack of an ASJE advance person who would have helped each local group figure out how best to use us. Of course, we didn't really know what we would "BE" either so it was hard for local communities and hard for us to say exactly what the "March" would be.

Some organizers welcomed us with open arms and some acted as if we were some strange virus that might damage their reputation. Some called us "the bus people" and after we arrived they didn't know what to do with us. Some built us into their programs as an afterthought and some made us the entire program.

Negotiations with State Authorities

We did not need to negotiate with the authorities at any time on the march. All this was done by local organizers who organized the forums and the marches. While there was police presence at the marches, the only time their presence became intimidating was on our 34 mile march from Ft. Lauderdale to Miami.

Assessment and Post-March Characterization

Everyone knows. They know the job loss, environmental degradation can't go on. They understand NAFTA is an assault on their way of life. They see "corporations" and not "nations" or their peoples as the main enemy. Racist explanations have diminished.

Blue/Green collaboration is seen as necessary. This is mainly reflected in the speaking agenda of rallies. So, the understanding of the need for alliances is there but the institutional mechanisms to ensure it are not in place.

Local groups feel isolated, but the bus coming through town on a "national" tour cut down that isolation and "nationalized" their local struggle.

Information starvation. Working people are amazingly curious and interested in information that offers an explanation about what is happening to them. Have good information and plenty of it. If you raise a question – Stop the FTAA – you should have plenty of information to tell people what it is.

The Blue-Green Machine was not just a link to events in different cities, but an object of interest all by itself. We painted it; cleaned it, scripted it. It was a beautiful bus. Press wanted to talk to the driver. (Have a driver who knows what they're talking about) The press used it as background to local stories. People want to see where you sleep and how it is organized. They want to know if you are really going to go all the way to Miami. People will also give the bus funds to keep "the bus people" going. We raised almost \$4,000 just "passing the hat." -- The driver made the pitch.

Recruitment of people to the movement traveling horizontally is a critical task and you need one or two folks who do just that. Raffle off books, collect address cards, business cards, etc and then enter and secure the information.

Press. We had a great article in the Olympian the day we left. This article took a great deal of time to develop, but it was a great one AND it set the standard for press coverage for the rest of the trip. Other local reporters picked up on that article and kept up that type of coverage. Also, we had advance people who would talk to press and encourage them to come to the local event because it was in fact a "national" event.

Skits and Songs. People want to be active, even though they are prepared to listen to one boring speech after the other telling them how screwed they are. I think our skits that involved locals, especially young people, and our "FTAA No Way" song that made people get up and do an aerobic exercise were often our best contribution to the local event.

Link with a Group grounded in its community. We did our best to do this all along the way. The more the group was grounded in its community, the greater exposure we had to a large base of people. Here are a few examples.

The Spokane USWA members worked with faculty at the Spokane Community College to organize talks in three sessions. We talked with about 600 students between 8:30 am and 1:00 pm, passed out FTAA literature, recruited skit participants and invited them to the rally the next day.

The Montana Community Labor Alliance got the Blue-Green Machine entered as a float in the University of Montana Homecoming Parade. That day we had access to over 18,000 people gathered along the route of the March.

The Root Cause March from Ft. Lauderdale to Miami, 34 miles over three days. This March was organized by people grounded in Florida and Miami and they knew how to get their message opposing free trade out to the public and to the press despite heavy

police presence and intimidation. I don't think one person was touched by the police during those three days.

Things that I would change.

Advance people. I would have advance people who would work with local communities two to three months in advance. This was in my initial proposal, of course, but I could not get the money and I had limited time to do it myself. If I could raise the funds, I'd do this.

Stories. I'd find some way to record stories. I kept a workbook, but it was mainly filled with notes about upcoming events, directions, expenses, people's addresses, things to do, etc. We did have a student filmmaker who did record interviews and did make a documentary. We also had two people who wrote travel logs and put them on our website. Still, I would like to have a person who would write up stories right after they happened. I've written one which I've attached so you can see what I mean.

Literature. I'd change the literature we had on the bus. We didn't take time to find the best literature about the FTAA and get it on the bus. As a result, we printed something at the last minute that was not very good. We eventually found a good piece, (FTAA for Beginners) but by then we did not have the funds to get it copies. People as usual are very curious. Everywhere we went people wanted to know what the FTAA was and why we were going to Miami. We marched in the Missoula, Montana homecoming parade and could have passed out 18,000 copies of the "FTAA for Beginners," but we had only about 300.

Recruitment. I'd change the way we recruited names. We had an address card and used a book raffle to get names into the box, but we didn't do it consistently and lost lots of good contacts. Of course, there were lots of other groups at the local level collecting names and we didn't want to interfere with that, but next time we travel, some person(s) need to be doing this --- organizing is still "name, address and phone number."

Organizing History. I'd develop a concise historical statement about how people in the US have defeated corporate power and created viable jobs and communities. People would hear over and over again about how bad things are, but little about what to do, expect vote against Bush. Bush won't be beaten, nor the policies he implements stopped, without a broad social movement of resistance. People need to be reminded of their own history and young people need to be reminded that power concedes nothing without struggle and it is their turn to struggle or face the draft for Iraq and a future as a Wal Mart clerk.

A Break. I'd build in a break during the two months. As it worked out, we did have a week break at the end of October and it turned out to be a great idea. We were all tired of being on the road after one month.

Final Assessment

The sources of resistance to the New World Order seem to point to a common alternative.

Land and food sovereignty seem to be front and center with the Zapatistas, the Landless Peasant Movement of Brazil, the growing farm movement the US and Western Europe such as the Via Campesina.

Cultural autonomy against the intrusion of a consumptive and extractive US culture seems to be another course of resistance and alternative.

Maintenance of the idea of public resources and public knowledge seems to be another common alternative especially in the light of the attempted theft of "water" by transnational corporations and "knowledge" by Microsoft and others.