

RE:ACTION

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Participatory Action Research: Questions to ask

By Bruce Wallace

The goal of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is to have community members anticipate in every stage of the research. The research process is described as community building and transformative for the participants, as well as effective in creating change.

For years I have struggled to achieve these goals through my research with marginalized communities living in dire poverty. While each project had its successes, I consistently felt that none was truly participatory.

I began to wonder just how realistic PAR was for my work with the street community and other marginalized groups struggling with poverty, mental health issues and active addictions. How could individuals who faced significant barriers to participating fully in society be expected to participate fully in a social research project?

I came to several conclusions. The first is that PAR is too often romanticized as the all-empowering alternative to traditional research, regardless of the research question or community's interests. The second conclusion is that much of what is being called PAR — isn't. What was once called a consultation is now being called participatory. Finally, I realized that PAR could be redefined. Rather than asking how can we get communities to participate in research we could be asking how can we get researchers to participate in communities?

Instead of romanticizing PAR, we need a more realistic awareness of the real life struggles involved in putting this valuable theory into practice. With that goal in mind, I have created the following questions to ask before starting a PAR project in a marginalized community:

Is it relevant? Is this research project relevant to the community? How does the project fit into ongoing community processes? Are the research goals consistent with the goals of the community and are they relevant to what is currently occurring in that community? Most often an issue is relevant when it comes from the community to the researcher, rather than from the researcher approaching a community. Most of my research is the result of community groups identifying a problem, wanting to take action and asking me if I can help.

Will I be a drain? Community research is supposed

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What is Constable Erin doing to Jude?? Intrigued? See the story on page 7. (photo: Larry Wartels)



VIPIRG



to build on community assets, not be a drain on them. There should be a considerable transfer of resources to the community if the community is being asked to participate in a funded research project. There are too many examples of projects that seek participation without compensation. Often people “living the issue” are expected to volunteer their time as well as afford transportation and meals. Even for salaried participants, participating in the research means taking time away from clients or other agency priorities. I find that academia can sometimes idealize community participation, using words such as transformative, empowering and consciousness-raising. I have more limited expectations of the benefits of participating in research.

What are the barriers to participation? If community participation is a goal of the research process, then brainstorm possible barriers to participation and ways to overcome these barriers. In my experience, the greatest barrier is poverty. The most obvious way to overcome this barrier is to financially compensate community members for their participation. It is also more than a lack of money. Living in poverty may mean the person lives without a phone, without an alarm clock, unable to cash a cheque without a bank account or proper identification, and unable to legally earn money while receiving welfare. Addressing some of these barriers could mean providing incomes or honorariums for participation, child care (and caregiver) expenses, food at all meetings, and bus tickets. Finally, all of these should be advertised ahead of time and presented in a way that assures that these are the explicit benefits of participation. For example, people should not have to ask for their bus tickets, they should be offered generously. Remember also, that social service staff can be poorly paid and that they may face some of the same barriers that their clients face.

How much participation? This is a two-part question: how much participation at each stage of the process and also the degree of participation. Some research proposals state that they will include research participants at every stage of the research — from defining the issues, collecting the data, analyzing the data, writing the report, developing action. More often, there are various levels of participation at the various stages of research. This must be made explicit and

not assumed.

Next is the degree of participation — **how meaningful will the participation be at each stage?** Participation can mean many things to different people. Are you talking about consultation, collaboration or participant control? It needs to be made clear to community participants what the limits are on their power and access to resources and decisionmaking. Often the researcher needs to remain in control of the research process because they are responsible — they are accountable to the Ethics Office, to the funder, for deadlines, and ultimately it will be their name on the report. If this is the case, the participants need to be very aware that there are limits to their control over decisions.

What will the participants bring to the process? I find that when researchers seek community participation they inadvertently expect the community participants to be like-minded researchers. Community participants are distinct from researchers. Whereas researchers bring their research skills and knowledge of the subject area to the project, the community participants bring their life experience, experiences that are most often expressed in their stories. This difference must be respected. What does it mean to value the lived experience of a marginalized community participant? It means that a meeting includes time for people relating their stories; that this is as “on topic” as the agenda of the researchers. It may also mean allowing for anger within a meeting and many other emotions that result from marginalization and victimization. There are obvious power dynamics between the researcher and the participants — but be equally aware of possible power dynamics between participants. People within a community may marginalize others, be oppressive or have “power-over” roles.

What are my limitations in this project? Who are you in the research project? Are you part of the community participating, or an outsider? What is your conceptual baggage? How much time, energy and resources do you have for this project?

At what point do you plan to leave the process? Will you stick around for the action component regardless of how long it takes, or are you there for the research phase and leaving the action part to the community?

Researchers can leave a considerable negative wake behind them when their project ends and they remove themselves and their resources from a community. If a PAR project is successful in creating actions, there should be consideration to ensuring these actions are sustainable. Be clear about your limits and roles. In traditional research texts there is considerable attention to the research stage known as “entering the setting.” Researchers experienced in PAR may find that they have little difficulty entering the setting and instead struggle on how to exit the setting after the research is completed.

How flexible is this project? Expect that if “real” people are participating in the research process that there will be “real” unexpected issues arising throughout the process. Just as the community is being asked to participate in the research process, the researcher should be able to participate in the community processes or in the issues arising for individuals participating in the project. This is especially relevant for participants from marginalized groups. Too often researchers seek the views of marginalized people, such as the homeless, without being able to address the homeless individual’s immediate needs. What happens when a participant loses their housing or welfare? If there is a participant that is helping your research; can you help them? Involving participants with active addictions is not just difficult but potentially dangerous. Their ongoing participation may require support that extends well beyond the definition of the research project.

What are the possible negative impacts of this project? There are many possible negative impacts on a community and individuals that should be considered at an early stage. False expectations are a very real risk of community research. If people participate in an action research project, they may actually expect action; they may expect change. Unfortunately, the research may be too slow to meet the immediate needs of participants and the research may even misdirect the community’s efforts to meet these needs. Ask how can the negative outcomes be eliminated or reduced? To conclude, I think that PAR is a valuable methodology for research with marginalized communities but not a simple one. This research methodology is currently guided by the question “how do we get communities to participate in research?” The problem with this question is that it places the burden of change on the already marginalized community — it is those people who could participate in my research. PAR has great potential when we seek to change the researchers more than the communities. Therefore, rather than asking “how can we get communities to participate in research?” I think we should be asking “how can we get researchers to participate in communities?”

Bruce Wallace is the Research Coordinator at the Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG) and a sessional instructor at UVic’s School of Social Work. This article was originally published in the BC Association of Social Worker’s newsletter perspectives in May 2005 (Vol. 27 No. 3 pp. 16-17).

New to the Alternative Resources Library | DVDs



THE TAKE: Occupy. Resist. Produce. In Argentina, groups of workers are taking over bankrupt workplaces and running them democratically – without bosses. THE TAKE, a political thriller directed by Avi Lewis and written by Naomi Klein, is one answer to the question posed by both critics and supporters of radical movements worldwide: “We know what you’re against, but what are you for?”



WAL-MART: The High Cost of Low Price We soon should have a copy of this new documentary on the world’s largest retailer. The film shows the corporate giant’s inner-workings and communities and individuals struggles against the world’s wealthiest company. Hundreds of people showed up at Movie Monday’s local premiere of the film which was one part of a large and innovative grassroots strategy that included thousands of community screenings during t premiere week. From the makers of Outfoxed.

'New Clothes' for Empire in time for the Fall? Situating the Discourse of 'Democracy in Iraq' Amid Contemporary Thinking in International Law

by Andrew Bienefeld

In many ways an air of unreality has served to characterise public debate concerning the invasion of Iraq, both beforehand and after. Regrettably, this has perhaps been particularly so with regard to matters of international law. For whatever reason, mass media sources by and large failed unequivocally to allow for an actual advancement of the public debate by consulting trained experts from the field of international law that could facilitate a widespread basis for evaluating the validity, or the lack thereof, of the various specifically legal claims that were put forth. This sin of omission is difficult in some ways to comprehend given the centrality and seriousness of the topic for the future of international affairs, and indeed for what prospects remain for the emergence of a peaceful and sane world order within our lifetimes.

Both before and after the event public officials from the United States and Great Britain put forth a number of rationales for the March 2003 invasion. Certainly, the supposition that Iraq possessed a weapons of mass destruction program which constituted a threat to Western states was the only one which could theoretically imply any kind of basis for urgency in opting for war (although, to be clear, I would argue that even that argument in fact had no legal traction whatsoever). Nevertheless, even if it was the most prominent, this claim always appeared as one of a number of publicly declared reasons for initiating the war. Some of those arguments, in referencing Security Council Resolutions for example, were of an unmistakably legal nature. Others, however, such as the invocation of 'humanitarian intervention' have likely been intended to blur the line between political basis for action, and legal grounds. In recent months it is notable that much of what is said about Iraq in or on mass media outlets has focussed specifically on the supposed emergence of 'a democracy' as both an outcome and as a justification for the war there. What follows is offered as a brief outline of how lines of scholarship within the field of international law could and should have informed debates concerning the relationship of the 'democracy' as a concept to questions regarding the legitimacy of the violence unleashed on that country during the invasion and the occupation.

Those who would seek to justify the invasion of Iraq on the basis of spreading democracy are undertaking an extremely treacherous path. In no sense should the danger of that path be simply a retrospective thought provoked by the sustained

intensity of violence in that country that has burned so horrendously over the last two and a half years. Rather, where the exercise of power *between* peoples and states takes place in the absence of due process and accountability, there enters into the realm of imperialism. Therefore, if wars are to be made between states in order to create the conditions of democracy in one another, imperial relations can only be avoided in that process if a clear definition of what constitutes 'insufficient democracy' is achieved beforehand, and equally importantly, if a consensus is reached on what body or institution will act as the judge for meeting said standard.

A searing weakness in the mass media treatment of the concept of democracy as it pertains to the war in Iraq has been one of definition, or more specifically, the absence thereof. Journalists, however, can have little excuse for being unprepared for this question. Almost precisely eleven months before the invasion of Iraq a *coup* in Venezuela pointed to the centrality of the questions what constitutes 'democracy', how much is 'enough', and who is to decide these questions on a case by case basis? The Venezuelan experience also pointed specifically to the extent to which having a foreign power make said decisions constitutes imperialism, and the degree to which endorsements of the concept of 'democracy' by the government of the United States can be taken seriously.

Given that one of the great theoretical questions for lawyers of both domestic and international persuasions is to discern from whence law derives legitimacy for the power that it wields over people's lives - and that in the modern world 'democracy' is the principal rhetorical construct employed to endow legitimacy upon the persons and institutions that hold and express power - democracy is inevitably a concept of great interest to all theoretically inclined lawyers. Even so, despite the existence of states in a recognisable form for upwards of 350 years, it is only since 1991 that there has been any sense that fealty for democracy might conceivably have sufficient power as a concept to overrun the foundational truth of international law - which is the sovereign equality of states. At that time, following closely upon the end of the Cold War. Thomas Franck and Gregory Fox effectively launched the process among scholars of international law by arguing for the emergence of a right for peoples to live under democratic government, which Franck termed the 'democratic entitlement'.

As Frances Fukuyama, albeit rather comically,

pronounced the 'End of History', and George Bush the first declared the dawn of a 'New World Order' the conditions for nurturing such a claim could perhaps hardly have been more promising. And yet, for those who wish to argue that countries should be warred upon until they become 'democracies' the problem of definition has proven vexing to the extreme from the first. For one to know precisely whom to make war upon on this basis, one needs to settle on a definition that is both clear, and widely accepted. Despite a great deal of intellectual effort, however, no such definition was achieved. One of the more proficient efforts in this regard was that of legal scholar Christopher Joyner, who, writing in 1999 attempted to summarise the requirements for a fully functioning democracy as: 'full respect for human rights, . . . upholding the rights of minorities, children, women, and the elderly . . . an independent, respected, and impartial judiciary that is professionally run and staffed . . . honesty [within the civil service] . . . transparency . . . strict control and transparency . . . over campaign finances . . . elections to be free, fair and sustained . . . nongovernmental organizations. Civic education . . . Gender equality and equity.'

As one can readily apprehend, however, the outline offered by Joyner is fraught with pitfalls. Like seemingly all such writings on the matter, Joyner's ultimately collapses into a string of caveats, each of which in turn requires a new series of complex definitions. What precisely constitutes 'full' respect for human rights we may well ask? Further such questions abound. For all Joyner's efforts the following year the eminent Finnish legal scholar Martti Koskenniemi was moved to soberly conclude that such lists in fact tend to obscure more than they reveal, and that at very best they 'provide no more guidance than does a general commitment to the good.' The harm, in Koskenniemi's eyes, was principally that such lists serve only to filter complex realities on the ground through Western frames of reference that in almost all cases are entirely inappropriate for really comprehending the constellations of power in the given locale. Equally, in so doing the set of 'solutions' to be proscribed are defined entirely by the frames of the outside observer - a process that cannot help but be imperialistic from start to finish.

For all these problems with the bland 'either-or' frame for evaluating the concept of 'democracy' as a tool for understanding American efforts to shape domestic power structures in Iraq, the state of the debate in the field of international law throws up a further problem of massive import: the extent to which in a globalised world economy the state can any longer serve as a viable political model for organising power

in a democratic fashion. The intellectually compelling work in the field of international law done in the last decade, however, recognises that for democracy to be a meaningful concept it must ensure and facilitate peoples having the scope to make *meaningful* political choices concerning the shape of their lives as societies. In effect, a new theory of what democracy can and must mean has emerged as the result of widespread disenchantment - in many nations - at the failure of the post Cold War national and international political economies to deliver socio-political circumstances in which people and communities had control of their own lives. In effect, the liberal-democratic model, even in so far as such a thing might be possible to define, has nevertheless already failed to allow people to achieve self-determination in practical terms, just as it has failed for the most part to offer *sustained* hope for a better future (for the most recent example of such disenchantment readers may wish to familiarise themselves with the latest political developments in the Ukraine).

The encroachments of Inter-governmental Organisations (hereinafter IGOs) in the early and mid 1990s upon economic areas that were previously considered the sovereign space of states, in combination with the deterioration of state power in economic matters under the influence of globalisation, in turn helped to foster concerns about the actual import of domestic political processes in making the choices determining the future of societies. In light of the influence that the unelected officials at the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF have been able to wield over the elected officials of many states, the crystallisation of concerns about the weakness of states in governing the affairs of their people has translated into a rather widespread concern over the legitimacy of the power wielded by such IGOs in the absence of democratic policy making structures in such bodies. Equally the sense that the continuing message delivered by such institutions was that the solution to the problems of the present was to be 'more of the same' in policy terms, preached in political terms by some advocates of liberal-democracy, and economically by the Bretton Woods financial IGOs, rang of detachment from the gravity of the situations faced by many peoples.

The new vein of scholarship that emerged argued that the effects of globalisation were such that state sovereignty had so eroded that in order for peoples to regain control of their lives in effect compelled the democratisation of international institutions, if democracy was going to be a meaningful concept, rather than an empty rhetorical one. Pointing to the question of how power is legitimated, Cambridge's

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Susan Marks underlined that “Democracy” is in no sense a neutral term. Rather, in open defiance of the position put forth by Joyner, according to Marks democracy represents: ‘an essentially contested concept.’ Marks’ goes on to say ‘In no setting is the meaning of democracy a technical issue, on which a scholar might hope authoritatively to pronounce. Rather, the significance attached to “rule by the people” is always and everywhere a political struggle, with winners and losers and exceptionally high stakes. . . . democracy is defined and redefined not through scholarly *fiat*, but through the interplay of social forces.’ Later Marks summarised her critique of state based ‘liberal’ approaches to the question of democracy by stating succinctly that the pressure building to use multilateral instruments and IGOs to expand the scope for liberal democratic political structures around the world, but only within countries, is inherently flawed conceptually since there in fact exists a: ‘tension between liberalism and democracy. The liberal preoccupation with rights and freedom from government control, and the democratic preoccupation with equal participation in, and accountability of, public power, may point in different directions.’

Ultimately the merits, or perhaps even the lack thereof, of the position put forth by Marks are complex. Rather than seek to sketch them insufficiently in the space remaining I should say instead that the most important point is that in the field of international law matters have now developed to the point wherein no work can be considered to be of a serious nature if it does not at least show an awareness of the perspective outlined above, and provide some sort of answer to it. In the lead up to the Iraq War journalists for mass media outlets appeared to singularly fail not only to master the complexities of this issue, but indeed even to offer sufficient space (or time, depending upon the medium) to allow those who did to put forth their perspectives on the issue. The war in Iraq has given considerable reason to feel that if the term democracy is to be meaningful it must include rich debate about the full nature of the concept itself, otherwise the word can become an empty slogan and as such, can be used to justify violence on an industrial scale. There is yet reason to hope the term may be salvaged, but there is equally reason to be active in setting about the doing of it.

Andrew Bienefeld is a VIPIRG member and a doctoral student in law at the University of British Columbia. He received his Master of Laws in Public International Law from the University of Nottingham. Negotiations are currently underway to arrange for the web publication of a more extensive academic form of this argument, with full references, on the VIPIRG website.

To learn about an interesting Canadian group which is grappling in a sophisticated manner with the issues discussed in this paper please see the World Federalists of Canada (on the web: <http://www.worldfederalistscanada.org/>).

VIPIRG WELCOMES NEW STAFF!

Erik Haensel, Ethical Purchasing Coordinator

Erik has an extensive history of active involvement at the University of Victoria. Some of his accomplishments include spearheading the successful drive to convert all Student Society standard format paper use to 100% post-consumer waste paper, and participating in an ongoing drive to democratize planning and development at UVic. Erik has also been on the board of the University of Victoria Student’s Society, the University of Victoria Senate, and currently sits on UVic’s Board of Governors.

Jude Coates, No One is Illegal Coordinator and Indigenous Peoples’ Solidarity Working Group Coordinator

There are more wonderful things to say about Jude than there is space in this newsletter. Jude has been

involved with VIPIRG since way back in the day. This year, Jude is coordinating both the *No One Is Illegal Committee* and the *Indigenous Peoples’ Solidarity Working Group*. (what a star!). Unfortunately Jude will be leaving us (sob) as she is going to Argentina in December to reunite with her long lost deported darling. Bien Viaje Jude!!!!

Juilana Wigmore, Urban Agriculture Coordinator

Juliana is thrilled to be this year’s coordinator for VIPIRG’s Urban Agriculture Committee. Over the last several years, she has developed a passion for gardening and feels that integrating food systems into urban areas has an enormous potential to empower people by increasing food security individually and at a community level. She looks forward to assisting volunteers in organizing projects and realizing their goals for the committee in the upcoming months while maintaining a fun, positive environment. Past

projects have included hosting an Urban Agriculture Fair and Farmer's Market at UVic, producing a magazine, and providing workshops on worm composting, seed saving, and food preserving. The committee collectively decides on projects that it would like to pursue and is currently in the process of setting project goals for this year. So, if you are interested in food security, like to garden, or love food, please feel free to attend our weekly meetings every Wednesday at 2:30pm in the VIPIRG office (SUB B122), or e-mail agriculture@vipirg.ca for more information. Embrace the complexities of life - garden!

Erin Bett, Outreach Assistant

Erin started as the Outreach Assistant in October and is currently completing a degree in Environmental Studies and Political Science. UVic has a rich political and environmental culture, which she thinks is fully realized in VIPIRG; Erin is very grateful to have the opportunity to work for an organization that is so active in issues that she strongly supports. Her interests include: local environmental issues, such as offshore oil and gas exploration, and media politics. Erin looks forward to working with students and community members, and hopes to be able to encourage even more participation!

Indigenous Peoples' Solidarity Group Rallies to Defend Tahltan Elders

by Jude Coates and Erin Bett



VIPIRG's IPS Working Group members rally at the BC Legislature to defend Tahltan Elders. (photo: Erin Bett)

At 12:30 on October 31 2005, The Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Working Group and other community members gathered at the BC Legislature in support of the Tahltan traditional Elders. The rally was organized to send a message to government and corporations that environmental devastation and improper consultation with Indigenous Peoples is unacceptable.

On September 21 2005, nine Tahltan elders and four youth were arrested for blocking Fortune minerals from encroaching upon their land to establish coal bed methane mining in the Klapan region of the BC interior. This threat to Tahltan lands and the Sacred Headwaters directly impacts four major rivers which will affect many communities downstream for years to come.

"I have total respect for my Tahltan Elders. They represent the rights and responsibilities of the Tahltan people to protect their land. They are Dena nenn Sogga neh ine – the keepers and protectors of the land. They stand for and protect Tahltan Law which is being threatened by the government sanctioned Tahltan Central Council." Beverly Slater, Tahltan Law Student

Ron George, Hereditary Chief of the Wet'suwet'en Nation spoke to rally participants and the media:

"I respect and support my hereditary Chiefs who attended the blockade in support of the Tahltan Elders and we understand that the development in their traditional headwaters will affect those of us living downstream. Our court case found that aboriginal title has not been extinguished in BC and therefore the government must deal with the traditional people in a fair and just manner." Ron George, Tsaskiy, hereditary chief, Spooks House, Wet'suwet'en Nation; final year Social Work First Nations Specialization Student.

Although the elders were released a few days before the rally, which was set to coincide with their court date, the struggle is far from over. As Ron George said to those present at the protest, the Tahltan people will continue to be shut out of the decision-making process that directly affects them; as a result, they will continue to protest, and the government will continue to react as it has – with arrests instead of open dialogue.

This issue is not just about mining and resource extraction. It is about sustainable development. It is

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“Tabltan Rally” continued

about the inherent right of traditional peoples to govern their territories as they have for millennia. It is about the inherent right of the Tahltan to continue their stewardship over their lands.

“As a Canadian citizen it is my responsibility to hold my governments accountable for actions taken in my name. The provincial government claims to be building a ‘new relationship’ with First Nations, but is actually continuing to use old techniques of ignoring traditional First Nations governance structures. Arresting Tahltan elders is not a legitimate way to begin a relationship of ‘respect, recognition and accommodation.” Jude Coates, UVic Political Science student.

Jude Coates is VIPIRG’s Indigenous Peoples’ Solidarity Coordinator and Erin Bett is VIPIRG’s Outreach Assistant

Irene Fernandez: Defender of Human Rights

by Theresa Wolfwood

Malaysia is a paean to modern economic development. Downtown Kuala Lumpur looks sleek and prosperous; the Petronas towers, among the tallest buildings in the world, full of glittering shops and happy shoppers, rise golden over the superhighways, parks and elegant homes. The airport is an architectural triumph and a traveller’s dream of glass, trees and efficient function. Malaysia avoided the Asian economic crisis of the nineties with strong currency controls and nationalistic banking regulation; its prosperity continues.

The hidden cost of this development is the essential, exploitive part of “economic miracles” in today’s world: cheap labour. At the height of boom times, Malaysia had more than 2 million foreign workers, some legal, some not; all subject to arbitrary mistreatment, confinement and expulsion; even those who were properly documented were badly treated and denied basic human rights.

That is why Irene Fernandez, director of the human rights organization, Tenaganita, published a report in 1995 on the conditions and abuses of migrant labourers from surrounding Asian nations: **Abuse, Torture, Dehumanized Treatment and deaths of Migrant Workers in Detention Centres**. Rather than investigate the detailed information in the report, the Malaysian government harassed Tenaganita even though it admitted that 46 people had died of beriberi and other serious conditions in these camps.

In March, 1996 the Malaysian government came to her home and arrested Irene and charged her with “maliciously publishing false news.”

I met Irene at the UN Women’s Forum in Beijing in 1995; she was a strong and powerful presence at

workshops and rallies, speaking knowledgably about workers in homes, sweatshops and agriculture. She returned home to a life of uncertainty, harassment and a long legal struggle. In seven years, during Malaysia’s longest trial, she was in court more than 300 times to defend herself and her group, but never neglected the plight of the workers she defends.

In 1991, Fernandez helped establish Tenaganita (women’s force), a grassroots organization committed to establishing ‘protective tools’ for women. On the legislative front, the organization succeeded in establishing reform amendments to rape laws, model contracts for overseas domestic helpers, and a domestic violence act, which opened up complaint procedures for victims. Throughout her long legal struggles, Irene and Tenaganita continued their daily work of education, advocacy and action.

‘The trial has had a consciousness-raising effect educating the people about what is really happening,’ Fernandez said in an interview. ‘When I walk down the street, people stop me and say, ‘we believe in what you’re doing.’ Indeed, women’s organizations and migrant groups are organizing at the grassroots level more than ever. So, while free speech may be suppressed, free association is taking on new life.’

Tenaganita’s work includes immediate and urgent action, long term advocacy and education and providing facilities and a forum for migrants and women workers, those who have and people at risk from HIV/AIDS, domestic workers, general health concerns, regional health networking with other countries, workers who require interventions upon arrest, detention and legal support and victims of trafficking.. Appeals are requested internationally for urgent intervention. Housing and safe houses for single mothers, sex workers, and abused women

have been initiatives of Tenaganita,

There is also a program on Women, Chemicals and Cancer for farm worker exposed to Tenaganita has been intensively campaigning for the ban of paraquat since 1999. In 2002, the government banned paraquat after evaluating Tenaganita's study: Poisoned and Silenced. The full ban will only be realized in 2005 and currently the campaign is on to sustain the ban while powerful corporate forces want the ban overturned.

Article 19. UDHR Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

I visited Irene in 1998 and saw her office festooned with thousands of cards from supporter worldwide, calling for dismissal of her charges and recognition of the truth of her documentation. The campaign to help Irene has been supported by many international groups including Amnesty and Physicians for Human Rights. This support is still needed.

On October 17, 2003, the court found Irene guilty and sentenced her to one year in jail. The judge said, "The offence cannot be regarded lightly as it had tarnished the country's image." She is now free on bail, pending an appeal – but she tells me she cannot get an appeal court date. She is not allowed to run for political office and her passport is held by the government and she is frequently refused the right to travel. She could not attend or speak at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, 2004 where I had invited her to speak on a panel; we held an empty chair for her and helped publicize the campaign to have her charges dismissed and her sentence overthrown. The campaign called DEFEND THE DEFENDERS has wide spread local and international support. See www.tanaganita.net for details.

The government still refuses to investigate the conditions of migrant workers, in fact, the persecution continues and is reported to be worsening. This month a documented and legal Nepali worker, Mangal Bahadur Gurung, was sentenced to 10 months imprisonment and whipped after he filed a case against his employer for unpaid wages.

Irene places Tenaganita's work squarely in the anti-globalization movement. She says that economic prosperity and affluence for the global elite are based the oppression of many workers; the same struggle is played out everywhere – including Canada

where we see services and jobs constantly cut while corporate taxes go down and profits go up. Irene says, "We struggle for equality and people's rights. The struggle in the region in each country is to reaffirm our democratic rights. Workers everywhere must be treated with the dignity and the human rights everyone deserves." The Malaysian government, like all governments, undoubtedly knows this, hence the severity of the charges; if it admitted its exploitation, it would admit the failure of capitalism and globalization.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

After I returned from Malaysia in 1998 I was invited to speak on Irene's behalf at an event that celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights: a lofty document whose articles are brazenly broken every day around the world.

At the candlelight ceremony, I said the following:

"We recently had dinner at home with Irene, her husband Joe and their children. It's a nice townhouse in the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur, a bit worse for wear, decorated with family photos, religious art, social justice posters, tropical plants and filled with the noise of young people talking and laughing, television and telephones – in other words- what we would call a normal home.

Irene is a bit younger than me, also plump and casually dressed. I say this so you can feel Irene is just an ordinary person, someone you can imagine as a friend and neighbour. She is also a person of great commitment and courage

At some point years ago, her commitment to social justice took her out of the safety of her home. Courage carries her to face a jail sentence with serenity, because, like us she fervently believes in human rights and justice for all.

If we hold Irene in our hearts, always, may we be moved to act as courageously, so that when our time comes we may recognize the call and stand as bravely as Irene and with Irene, and accept the consequences of our dedication to human rights with grace. May we believe that what we do can help create a better world for all. Let us go out tonight and

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“Fernandez” continued

every night, and carry candles of courage and hope, and the image of Irene and her work for human rights into the world.”

ACTION: Write to the following and call for the dismissal of charges against Irene Fernandez. Ask them to respect the rights of all in Malaysia and to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Prime Minister Dato Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, Gov't. Admin. Centre, Bangunan Perdana Putra, 62502 Putrajaya, Malaysia. And to: His Excellency Dennis Joachim Ignatius, High Commissioner of Malaysia, 60 Boteler St. Ottawa, ON K1N 8Y7 Canada.

Theresa Wolfwood is a member of VIPIRG's Coordinating Collective and is the Founder of the Barnard-Boecker Centre

**Film Review: STEALING A NATION. 2004. UK. John Pilger.
by Theresa Wolfwood**

If we learned in all the sentimentality of the reporting of the Tsunami tragedy of December 2004, that lives could have been saved if the USA military had passed on the warning from its gigantic base on Diego Garcia, we have John Pilger to thank. In fact, if we have ever even heard of this base in the Indian Ocean, it is thanks to Pilger. This documentary, by the international award winning Australian journalist and film maker, tells the shocking story of the UK government's gift of the Chago Islands, including Diego Garcia, to the USA. The Chagossians lived a paradisiacal existence on these tropical islands; they used much loved pet dogs to fish for them; the dogs swam out and returned with fish in their mouths for their owners. One of the first acts of the USA military occupation in 1971 was to kill all the dogs with fumes from their vehicles. Then they “swept and sanitized” to prepare the island for its one billion dollar base - all the Chagossians were secretly expelled from their paradise and left without hope or help in the slums of Mauritius. It is a microcosm of the global takeover by the ruthless USA empire. Pilger documents all this, using old film from the pre-occupation to the present, as the determined Chagossians challenge the UK in court to return their beloved homeland to them.

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