

Cancun Journal #1: Tuesday, 8/26/03

I'm here in Cancun City to help in organizing for the mobilization against the upcoming ministerial of the World Trade Organization. Cancun City is, in its own way a perfect example of the model of globalization we're fighting against. The city is crunched between the jungle and the sea, on the mainland just where the long, skinny, island of the hotel zone launches out into the blue bay. The island is cool and breezy, shaped like a 7 with Cancun City at the upper tip, the airport at the lower, and the conference center where the ministerial will take place at the jutting point. The city is hot and sticky, an open-air sauna where all the workers who service the hotels live. There is nothing on the island but big hotels and a few malls and shops for the tourists, all on a gigantic scale, like Las Vegas with waves beyond the sand, There are glossy modern hotels and pseudo Mayan temples and faux Colonial mansions and huge resorts hidden from the common view by gates and fences, where those who have the money can repose at leisure while those who serve take the bus home each night to a simple palapa which probably has no flush toilet, as two-thirds of Cancun residents are not hooked into the sewer system.

Six of us arrived together last night from northern California. We flew in with no problems and met up with some of the rest of our team who had come from Texas. Part of our goal is to create an eco-camp for the encampments being planned for the thousands of campesinos and students who will soon arrive. We got in late in the evening, took a taxi to the house occupied by the Puente de Cancun, a group of internationals here to help set up a media convergence and help network with others who are coming. Lisa and Juniper, our friends from Texas, had come in early and were at a meeting, so we went over to the house rented by the Comite de Bienvenidos, the local group arranging spaces and organizing forums. We all met up, went out, drank beer, and reconnected with others we'd met a few weeks ago who are also organizing. Hector is working with the youth and the cultural events and also with the Comite--he is tall and lean and a great dancer. Last time we were here there was music

every night at the Parque de Palapas, the central park of downtown Cancun, with a stage covered by a tall, steeped, thatched pyramid of a roof, and we danced salsa in the hot, sticky, midnight air. Cesar is working on networking with unions and doing outreach--he is small and fiery. Agostin is a sandy-haired Argentine who seems to pick up a lot of pieces. Anna and Otto are students from the group we met in Mexico City. Ramor from the Puente had brought his beautiful baby out, and there were others who had just arrived and we all felt festive, though very tired. Then we gathered our stuff and piled into taxis and our rented car and went to the house which we'd just managed to acquire, a big, lovely residence a bit far from the center of town but with lots of big rooms and a refrigerator and four bathrooms and even air conditioning! Since we are expecting another thirty or so of our closest friends to join us soon, we needed a big place and may even look for another to rent.

We woke up in the morning and ate breakfast, met, and then four of us went out to the Casa de la Cultura to look at the site where we are expecting to have the encampments. It's a big building complex surrounded by soccer fields, four or five of them, all bare and blisteringly hot. Like most places in the tropics, the soil here is not very fertile--all the fertility is locked in the biomass of trees and plants, but when they are removed the earth becomes a hard, alkaline plain. But around the edges of the fields are lush patches of green, giant grasses, fine-leaved acacias with beautiful orange flower, guava trees and others I don't know. Leaving my own bioregion, where I know all the trees and most of the other plants, and coming to this exuberant jungle is like going to a wild party where you don't know hardly anybody.

We find lots of potential resources--rock, plenty of material to cut for mulch, even broken tiles for mosaics. Workmen are busy pruning and cutting grass with their machetes and making piles of just what we need for compost and brush berms and other permaculture techniques. A man comes out of the main building, greets us in a friendly way, says, "Oh, you must be preparing for the event." When Erik explains to him what we're doing, he goes to talk to the workmen to ask them to leave the brush piles for us.

Then we all pile into the car, which involves Juniper sitting astraddle the clutch with me in the passenger seat, and five people piling into the back, Erik lying curled up on top of the others in a fetal position.

We drive out to walk around the conference center while we still can, before the security zone is established. The conference center is a huge, concrete building surrounded by huge, concrete buildings, giant restaurants, a shopping mall where a couple of weeks ago I got a \$3.50 single cone of ice cream, and big hotels where we'd popped in on our earlier trip to sit at the bar while tourists got on stage and embarrassed themselves and really bad music was playing, not nearly as good as what was offered for free at the Parque de Palapas. Now some of our group goes for a swim at the small public beach behind the giant hotels, while we sit and watch pelicans diving a few feet away from us. Two of them seem to be a mated pair who must have been ice dancers in a former life; they wheel and turn and dive in perfect unison, hitting the water with wings spread in elegant diving form,

We circle up on the beach, make an offering to the waves of waters of the world, water we've collected over many years from sacred places and political actions. We ask for help from the land and the sea and whatever powers lie behind them. It seems all too likely that we'll need it.

Then the rest of the day is taken up with lunch and shopping for necessities and gossiping about all the convoluted internal politics of the various organizations involved in this action, and tracking down Maria Elena, who is working with UNORCA, the campesino organization and helping to plan the encampments. She sets up a meeting for us with someone in the city administration, stresses that we need to bring our proposal printed up in Spanish, and dress a bit professional. So we spend a long evening hammering out our ideas for graywater systems and compost bins and rainwater catchment and writing up materials lists and talking points. And now it's 1:30 AM and if I end this and go to bed, it will be the earliest I've gotten to sleep in days. Meanwhile Mars hovers closer to the earth than he's gotten in 60,000 years. Planeloads of federales arrive and announce that they will not tolerate illegal activity but intend to return "an eye for an eye." Does that mean, I wonder, if we sit down quietly and pacifically in the road that they will join us in a nonviolent sit-in?

Somehow I don't think so. Good night.

-- *Starhawk*

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