

**Latin Meeting on a Culture and a Socioeconomy of Solidarity
PORTO ALEGRE (Brazil), August 1998**

LETTER FROM PORTO ALEGRE

We belong to various organizations and institutions dedicated to the promotion of a socioeconomy of solidarity. We have worked for many years in urban and rural cooperatives and associations (industry, services, rural and agricultural production), self-managed enterprises, trade union organizations, commercial networks, educational centers, solidarity groups and local governments. As a step forward in this process, we met to reinforce the exchange and cooperation networks we have built, and also to evaluate our efficacy, the effects and the deep meaning of what we have been doing.

We are more than one hundred persons – women, men, youth, working children, professionals in various areas, rural and urban workers, and representatives of local governments, coming from both sides of the Atlantic. We come from villages, communities, and nations of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela), and of the European Union (France and the Spanish State).

Together we have understood that, despite the distance and the different circumstances of our specific contexts, the weight of the global capitalist economy and its model of operation bear similar situations of social and economic injustice and imply a permanent threat to the lives of human beings and of the planet itself.

Such an economic model generates growing and widespread unemployment, new and old forms of exploitation, particularly of children, youths, and women, situations of extreme poverty and lack of basic material means for a human being's dignified life. In addition, it generates dissatisfaction, lack of perspectives, and the waste of talents and skills of millions of peoples, who are considered as mere objects of production, consumption, and taxation. It also generates the destruction of cultural and environmental diversities.

Why not become subjects of a creative and satisfactory work, free from oppression and exploitation, and which produces what we lack in order to meet our needs – cultural, physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational?

Why produce only as a function of an unjust market that depletes and exploits, denying us the chance to manage both the production and the economy for our own service, for the service of all citizens, and of all peoples of the planet, as well as for future generations?

Why delegate the management of such important realms of our lives, as are health, education, urbanization, housing, work, and the management of our economic resources?

Why remain subordinated to the will of transnational corporations, States, and international institutions that identify themselves with corporative and exclusionary interests, if together, with our collective force, we can create public spaces, States, and new organizations that serve society's empowerment, so that it becomes the leading subject of its own development in an autonomous and self-reliant way?

Our proposal is a socioeconomy of solidarity as a way of life that encompasses the totality of the human being, that announces a new culture and a new form of producing to fulfill the needs of each human being and of the entire humanity.

We have observed that our experiences have much in common: a thirst for justice, a logic of participation, creativity and processes of self-management and autonomy. We have been able to experience the real power of people and human communities when they:

- 0* promote production initiatives with a meaningful sense of work to develop themselves fully as free people, who know why and for what they work and produce, and to respond to the needs of entire populations while respecting nature;
- 1* organize themselves and decide to control the destiny of all their resources, including financial resources;
- 2* organize and coordinate themselves to exercise their immense power as consumers in a conscious and sustainable fashion, to control the quality of products and services, and to promote economic relations based on justice, solidarity, and co-responsibility through all the links of the production, distribution, commercialization, and consumption chains;
- 3* live as coherent people, who transform their attitudes and relations in a way that mirrors their action for social transformation.

We believe that like ours, there are innumerable positive experiences around the world. Experiences that propose important functional changes in the way one participates in the economy, culture, politics, and in social relations in general.

That is why we want to share our experiences with all those who are already committed to and motivated by these goals while reminding them of the importance of coming together and strengthening such experiences. And, to those who still are not involved, encourage them to organize themselves freely, together with their fellow citizens to build a society where it is possible to enjoy life, build relations of sister/brotherhood and solidarity, and smile each morning because we are assuming the responsibility of managing our lives and of filling them up with meaning and love.

**PARTICIPANTS OF THE LATIN MEETING ON
A CULTURE AND A SOCIOECONOMY OF SOLIDARITY**

Porto Alegre, August 9, 1998

The Porto Alegre Meeting was promoted by the following institutions:

- 4* The Alliance for a Responsible and United World – Workshop on a Socioeconomy of Solidarity
- 5* CASA – Autonomous Collectivity of Self-Managed Solidarity, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
- 6* CASAL - Autonomous Collectivity of Solidarity with the Latin Area, Spain
- 7* FACCTA – Autonomous Federation of Catalan Cooperatives and Associational Work, Cataluña
- 8* FCTAC – Cooperative Federation of Associative Work of Cataluña
- 9* PACS – Institute of Alternative Policies for the Southern Cone of Latin America, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil