

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
Nelson, B.C. Canada

August 10, 2006

Title: The Solidarity of Others in Our Own Defense

Producer/Host: Jon Steinman
Transcript: Pat Yama

Jon Steinman: And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one hour radio program produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. My name's Jon Steinman.

Previous broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner have explored the influence of large food and agricultural corporations. We have explored the efforts small local businesses are making to provide local and healthy food to their communities. Voices have been heard on the topic of genetically modified ingredients and the effect decreasing supplies of oil will have on our food system. And all of these broadcasts ultimately address one subject and that is food security.

One widely-held perception is that food security simply refers to a community's ability to respond to poverty and feed the hungry. But that is only one small part of food security, and on today's broadcast we will look to address this misperception and to do so, we will explore the root causes *of* hunger. The term food sovereignty will be introduced and that will take us from Africa to Mexico where indigenous communities are fighting to protect their culture and their food from globalization. And from there we will arrive in South Central Los Angeles, where recent events have perhaps provided one of the most concrete illustrations of how lost and misguided the North American connection to food has become.

As will be discovered by exploring the many struggles for food sovereignty waging around the world, we will better identify how much control *we* here in Canada and North America have lost in relation to *our* food supply.

And lending their voice to today's program will be Anuradha Mittal of the California-based Oakland Institute; Charles Levkoe of SunRoot Farm in Nova Scotia; Refugio Gregorio of the Indigenous Women's Cooperative in Oaxaca, Mexico; Antonio Villanueva Feliciano of the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca; Emilie Smith of the Vancouver-based Ecumenical Task Force for Justice in the Americas; and also today's Spanish translator. And we will hear voices of the farmers and protestors who have been fighting against the destruction of the South Central Farm located in the middle of Los Angeles.

increase music and fade out

Should you wish to further explore today's topic and previous broadcasts, by all means visit the Deconstructing Dinner website which is cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

The title of today's broadcast is a quote first said by Praxedis Guerrero in 1906, and it reads, "The Solidarity of Others is Our Own Defense." And so what does this title mean and what are we defending. Well for the purpose of today's broadcast, we are defending the easy access to food;

we are defending the ability of local farmers to earn a living; we are defending food that is grown and produced in environmentally friendly ways. And tying it all together, we are defending our own food security. In other parts of the world this idea has also been termed food sovereignty or perhaps food justice.

In trying to identify why food security is such an important idea or human right, we can very easily look to other countries and other cultures where people are much more connected to their food than we are here in Canada and North America. Within these cultures are people who have joined together to resist our disconnected food culture that is spreading its reach around the planet through globalization. And these alliances created within and among communities to oppose this, is the very solidarity the title of today's broadcast refers to "The Solidarity of Others is Our Own Defense."

Back in March of this year 2006, I sat down in the studio here with Charles Levkoe who was then the Urban Agriculture coordinator at The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto. He has since moved on to become part of a Community Supported Agriculture Co-operative in Nova Scotia. But it was during that conversation that Charles helped define food security, and this provides the launch of today's broadcast.

Charles Levkoe: So food justice is a term that I've started to use more that's come from the use of a number of terms that have been used across Canada, across local communities and across right around the world as well. Food security is a term that, I mean most people in Canada have been using and is used and food security often refers to this idea of trying to really increase access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food that's been produced in an environmentally sustainable way. I think the challenge with that term and it's all semantics when it comes down to it but you know language is very important and I think, talking about language is also a way to sort of understand not only what's happening but also the way people are thinking about these issues. And food security is a challenging term because first of all whenever I do workshops with youth and I talk about food security the first thing they all think about is, you know terrorists, you know putting chemicals in food and how it's going to kill the whole population and they get really worried about that. And another challenge, I mean that's one of the main challenges is just people conceptualizing what is this food security especially in the current sort of geopolitical climate and it's sort of "war on terrorism" that's going on.

And another, I think it's challenging though also because a lot of folks in the global south, the majority world use the term food sovereignty which is another sort of big issue and that really looks at the central issues that are happening down there and the way people are really looking for ways to sort of claim sovereignty over their own food whether it's the growing of food, the exporting of food, the importing of food, and it's something that is a very different issue for the north and the south. And they're both very important and I think for me, food justice is a term that has really sort of brought not only those two issues together but a lot of the issues around food.

JS: As will be better illustrated later on today's broadcast, food sovereignty or food security is in the current economic climate threatened by the modern methods in which food is grown, produced and sold. Methods of which we are almost all inescapably a part of. Now while Charles Levkoe does not denounce the concept of profit, he does mention how profit rarely serves the majority of the population.

CL: The market is a very nebulous concept because I think that in an ideal world we might have a market that could really serve. The population could really, you know respond to the needs of a

population. Unfortunately we don't live in an ideal world, we live in a world that governed by capitalism and what that comes down to is that the market is deciding what is needed based on profit. And you know, profit is not I don't think a demonizing concept, it's not something that is always bad but it is something that when we look at who's being served by the market at this point, it's not the people who, it's not the majority of population. It is the people who have the majority of the money or the majority of the funds to purchase the products that are available. So what we see is - I mean food and a part of the reason I really like talking about food is because it's really a way to understand the way society functions. A perfect example is, in Toronto, I'm assuming most cities are probably the same - a really sort of explicit example of it is if you walk into a Loblaw's which is in Toronto, the sort of higher end grocery store, you'll find fabulous produce, a whole selection of organic produce, generally food that is in very good condition. I mean it's the best place to shop. On the other hand, we have the No Frills which is owned by Loblaw's by George Weston and it is literally the place where the food that isn't - so it doesn't make the high standard quality that Loblaw's sells, goes. So you literally have a sort of dichotomous grocery store system where, you know the best is going to one place and the less than best is going to the other place. And No Frills is where the majority of people have to shop.

JS: And that was Charles Levkoe of SunRoot Farm in Kennetcook, Nova Scotia. More info about Charles can be found on the Deconstructing Dinner website.

As mentioned earlier, a common misperception when addressing food security is that this term simply deals with poverty, responses to hunger and food banks. And while this represents a very important part of addressing food security or food sovereignty, this remains only one small part of a much larger issue. And this misperception leads us into a debate over what causes hunger. The answer has traditionally been poverty, and the response, traditionally and to this day, food aid. But exploring this debate and exploring the root causes of hunger, leads into this topic of food security or food sovereignty because the very same causes of hunger are also the very same causes of food insecurity or of the loss of food sovereignty.

A recent report to address this very topic is one released by The Oakland Institute, a policy think tank created in 2004 and based in Oakland, California. The report titled, "Food Aid or Food Sovereignty" indicates how there is a sufficient amount of food on this planet to feed every human being, and so if not scarcity then why hunger?

To help expand on this report, we will hear footage from an interview with Anurhada Mittal, the Executive Director of the Oakland Institute. This courtesy of RadioActive a weekly program produced at WERU, a community radio station located in Blue Hill and Bangor Maine.

Anuradha Mittal: This is actually the title of a new report that the Oakland Institute had just published, Food Aid or Food Sovereignty and it's a crucial time to be looking at this issue. Most of the listeners might have been, might have seen on television or read in the newspapers, headlines about the famine in Niger on which 3 to 4 million people in Niger are starving and the response has been to send food aid which has been a day late response. But the question that we need to ask is what causes hunger. Most of us tend to believe that hunger is the result of shortages of food production and that is a total myth. In fact according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, we have enough food to provide over 2,720 kilocalories per person per day around the world. So the reasons for hunger are rooted in issues of injustice, of social inequities of poverty, and dismantling of state intervention and agriculture. And that is why the concept of food sovereignty is becoming increasingly important and has to be the rallying cry for all of us if we want to really deal with world hunger.

JS: While food aid is often seen as a key response to world hunger and catastrophe, as Anuradha Mittal indicates, food aid is simply an integral component of our North American food system.

AM: First of all when you think of food aid our reaction tends to be this is a wonderful way of showing a benevolence of being good neighbours, good community members in this globalized world. But the problem is that food aid initiated in 1954 has remained and continues to be a tool for promoting foreign policy interest as well as for promoting trade. It is really a way of dumping surpluses from countries such as United States and to assure in a market for agribusinesses in the United States and then the food is dumped in countries such as Niger. It brings the prices further down which is basically destroying livelihoods of small farmers in countries such as Niger.

If we look at what happened in Niger and even Doctors Without Borders are stating that, that they are actually distributing food to people who are too poor to buy food in the market. As a result of these international financial institutions such as the World Trade Organization, World Bank/IMF, countries such as Niger have dismantled. For example, the Grain Marketing Board which were responsible for providing support to their farmers which were responsible for maintaining price control. Now with them being dismantled, frankly the price of the food is determined by the market and there's black marketing going on that the food is being hoarded. So the Doctors Without Borders have said we are distributing food to the poor people and there is actually not the shortage of food production.

If we want to address issues such as world hunger we will have to look at what can be done with the agricultural policies in sectors in countries such as Niger. It will require state intervention, the kind of state intervention we have seen in countries such as the United States. If we look at the Farm Bill, the kind of subsidies that continue to be provided to the large agribusinesses, the way programs are created such as food aid programs to assure markets for them. That same kind of intervention is required in countries such as Niger so they can maintain their markets for the farmers. In fact our research shows, which is using numbers from food and agriculture organization, over 852 million people are estimated to be hungry in the world today of which 50% are small producers. So we have created agricultural policies which are starving our food producers.

JS: As Mittal indicated, food aid is simply a tool for promoting foreign policy interests and trade. Now while some may hear such a comment and denounce what perhaps sounds like a conspiracy-type theory, this is actually very much a part of the USAID program that is not hidden in any way whatsoever. As I took a brief look through the USAID website, located directly on one of the pages reads the following:

“Foreign assistance is a valuable foreign policy tool in terms of promoting U.S. security interests and its economic interests.”

And a link to this website will be provided on the Deconstructing Dinner website cjly.net/deconstructingdinner,

soundbite

JS: As our North American food system spreads its way around the world, we begin to see the success it has had in disconnecting both farmers and the general public from the food that sustains us. There is most certainly a problem with our food system when farmers themselves are going hungry, and as Anuradha Mittal explains, this situation is not just exclusive to those in third-world countries, but this takes place right here in North America.

AM: The most striking figure for me is that some of the listeners might be aware of the fact that farmers in India have been committing suicide. And it is estimated that between 1997 and 2002, over 25,000 farmers have taken their own lives because they had gone into debt as they were told to kind of get on the treadmill of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. And when the crops were ready there were no markets for them. So they were left in debt and very little choice left and they took their own lives. But what is even more shocking for me is that the number one cause of death among farmers in the United States is suicide. It is the same agricultural policies which are killing farmers in third world countries, the same policies are pushing our small family farmers in the U.S. to the brink as well.

JS: While the global market is increasingly pushing family farmers out of business, the economics of why this is can sometimes appear to be rather confusing. But Anuradha Mittal explains it quite well in the following clip, as she describes how countries like the United States are creating poverty and creating hunger.

AM: So for example, with the World Trade Organization it is a requirement for countries to remove agricultural tariff which means that taxes that they might have had through say on a crop like corn. And if corn, you know they're growing a lot of corn, they want to protect their farmers so they would have taxes for corn that would come in from outside. But because of these trade agreements, countries have been forced to remove such tariffs. And at the same time, in order to create a level playing field that every farmer has equal opportunity, that's what it means a level playing field, you would have to remove subsidies. Now in third world countries such as India or Mexico, thanks to the World Bank and IMF structural programs, those kind of support have already been taken away. But in the United States, if we look at the last Farm Bill, 2002 Farm Bill, subsidies were increased by 180 million dollars over a period of 10 years.

So what happens is that here is the U.S. agribusiness – now please note I'm not saying U.S. family farmers, these are not small farmers these are large agribusinesses such as Cargill and Archer Daniel Midland who control over 70% of the world's grain trade. They are the ones who have the subsidies. So what happens is they can produce lots and they are able to sell it to other countries at below the cost of production. So if it costs say, \$1.00 to produce a bushel of say wheat – I'm just making up the figure, they can actually put it into India for say \$0.50 per bushel. Now given that kind of inequality because Indian farmers will not have the subsidies, they do not have the support, they are not able to match that price. Because if they match that price there's no point for them to be growing those crops. So this artificially reduced prices which are actually created by giving subsidies to large agribusinesses, you're able to take over the market in another country. Now the result of that is that the small family farmers are being displaced from land and as a result of that it's a handful of corporations who gain control of a food system because they're the ones who'll then determine the prices, who will determine what is grown and how it is grown. So given that context it is becoming impossible for family farmers to be able to stay in business.

JS: And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour program that takes a look into how our food choices impact ourselves, our communities and the planet.

As Anuradha Mittal has just recently explained, farmers and families around the world suffer when their country's markets are opened up to our North American ways of growing, producing, and trading food. Mexico is one of the closest examples to us here in Canada of a country who is in the process of instituting a food system not so different from ours. There, exists a very large population of people who have been negatively affected by this aspect of globalization and are fighting to preserve their culture and their food.

AM: So if you look at the case of Mexico, thanks to NAFTA, North American Free Trade Agreement, since 1990 when it was or 1995 when it was started, you find that almost 500 farmers have been displaced from land each day. So the liberalization of agriculture has already started, third world countries have already made huge concessions opening up the market, thinking they would have market access but that market access has yet to come.

But the other important issue that I want to highlight, that it is not just about subsidy. It is the real question is about the recipe for development that has been offered to third world countries. That instead of supporting the small family farmers and maintaining their biodiversity they have been told to focus on cash crops. To focus in converting the agriculture into trade and commodities by growing cotton or coffee for exports. But what happens then is that you're basically destroying your food sovereignty, your food security and you're becoming dependent on other countries. In fact, Via Campesina, which is the world's largest small farmers movement has said that they want market access. But they want market access to their own domestic markets, to the local region instead of these promises of international market access.

JS: And we will hear from Anuradha Mittal later on today's program, because while on the topic of Mexico, we here at Kootenay Co-op Radio had the recent privilege of inviting two indigenous Mexicans into our studio to speak about their struggle to preserve their culture in the face of our North American relationship to food. Both Refugio Gregorio and Antonio Villanueva Feliciano were recently in Canada to attend the World Peace Forum held in Vancouver in June of this year 2006. And on their way, they stopped in Nelson and spoke with Kootenay Co-op Radio's Rebecca Craigie about their struggles in the state of Oaxaca.

As of the date of this broadcast, August 10th, the current situation in Oaxaca is incredibly tense, and I will shortly provide you with information on that situation there.

Also joining Refugio and Antonio in the studio was Vancouver-based Emilie Smith who has long been an advocate for indigenous rights in both Mexico and Guatemala. Emilie Smith acted as the translator during this interview.

As Antonio Feliciano will indicate in this upcoming clip, the struggles to protect their culture, are not so different from ours here in Canada, but while many Canadians would not identify such struggles taking place here, perhaps in our case, we have yet to identify any problems with our food system on the same scale of what has been identified by the indigenous populations of Oaxaca.

And here's Rebecca Craigie.

Rebecca Craigie: Antonio Feliciano, aka Panda is an indigenous youth from Oaxaca living in Mexico City as a migrant for 10 years. Since 2003 he has worked for the Indigenous Peoples Centre. Antonio has suffered the repression of the Mexican government by being in prison three times and has been badly beaten at protests against NAFTA and the WTO in Monterey, Cancun and Guadalajara. He is involved in developing training an empowering workshops about peaceful resistance, alcoholism, and substance abuse as well as organizing music concerts to collect funds and resources for community development projects in Oaxaca. With him is elder Refugio Gregorio Bautista, better known as Doña Vicky. She founds her resistance in the preservation and celebration of her traditions and is happy to share these with all. From the making of mole and chocolate to the forms and ways of praying. She's a devout Christian as well as someone who has deep knowledge and practice of traditional indigenous spiritual ways. She is Mixteca, originally

from Oaxaca. She is a founding member of the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca and of Margarita Magôn Women's Co-op which we will hear more about.

In 2005 she was chosen as President of the women's co-op that currently produces textiles, mole which is spicy sauce for chicken and other foods, chocolate, coffee, honey, and straw crafts. She headed the protest against McDonald's and Walmart in Oaxaca City using traditional food to promote healthy eating and local traditions against junk food. She has participated in taking a leadership role at the protest against free trade agreements and has attended multiple international meetings in Guatemala, El Salvador, and now Canada. And we have these very special people with us in the studio here with us as well as their translator, Emilie Smith who will be here translating for us.

Interview

RC: Good morning.

RG & AF: Good morning.

RC: Bienvenido a Canada, Nelson.

RG & AF: Muchos gracias.

RC: Is this your first time to Canada?

RG: Si. This is the first time they've come here.

RC: Okay and do you like it so far?

RG: It's been lovely, so beautiful and people are so warm.

RC: Okay.

AF: It's really beautiful, a lot of natural resources. And we see the richness and culture as well. What we've discovered in our visit are the same problems we find in Mexico. Of course, the reality is different. The problems in Mexico are more severe, more serious in some ways.

JS: As the interview conducted by Kootenay Co-op Radio's Rebecca Craigie progresses, we hear from Refugio Gregorio about the purpose of their visit to Canada, and how their people are being repressed by the Oaxaca State government.

RG: We come to meet people and to let them know about our life in Mexico. Because we can see how different life is here. We sometimes say we're dreaming when we're here. Everything here is so different. People are treated so differently and where we come from we're very seriously repressed. Just because we're indigenous people, we're badly treated.

RC: So now you have some experience in fighting against this repression.

RG: Yeah, that's our life (laughs). For example on the 14th of September last year we were repressed. All of our human rights were violated on that day. We were beaten and abused, women were raped and they were taken to jail. There were 14 of our people went to jail that day. One of

our friends is in Vancouver who's in exile because the government is planning on killing him, our government, our Mexican government.

RC: Now why did this happen September 14th?

RG: Because we were protesting in the central square of our state. We were peaceful of course and we have a lot of arrest orders against us. And our goal is for the people to wake up and because the government is working very hard to take away their forest for example, their forests, their way of life, their traditional ways of being, everything. Everything that we have within our state and in our villages, they don't like it that we go and make a big scandal in the central square. They don't want the tourists to see this side of Mexico. Oaxaca is a tourist centre that has a lot of history and they don't like that and that's why they repress us. There's so many poor people in our communities, they're just under such bad conditions. The government only goes to look after them when they need them. And they go there to look for them and to offer them all sorts of things so that they'll vote for them and these political parties. We will sit down in a chair when we get there. When they get into power they just forget about the poor people where they have gone off to steal their votes. And they don't give them what they promised. There's so many communities that don't have water, light or electricity, or doctors. The people are dying because there's no medical attention. They go put a little shack and they call it a health centre but there's not even a nurse or a doctor so why do they even bother. So all of this, the people make demands around these issues and they come down to the city to demand their rights and for demanding their rights, that's why we are beaten. And they make the police come and chase us or beat us.

JS: And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour program produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia, My name's Jon Steinman.

In this next clip we hear from Antonio Feliciano of the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca, as he explains how threats to the indigenous populations in the state of Oaxaca are no different than those that have threatened the indigenous populations here in Canada. As Antonio describes this situation in Mexico, it is, as he indicates a form of genocide.

AF: So our struggle is really the struggle against globalization, that's where we carry out our resistance. And our organization, this is, that's the focus of their work. And in this phase of globalization that's happening all over the world, the world economy starts to get rid of those groups that don't have financial benefit for them. And paradoxically these groups that the system just dismisses are the communities and populations of indigenous people not only in Mexico but in North America and all of Latin America and all around the world.

RC: Right, it's happening everywhere.

AF: The logic behind this system is that because the indigenous peoples in Mexico and the indigenous people that belong to our organization The Popular Indigenous Council, our communities don't produce enough beans or corn to compete with the large multinational agribusiness. They don't have money, we don't have money and we don't have credit and we aren't huge consumers. Most of the communities are self-contained, they take care of themselves. They grow and consume what they need so there's no benefit, so to speak, for the global economy. There is a campaign of genocide against us. It's not the genocide like it was in the time of the conquest. This genocide is like our friend Vicky said, there's no work, there's no health, no electricity or water, there's no housing, dignified housing and every year 3,000 indigenous people die in Mexico from curable diseases, from fevers or diarrhea, from these curable diseases.

JS: As Antonio continues on, he describes the ways in which the indigenous communities in Oaxaca resist these threats to their culture. His explanation is a clear indication of how our food system here in Canada, is an example of where their food system is heading. And his explanation can perhaps allow us to see where our own connection to food was once lost.

AF: There is different ways of struggle and one of them is the way our friend Vicky's working which is through food. Why is food so important for indigenous people? Because it's what's at our heart. It's our memory and our history. It is who we are. The mole and the chocolate. All of these traditional foods, all have a history and they've walked with us, and as we move forward as indigenous people from when we began to now. And there's a traditional way of dressing, those shawls and the blouses, all the traditional clothing of the indigenous peoples. Right now in this globalized economy they are making everything uniform in the world. They want everything in the world to be the same. They want something to be in Canada and Mexico and Chile. There's a McDonald's, a Walmart, everything's the same. They want this whole world to be the same. And one way of fighting neoliberalism is what Dôna Vicky said. Not just one way. Another way is that if the system that we're operating under right now turns absolutely everything into merchandise thus every individual in the world becomes a merchandise themselves that you can buy or sell. We say NO. None of the peoples of the world and the rights and the culture and the ecology is merchandise and you can't negotiate these things.

So one of the ways of defending the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca is protecting the forests. It's to stop the ecoside that the multinationals are carrying out. Then also defending water, they are privatizing the water, they're privatizing education.

JS: And that was Antonio Villaneuva Felliciano of the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca. And to better describe the way in which the indigenous people of Oaxaca have used food to resist threats against their culture, Refugio Gregorio refers to the well-known case of how a McDonald's franchise was prevented from opening in the middle of the historic central square of Oaxaca.

RG: Traditional food of our peoples is the food that we make, the indigenous people in our organization is exactly the same as from my area Mixteco from the different populations. Not even in Oaxaca City people make it the same. They do make mole but it's different (RC laughs). Maybe it's because it's our traditional way but we think ours is the best. (RC laughs) But we say it is the best. It doesn't have any preservatives, it doesn't have anything in it. It's completely natural. It's mole made of fruit. We got organized to make this food to defend our culture and let the people know that we know how to make food and we know how to sell food. So our government did the most outrageous thing. They want to put in the central square of the historic central square of Oaxaca City, a McDonald's. There's a lot of really fancy restaurants, rich people's restaurants in the central square, the Zócalo the central square of Oaxaca.

RC: So who goes to this McDonald's?

RG: Just the people with money because really we could never go to McDonald's. And because there's lots of tourists and there's lots of people in the centre of town that have money for example. So we didn't want this to happen. We understood that this is going to destroy our culture, our indigenous culture and they are the best traditions. And we don't want to lose our traditions. So we organize a party. All the indigenous women we just took over the plaza. We made a huge enormous pot of mole and we gave mole to absolutely everybody. We fed them with our tortillas, our original tortillas. We had tourists come by, people like you and we gave this mole to everybody. The people tried it and they said and we started to sell it as well, right then

and there. And that's why the government got mad and they chased us away and they beat us up. They won't give us the paperwork to sell our product. They want to control our product. They want to ask to give it all over to the big companies so they can make business out of it and so they can pay us terrible wages at a terrible price. And we won't be able to have the things that we need. Because this stuff, the money that we make from this is to share amongst everybody - those who don't have work. There's a little profit for the struggle and part for all the people who don't have work. It's a way of resisting, struggling for our organization. We don't have funds that come from anywhere to keep fighting, to resist, to fight against this violation of our rights.

RC: And all you want to do is keep your traditional ways and your food.

RG: Yes. We want to keep our traditions, our ways of being because we know that this food is good for us. There's a lot of junk food out there. Like canned food that they take to our villages. We think that's why there might be a lot of sickness, with cancer, other sicknesses that we don't even know what they are. Because these kinds of diseases didn't exist in our villages before. We use to cure ourselves with herbs and now we can't. We have to have operations; we have to have organs taken out of our bodies when that never happened before.

JS: And that was Refugio Gregorio of the Indigenous Women's Cooperative in Oaxaca, Mexico. There will be more information on both her and Antonio listed on the Deconstructing Dinner website – cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

As is one of the goals behind today's broadcast, we are trying to look to the struggles of those in other parts of the world, to better identify the effect our own food system has on not only cultures such as those in Mexico, but our own right here in Canada and North America. And in the case of this particular radio program, one that attempts to address the topic of food security and food sovereignty, it is equally important to note the integral role of radio in places such as Oaxaca. And Emilie Smith explains.

Emilie Smith: One of the big works that Antonio and others do is in the community radio in Oaxaca which of course is totally clandestine illegal. It's a federal offence for them to actually operate this radio but they operate it nonetheless, clandestinely all over moving from site to site with a transportable antenna and....

RC: That's like an antenna strapped to your back on a backpack. No?

ES: Well not exactly. They have a computer so I guess they're driving around somewhere but they have to move constantly because it's against the law and people have been threatened for this. So we had this great idea of somehow maybe becoming, talking with your folks here about becoming companion radios and maybe there's a way we can develop a relationship that can give ongoing support to the Gelaguetza, that's the name of their radio station in Oaxaca. Because radio is just an incredible effective tool for communication and resistance when the national government is really trying to control media and control people.

RC: Right.

JS: This companion radio idea of which Emilie Smith suggested, is one that the Deconstructing Dinner program has agreed to be a part of, and I do encourage listeners to stay posted to the program's website on how that progresses.

We did just receive an e-mail a day prior to this current broadcast dated August 10th 2006, which came from Emilie Smith herself who is currently in Oaxaca during what is an incredibly tense situation. On June 14th, upwards to 40,000 teachers and union members had been part of a 23-day sit-in as they called for living wages which have not been changed in over ten years. State police violently entered the city and evicted the striking workers. And the Mexican Red Cross initially reported eleven dead, a number that was later reduced to four. In other events, following that on July 22nd, the university radio station Radio Universidad was raided by police as the station was accused of supporting the demonstration. And here is actual footage of that raid, courtesy of Mexico Indymedia,

Indymedia audioclip - sounds of people shouting, shots fired, beeping sound increases

JS: The e-mail that we just received on August 9th from Emilie Smith who is currently in Oaxaca, indicated that the radio station was yet again raided the very morning of her e-mail. But on August 1st, the demonstrators managed to occupy a local television station, from which they are currently broadcasting a radio signal. And again you can stay updated on the situation in Oaxaca by visiting the Deconstructing Dinner website cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

And now to come back to Anuradha Mittal of the Oakland Institute, whom we just heard earlier on today's broadcast. She addresses this approach that the global food system and global economy has taken in dealing with third world and impoverished countries. And she addresses the shift that needs to take place from our current food system that many of us support on a daily basis.

AM: Well the question before us is that are we going to once again allow the third world countries to be really independent. Food sovereignty really means the right of countries and people to decide what to grow, how to grow and to do it in ways in which are ecologically, socially, economically feasible for them. So they would need the true independence to be able to decide that. You would need, instead of the dictate coming from World Bank and IMF, that countries are able to enact agricultural policies that can support the small farmers which can maintain biodiversity which can ensure grain marketing board. There are agencies that they have had in the past to be able to have, you know distribution programs such as entitlement programs such as the public distribution system in the case of India or Edmark in the case of Malawi. So those kinds of institutions, it is very important have to be maintained. And we have seen countries such as India or Zimbabwe and Malawi or Zambia which have been faced with severe hunger and when they found that food aid that was being dumped in their country did not respect the principles and the kind of food aid they wanted, they have started going back to the agencies to maintain our food distribution and food security in their country. So I think it is a failed recipe that has been given to the third world countries and it is so unsustainable that it is bound to fail. But the question is how many more people have to starve to death before we realize that. How many people have to die before we say that instead of food aid and food aid which comes from you know a different kind if it comes from U.S., how can we actually support third world countries to be able to create agricultural policies which would boost the food production but supporting small family farmers.

JS: And that was Anuradha Mittal of the California based Oakland Institute. And you can take a look at their report Food Aid or Food Sovereignty at oaklandinstitute.org. And I would like to thank the program RadioActive of WERU in Bangor and Blue Hill, Maine, for that interview with Anuradha Mittal.

And again, the title of today's broadcast is "The Sovereignty of Others is Our Own Defense." And this title refers to the coordinated resistance to the global food system that exists in places

such as Oaxaca, Mexico. We here in Canada and North America, can use this to identify our *own* food-insecurity because ultimately, what these communities in Mexico oppose, is the very food system we here in North America embrace.

The value North Americans place on food has most unfortunately been illustrated during recent events in South Central Los Angeles. And for those who are perhaps not familiar with the situation there, I can first say that what has happened in Los Angeles is perhaps the poster child for addressing the misguided approach that our North American culture has towards food.

Located in the middle of LA was a 14 acre farm serving 350 low-income families. This farm was built from the ground up, and as of the date of this broadcast August 10th, at least half of it has already been bulldozed. The following is a collage of two recordings that introduce what was known as the largest urban garden in North America.

Los Angeles:

(guitar playing throughout)

Male 1: Well this is South Central Farm. We're in the middle of South Central in the city of Vernon unincorporated in Los Angeles county. The 14 acres is divided into 350 plots that are assigned to individual families. Each family gets one plot so they can work and grow food to help themselves.

M2: It's really difficult to conceptualize. It's 14 acres in an urban environment in the city, in the ghetto. You know, it's a phenomenon.

M3: Well, the basis of this project was started as 1992 riots where Mayor Bradley mitigated this land to the community so the community could help themselves to grow food and to basically even out some of the inequities in society.

M4: We've been here for thirteen years since 1992.

M5: My family has been here approximately been farming the land here for about eight years.

Female 1: I come in for four years.

F2: Twelve years.

M6: The fact is that this community turned a dump to an oasis. And the site originally it was used to be a factory and it got tore down in the early 80s. These farmers actually came in and wheel barrowed out pieces of the foundation. Nothing has been given to these people. Everything that you see here – the trees, the seeds, the plants, the fences, the soil, the farmers have bought themselves.

M7: This was a blighted area, it was an ugly sore in the community. Now, this is the most beautiful thing we have in this community. If you look from a satellite, look for this place and you'll see it's these two green pair of lungs and then the rest is all gray.

JS: And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner. In bringing that introduction into the current spotlight, in 2003 the City of Los Angeles, without consulting the community, sold the land to developer Ralph Horowitz for just over 5 million dollars. Horowitz shortly after issued a notice that the farmers were to vacate the property, but the community had already organized to

challenge the sale of the farm from the city to the developer. And it was during this time that yet another example arose of our culture's misguided approach to ending hunger and addressing the food security of not just those who are hungry, but all us. And it was in regards to the way the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank treated the sale of the land. And the following clip brings us back to the very same argument made by Anuradha Mittal earlier on the broadcast, when she compared food aid with food sovereignty. This is Tezozomac – a spokesperson for the farmers.

Los Angeles

Tezozomac: The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank which is right next to us was the original holder of the permit. When the developer wanted to take over this land we wanted the food bank to fight with us and they chose not to. On the contrary they chose to be agents of the city and agents of the developer. So in a sense the food bank whose mission is to end the reasons and the causes of hunger, violated its own mission statement. You have to understand that this place right here moves 66 million dollars of food. We get zero of it.

JS: In bringing this story up to speed, an eviction notice had been issued to the farmers for June 13th of this year, 2006 and understandably the community along with supporters set up camp inside the farm, hoping to protect the land from being paved over. These protests were necessary even after the community raised the 16 million dollars that Horowitz demanded from the community to buy the land back, because that 16 million dollars, he later chose to not accept.

And this next clip is courtesy of truthout.org, an independent news resource who recorded the protest and the June 13th eviction. Voices in this clip include actress Darryl Hannah and environmental activist John Quigley.

(music and protestors chanting)

Audio Clip of Eviction

JQ: Tell me what's happening today.

DH: Well, today basically they're evicting the people from the farm. There's been people here in solidarity with the South Central farmers.

Protestor 1: There's still people tied up in trees and they've arrested several twenty people right now.

P2: There's people that actually tied themselves up to cement barrels and I think that they're still tied up. I know that the paramedics came in and took at least one person away, I don't know why though.

P3: He bought it for 5.1 million and he wanted to sell it for 16.1.

P4 shouting: Five million dollars in 2003, are you kidding me! Five million dollars, how much is this land worth? Do you even care?

P5: This was taken back by the people. They re-fertilized the earth, they started planting everything. We have 500 fruit trees, we have corn, there's guava, there's tomatoes, there's strawberries, you name it.

P6: They got 3 or 400 police here, they can use them over in Iraq if they're so interested in arresting and rounding up people you know.

JQ: What is he going to do with it?

P7: Put warehouses and people can't eat warehouses.

DH: This struggle is not about people who want to camp here or people who want to stay in the trees. This is about people who are subsistence farmers who need to have food for their families. Who need to have a place for their children to play and to be safe from drive-by shootings and from drugs and from gangs. And this is a story about the rich versus the poor, about people with power and people without a voice.

P8: The fact is that the money is there for the deal, the 16 million dollar deal. The Mayor backed us up on that last night. There's been a lot of confusion and there's been a lot of reporting that the eviction happened because we hadn't raised the money. That's simply not true. The money was on the table, there's been a lot of players through the Annenberg Foundation in the city. So the money was there and for some reason Mr. Horowitz has reneged on his promise to sell it back to the community.

P9: We are forgetting about just the importance of having green space and that's not important anymore. And we're living in a time of corporations and this is just one more example of how corporations are taking over and that we must resist.

JQ: Is there any chance that anything can be done now at this point?

DH: Oh the struggle is only beginning. This is where the community is actually going to get together and continue to fight. The struggles not over yet.

JS: And you can view all of these clips in video format and find out more information about the South Central Farm situation by visiting southcentralfarmers.org or southcentralfarmers.com. And both of those are different websites.

On those websites are up-to-date images of a bulldozer destroying the farm that the community had built 14 years ago. And as developer Ralph Horowitz said in an interview, "The Plants Needed Pruning." In one instance, a protestor attempted to shove a zucchini down the exhaust of the bulldozer.

AM: We have to realize that food is both personal and political. It is personal because each one of us needs it to survive. It is not a luxury item, it goes right inside us each day. At the same time when we reach out and pick something from the market shelf we're making a political decision. So it is the result of the global trade in agriculture and global trade in commodities that we find blemish-free grapes from Chile and we find all these things that travel long distances, which is a huge environmental cost to get to our market shelves. So I think when we're talking about food aid in third world countries that people should be able to have food which is grown locally. It is the same principle that needs to be followed in the United States, to be able to say that food and agriculture is not about trade and commodities. It is really about feeding our families and communities.

ending theme

JS: And that was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant Dianne Matenko.

Should you have any comments about today's show, want to learn more about topics covered, or would like to listen to previous broadcasts, you can visit the website for Deconstructing Dinner at www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.