

The Rio Negro socio-environmental assemblies in defense of the house



A few months ago my whatsapp was filled with sad messages, photos and terrible videos of fire devouring forests, homes, animals, human lives... Every year the fire deforests thousands of hectares in Argentina. In the mountains of Argentine Patagonia, fires have been burning in native forests of great biodiversity for decades. In March, in the provinces of Rio Negro and Chubut, there were fires in native forests and in monoculture pine plantations. These fires have caused the death of people, many injured and entire neighborhoods devastated; the families lost everything: their home, their assets, their vehicles, work utensils and objects of family memory. The daily life of these people was violently affected and their life projects altered. Added to this is the serious damage to the local electricity, gas and water infrastructure that affected thousands of homes.

For years, the provincial and national governments have not invested enough in means to prevent, control and fight fires, although they know that they are repeated every summer, aggravated by forest monocultures that are a powder keg that ignites at the slightest spark. We need greater citizen participation in the prevention of catastrophes and in the planning and territorial ordering for sustainable production and the care of the ecosystems in Patagonia.

Could it be that this territory is considered a sacrifice zone? What interests are hidden behind these burnings? We know that in these provinces they want to change the traditional productive matrix of sheep farming or fruit farming, for the extraction of hydrocarbons through fracking and mega-mining. On the plateau and in these mountains there is gold, silver, copper, uranium and other metals that could generate immense profits for companies with mega-mining projects, which they want to carry out without prior, free and informed consultation, and ignoring the strong popular resistance to extractivism. ecocide.

On the other hand, the beautiful landscapes with mountains, forests and crystal clear lakes attract real estate businesses and large-scale tourism projects. For this reason, the uncontrolled appropriation of land is allowed and the Mapuche-Tehuelche people are accused of burning. About this problem, Mauro Millán, a Mapuche lonko (chief), says: “we have years of democracy, there are rights, but none of that applies and we return to that old time of the privileged, using private property. To this group of businessmen, officials, judges, prosecutors, lawyers and landowners, the hegemonic media are added today to sustain the economic-political privilege over this territory. They reproduce this message of hate (against the Mapuche)... to misinform millions of people who end up reproducing what they see, hear and read.”

On the contrary, the solidarity and action campaign of self-convened neighbors and citizens who traveled to fight the fires in the provinces of Chubut and Río Negro, treat injured people, rescue animals or build new homes should be highlighted. Food, medicine, clothing, furniture, construction materials, etc. were also sent from the region and from all over the country. Showing once again that our people are capable of uniting and being present in the face of the neighbor's pain.

More than a decade ago I joined the socio-environmental assembly of my city, General Roca, now called: Assembly for water and land of Fiske Menuco. It is a space for volunteering, inclusive, plural, horizontal, nonpartisan, with decisions by consensus and critical of the extractivist market system. We propose the learning, exchange, discussion and proposal of actions in defense of natural common goods, the community, culture and human rights. That is also why we have made our solidarity contribution to those affected by the fires.

The socio-environmental assembly has had ups and downs in participation but, since last year, it has been renewed with many youthful energies that use street art, body expressions, murals, posters, educational brochures, poems hung on trees in parks, musical festivals, murgas, games, radio programs, videos, and also claim and protest marches, public and virtual talks, the issuance of communiqués and even the proposal for an anti-mega-mining law.

We seek to be present in all areas of education, visibility and popular dissemination: schools, universities (carrying out workshops and talks), the newspaper, radios, social networks, in hearings of the Legislature, in the streets or squares of the city's neighborhoods. and on the banks of the Negro River that irrigates the entire valley and for which we annually organize "El Abrazo al Rio" to denounce its contamination. Due to the pandemic, we meet virtually weekly or fortnightly, depending on organizational needs.

We are not alone, in each city or town of the region there are self-convened socio-environmental assemblies and other organizations that have created a provincial collective space: the Assembly of Assemblies of Curru Leufú, for learning and exchanging experiences of struggle and articulation and construction of strategies collective and joint actions, objectives that became a reality as we walked. It is a space that facilitates unity for organization and political incidence and the strengthening meeting of the daily struggles in the different regions, faced with the powerful challenge of the national, provincial or local governments allied with multinationals for extractive projects that imply contamination. , the privatization of the land and the exploitation of Mapuche community territories. It is also a challenge to fight against the criminalization and judicialization of social protest and the militarization of the territories in conflict.

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Stop the installation of a Chinese-owned nuclear plant in our province of Río Negro in 2019 (resistance led by the Rio Negro anti-nuclear Assembly), write and present a bill to the Legislature to ban mega-mining (2020-21), resist (also with judicial protection) two mega-mining projects for the exploitation of gold and uranium, increase social awareness of environmental issues, appear in the media, be summoned to schools and universities, denounce the contamination of the basin and the air (due to fracking and siliceous sands, due to sewage effluents and agrochemicals), publishing or adhering to statements denouncing predatory extractive plans are some of the great and small achievements of our actions, carried out in network with the other Rio Negro assemblies and the region.

We walk assuming our differences in age, training, criteria, experiences, our tiredness, lack of resources and time to dedicate ourselves to the defense of mother earth, but we are sustained by the love for Pachamama and our communities that we Mapuches, the peasants share. , intellectuals, workers, students, artists, teachers, activists, trade unionists, religious (not many), artisans, neighbors and I must say it: most of us are women courageously committed to caring for life through persevering, firm and non-violent struggle.

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