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# rebellion<sup>\*mag</sup>

a different kind of uprising



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SIMPLICITY, COMPASSION, FREEDOM, COMMON SENSE, RESPECT

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**Founder and Publisher**  
Robert Brian Hall

**Production and Design Director**  
Celina Moser

**Senior Editor**  
Maury L. Cohen

**Editors**  
Steve Grinstead  
Lori D. Kranz  
Mark Lehoczky

**Contributing Writers**  
Ted Andersen  
Robert Argyle  
Michelle Barnes  
Richard Castaldo  
Jim Craig  
Lori Filipek  
Howard Griffith  
Brian Klocke  
Mark Lehoczky  
Fran Pado  
Alec Tsoucatos  
Kenneth Ursay  
Nancy Wadsworth  
Edith Weiss

**Graphics**  
Phil Jacques  
Celina Moser  
Tony Norris  
Paul Sanyas

**Photos**  
Troy Dauenaugh  
Mark Manger  
Andy Marquez  
Mark Sink  
Barb Vogel  
Rosalie Winard

**Illustration**  
Michelle Barnes  
Tami Grindle  
Greg McGuan

**Rebellion Magazine Online**  
Todd Baginski  
Jamie Luetjen  
Celina McGuan

**Rebellion Magazine**  
2529 West Main Street Upper  
Littleton, CO 80120  
(720) 283-1868  
www.rebellionmag.com

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## CHANGE

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, our modern-day psyches have become more willing to accept and believe in the possibility of massive, fundamental change. And while dramatic sudden change can be unsettling, there is something about it that stirs our souls to believe, if even for a moment, that anything is possible. When a young Chinese protestor stood in front of a tank column in Tiananmen Square and effectively demonstrated to the world the power of one, the collective heart of all those who love freedom pumped a little stronger. We subconsciously understood that his risk and his courage sent a message to the world that said the fight for freedom is not over, and is, in fact, still fought with the same passion and unselfish intensity that marked the earliest days of the United States.

So how do we instigate peaceful, dramatic change in a world running so fast it can't seem to slow down to save itself? How do we create a series of social epidemics that come to critical mass and tip the world in a healthier direction, and who or what decides what "healthier" is? Is it possible to have a handgun-free society, or a society that doesn't profit from war? Is it possible for communities to organize in a way that would make the modern insurance industry obsolete? How do we find the courage to dislodge ourselves from our comfort zones long enough to realize that the fight for change is indeed worth the potentially enormous price?

These are the questions *rebellion* will try to answer.

So if you are among the millions who believe society is curable from the corrupt, needlessly complex, disrespectful, and denial-ridden policies and institutions that are so much a part of the current reality, come on out of the closet, office, church, home, or theater and give a yell—that is, if you haven't already.

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## **Rebels** We honor those who best represent the spirit of nonconformity in their chosen field.

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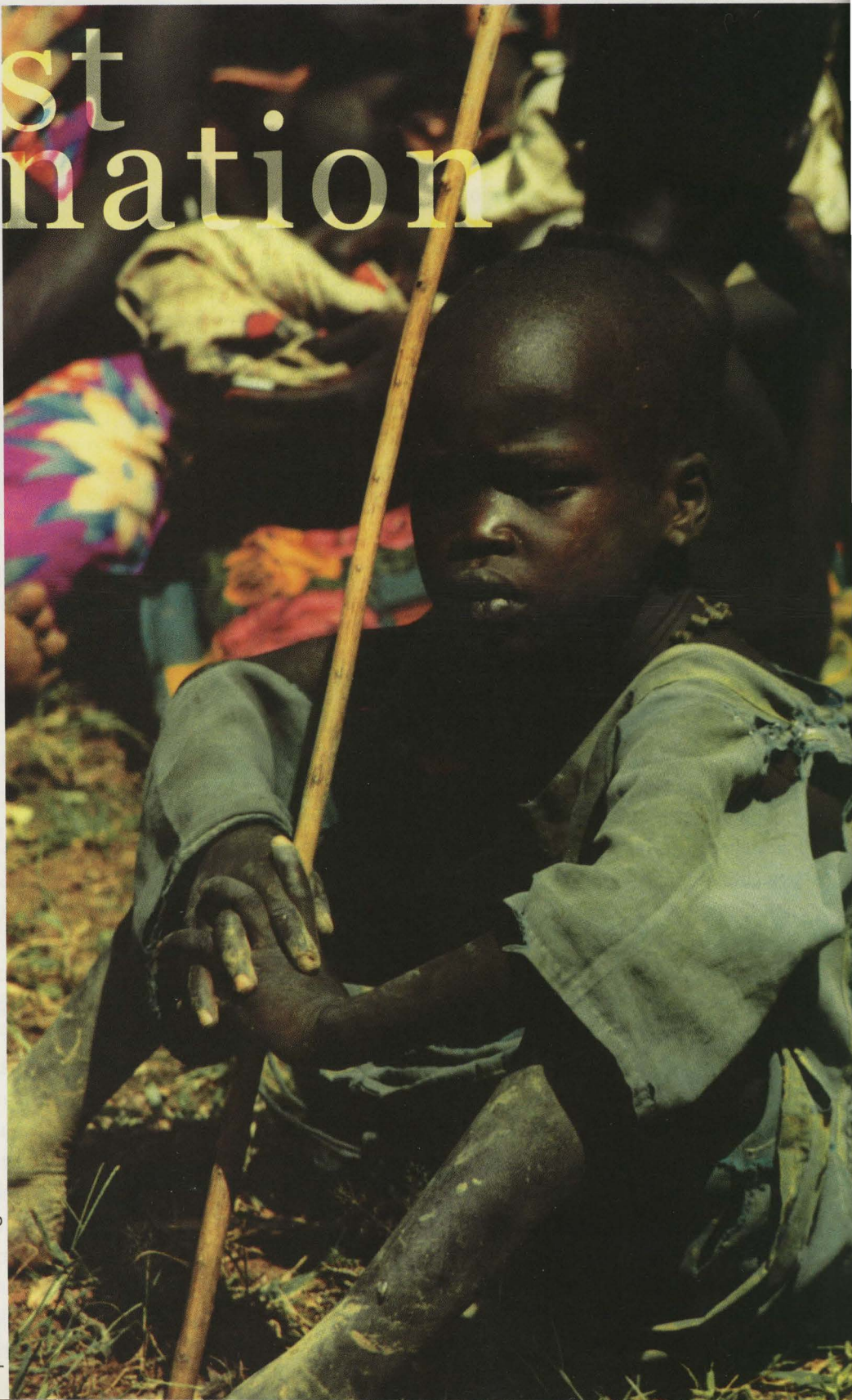
# an activist imagination

by Brian Klocke

**M**ass media images and stories often portray activists as rioters bent on destruction and violence. We are told, for example, that the global justice movement demonstrators in Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Genoa are anti-globalization zealots, uninformed rebels without a cause or backward thinking neo-Luddites. The media also frequently dismiss protestors as privileged kids just looking for some fun and excitement.

No wonder many of us who care about social injustice and want to make the world a better place shy away from identifying ourselves as “activists”.

photo: Barb Vogel



The mainstream media also promote the message that protesting is counter-productive to a civil society and keeps legitimate leaders from doing their jobs well. They tell us in subtle and not so subtle ways: Do not resist; Do not dissent; You can't really make a difference anyway. This public relations strategy is an attempt to protect those with power and privilege, and to avoid accountability for maintaining social inequality.

As the global justice movement continues to grow—and tens of thousands of people from all walks of life join in the streets to stand for an environmentally sustainable, economically just, nonviolent, interdependent world—attempts at silencing the voices of opposition are becoming more extreme. For the World Trade Organization leaders' conference in Seattle, a no-protest zone was implemented and gas masks were declared illegal. For the FTAA Summit leaders in Quebec, a 10-foot fence was constructed and significant police forces were marshaled. At the G-8 Summit in Genoa, more armed forces, including military forces, were on hand and a 20-foot fence was constructed. One protestor was shot dead by police and many ended up in the hospital because of police brutality.

**Mass media rarely covers the less dramatic ways that millions of people around the world have been engaging in activism for years.**

While mass demonstrations and marches are a dramatic form of the struggle for social justice, they are only one form of effective activism among a wide array of options. Mass media rarely cover the less dramatic ways that millions of people around the world have been engaging in activism for years by claiming their power and making a difference in their local communities. These people may not think of themselves as "activists", but they certainly are—and in the most

important sense of the word.

From groups of women in Chiapas forming weaving cooperatives to youth in America making their own media through independent 'zines, from families fighting the commercialization of schools to churches and civic groups coordinating voter participation drives, and to increasing numbers of conscientious citizens choosing organic foods, building community gardens, and speaking out at city council meetings, more and more people are waking up to the important role of everyday people banding together to solve public problems. This is the most sustainable and most powerful form of activism there is.

**We can transform the way public decisions get made, in our workplaces, classrooms, cities, nations and in our world.**

Frances Moore Lappé and Paul Martin DuBois, in their book, *The Quickening of America* (Jossey-Bass 1994) speak eloquently of this idea of a living democracy, a democracy that depends on the "ingenuity and experience of those who are directly affected." We *can* transform the way public decisions get made in our workplaces, our classrooms, our cities, our nations and in our world.

In order to participate in this transformation, it is helpful to look at the limiting myths about power, and the repression of our natural ability to experience pain and empathy for the world. We are taught through our social institutions that power comes from a limited source and is unidirectional.

Joanna Macy, author of *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (New Society, 1998), challenges us to see how power exists in a different way in living systems in nature. Power, in this sense, is not something to be acquired for one's own use and for dominating others, but is a process one engages *with* to develop not

invulnerability, but responsiveness. Macy explains, "As our pain for the world arises from our systemic interexistence, so does our power. While the concept of 'power with' summons us to develop empathy, it also calls for vigilance and assertiveness in responding to the self-organizing needs of the larger system." She goes on to say, "As parts self-organize into a larger whole, capacities emerge which could not have been predicted, and which the individual parts did not possess. In this process, one can feel sustained—and is sustained—by currents of power larger than one's own." This concept is called synergy, the first property of living systems.

We have all had the experience of being around someone who has a dramatic effect on our mood. If we can affect each other simply by our presence, imagine what we can do synergistically when we are intentional about how we interact with others. Everything we do can make a difference.

**We are all activists when we passionately act upon our desires to create a better world and to fulfill our deepest dreams.**

It all starts with one step, with changing how we live in our daily lives. Whether it is what we eat, where we spend our money, how we treat our families and neighbors, who we work for, or donating time to any of the multitude of organizations working for social justice, it is most important that we do it. As the *Better World Handbook* (New Society, 2001) states, "Living out your values and engaging in meaningful daily action actually gives you energy." "The trick to changing your daily actions permanently is to find a way of living that integrates your desire to make the world better and your desire to pursue your own personal dreams." We are all activists when we passionately act upon our desires to create a better world and to fulfill our deepest dreams.