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people have access to it anymore. And that is worth billions, the federal government has saved billions in the EI fund. The only reason why they have paid off the deficit is that extra money. So that money is, in effect, being paid by unemployed people who cannot access it, if it was not for this re-definition then Paul Martin would not have a surplus. So some people like students and the unemployed have paid down the deficit at a very high cost and the ones who have done well in this time are the ones now trying to benefit and grab what they can from the system.

AK: It is complicated by the fact that the media likes to put things in small sound bites, like 'okay our economy is doing good, we have this much percent of economic growth this year' when it would take more digging to tell the whole story. I see Seattle as a big spark. From here there will be other conferences and there will be more people doing things locally. It is like the point of critical mass. The more people who get involved, the more power we have.

It is, in the end, all the people of the world have. We have great numbers of non-rich people who, with a little determination and a strong gut, can take the pepper spraying and throw their voices. Henry David Thoreau thought civil disobedience could change the entire world, and, you know you won't get far disagreeing with him.

Fighting capitalism across the Americas

By Alejandro Bustos
Source: National
Bureau Chief

SANTIAGO, Chile (CUP) - A black-and-white photo of an army truck spraying protestors with a water cannon adorns the lobby of the Student Federation of the University of Chile.

Inside the modest room - furnished with two old desks, a table with three chairs and a three-piece sofa set - students earnestly debate how to stop the Neo-liberal right from winning the country's presidential elections.

On January 16, Chileans will head to the polls for a runoff vote between Joaquin Lavín, an official in the former government of past dictator Augusto Pinochet, and Ricardo Lagos, a Socialist.

But Alvaro Cabrera, the recently elected Student Federation president, is unhappy with either choice.

"The government disempowered the people," Cabrera, a Communist party member, told Canadian University Press (CUP) in a live interview.

The "government" is the centre-Left Concertación coalition, which Lagos is a part of, who has governed Chile since democracy returned here in 1990 after 17-years of military rule.

Like many Chileans, Cabrera - one of several Communist student leaders recently elected in

the country - is horrified at what the free market has done to this nation of 14-million people, and is angry at a government he believes is unwilling to change the economic system.

But what is really interesting about his frustration is that it expresses a common theme reverberating across both North and South American student circles.

Thousands of kilometres to the north of Santiago, Chile's capital, Cabrera's words were echoed in a very different context.

Several months before the recent Nov. 29-Dec. 3 World Trade Organisation (WTO) summit hit Seattle, officials from the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) were busy making links with labour, environmental and United States-based student groups.

Along with its allies, the CFS, Canada's largest student lobby group, is a vocal opponent of the WTO, a global collective of 135 nations whose goal is to remove economic barriers to international trade.

Critics say the WTO will sacrifice environmental, educational and labour standards within individual nations in the name of freer world trade.

"Market principles applied to education will not provide adequate access and quality for all," Mark Veerkamp, the British Columbia chair for

the CFS, told CUP in late November.

In other words, to stretch the argument further, a non-regulated free market will not protect workers' rights, save trees, or create a society that can provide publicly accessible post-secondary education and health-care.

It is this belief in a truly public educational system that has led students in Mexico to shutdown the country's largest university.

The National Autonomous University, located in Mexico City, once housed the nation's future presidents and multiple senior bureaucrats.

In the past 20-years, however, it has lost its status as upper- and middle-class Mexicans enrolled in private universities at home, or flew off to schools in the United States.

Last April, the striking students shut down the university, which has a massive enrolment figure of 268,000, and barricaded its main campus to protest a proposal to charge fees at a state institution that has never cost students more than a few token cents.

Some students fear these are the first steps in privatizing Mexico's public university system.

"We all want to go back to school," Carlos Montalvo, one of the student leaders, told the New York Times just before Christmas. "The point is, under what

circumstances?"

These words - "Under what circumstances?" - have been uttered, in one form or another, by countless students across North and South America.

Now, it is true these voices are not linked into a cohesive message. Some of the estimated 600 Canadian students demonstrating at the WTO summit in Seattle, for instance, were probably unaware of the struggles of their brethren in Chile and Mexico.

Yet what is curious is that these independent movements, who grew out of their own domestic realities, are asking common questions.

And the question, "what effect would an unregulated free market have in my society?" is one that tops the list. After the protests in Seattle - where more than 50,000 people, or twice that many according to some estimates, demonstrated against the WTO - many people were left wondering if activism had been rejuvenated across North America.

Media outlets like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation compared the Seattle protest to the Democratic Convention of 1968, when thousands of anti-Vietnam war demonstrators battled Chicago police.

But for those inside the student movement Seattle was part of a long process.

"It was an important event," said Ali Fischer, vice-president of the 3.5-million strong United States Student