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EDITORIAL

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The Bumpy Road to WSF 2004

It's enemy number one is neo-liberal and capitalist globalisation, it's strength is the ever-growing assembly of activists, organisations and movements and its objective is to realize the dream of 'Making Another World Possible'. No doubt, World Social Forum (WSF) - a movement against the neo-liberal globalisation - has risen in strength year after year. Starting with the participation of around 20,000 people in 2001, the figure rose to 55,000 in 2002 while registering a further increase in 2003 reaching the figure of 100,000 people. The forthcoming WSF 2004 in Mumbai is expected to further cross this figure. Yet in the process of striving for the social transformation, the World Social Forum seems to have been struck by a number of controversies, criticism and tensions. It seems that a movement primarily dominated by the leftist streams has fallen prey to the Marxian formulation of dialectics but without fructifying into the third and vital stage of synthesis.

A number of issues have emerged as points of debate within the WSF process. One of the leading points of debate concerns the reformist vs. the radical divide over three analytically distinct but related issues. These issues are (1) whether the "enemy" is capitalism, neo-liberalism or globalisation, (2) whether intergovernmental institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO are reformable, and (3) whether working to strengthen national sovereignty and state power is a desirable and /or a viable strategy for social transformation. In fact there has emerged three different streams of thinking regarding the process of WSF. While the one stream is that of neo-liberals or the reformists who believe in reinforcing of the national sovereignty to counter the global capital, the other stream is that of revolutionaries who look beyond the national alternatives and, instead, seek democratic globalisation. There is also a third stream which balances the two. But as Michael Hardt points out, there is always confrontation between the first two positions. This confrontation has also been seen in the form of two different approaches to social change. While there is the approach of most NGOs wanting to reinforce the role of civil society as a check on the power of corporations thereby making capitalism more humane, whereas the more radical approach wants to strengthen the antagonistic movement against capitalism to build a new society. Hardt says that it has always been the neo-liberal stream which has occupied and dominated the most visible spaces at WSF conclaves in Porto Alegre. Similarly Ezequiel Adamovsky points out that many radical movements are feeling more and more uncomfortable with the WSF. Then there are some who believe that capitalism can never be "socialised and humanised", nor can a "civilised and humanised", globalisation be a real possibility.

Eyebrows also have been raised regarding the relative role of the NGOs as opposed to that of social movements in managing the WSF process. For example, the Organizing Committee of the first two Social Forums was mainly composed of NGOs with only minority representation for Brazil's two main social movements – CUT and MST. Critics point out that once WSF's annual meeting seems as the premiere gathering of socially concerned leaders, its statements will carry extraordinary political weight and its "debates" will soon map out public policy. Hence big bureaucratic NGOs will continue to flock to the WSF in ever-greater numbers; and unlike activists and community based organisations operating on shoestring, they will be able to attend the meetings annually and serve as members of the organising council in between. These NGOs, then, will largely set themes and strategies discussed at the WSF, thus limiting, from the start, the concerns of grassroots groups and radical movements.

Look what Peter Waterman has to say about WSF – "The space that WSF has created is not really far removed from the "old politics and parties". Like the movements of the past, the WSF too would result in the domination of movements by the institutions they spawn and by

political parties that turn such movements into their own instruments. The NGO constituents might address themselves to social movements and civil society but are accountable only to themselves. Parties like the Brazilian Worker's party have often hidden their political lights behind NGO bushels".

Remarks have also been made regarding the structure of the World Social Forums. Naomi Klein has characterized the structure of the first WSF as "so opaque that it was nearly impossible to figure out how decisions were made". Similar critical remarks have been raised by many others in every annual edition of the WSF event. It has been pointed out that the much celebrated "horizontal" structure hides the "force that decides who will be invited and who not, and who will be given prominence at the plenary sessions and press meets, and who will be consigned to the oblivion of a workshop." Further, it has been pointed out that a "vertical" structure has scope for communications and representation from the bottom to the top, whereas a "horizontal" structure only allows top-down decisions by an inaccessible body.

Another point of debate concerns the under-representation of women at the WSF, and a perceived disconnect between the discussions by women's organisations and the race, class and nation dominated discourse of the global justice movement.

Amidst all these clatterings, where you stand depends on which stream of thought you belong to but at the same time it behoves you not to forget the basic idea behind the WSF i.e. the creation of a space for everyone to come together with a respect and sharing of different perspectives.

- Piyush Pant

Today's Bandung?

By

Michael Hardt

New Left Review 14
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Bird's Eye View

In the ongoing debate over the course of direction being taken by the World Social Forum, Michael Hardt, in this piece of writing, takes the revolutionary stance of globalizing the movements or global consolidation of the multitude. In this context, the WSF conclave at Porto Alegre in 2002 has been made the point of reference. Here Michael Hardt stands for the movement of the movements as opposed to the strengthening of the national solidarity.

While eulogising the enormous spectacle at the WSF, Hardt tries to analyse it in terms of its strength and weaknesses. He likes to look at the Porto Alegre as the distant offspring of the historic Bandung conference held in Indonesia in 1955 as far as both aimed at countering the dominant world order -- earlier manifested in colonialism and the oppressive cold war binary, whereas now in the form of capitalist globalization. Though referring to the massive attendance at Porto Alegre as 'unknowable, chaotic, dispersive' Hardt, nevertheless, derives satisfaction for the fact that under the banner of World Social Forum 'a sea of people from so many parts of the world are working similarly against the present form of capitalist globalization. He calls it an 'open encounter'. Michael Hardt feels that behind the happy, celebratory atmosphere of the World Social Forum 2002 lies the recognition by the North Atlantic movements of the commonality of their projects with those in the other parts of the world as the first step towards expanding the network of movements or linking one network to another. However, he feels that the 'open encounter' should reveal and address not only the common projects and desires, but also the differences of those involved - differences of material conditions and political orientation. Hardt says the WSF did provide an opportunity to recognise such differences and questions for those willing to see them but it did not provide the conditions for addressing them. He says- 'infact, the very same dispersive, overflowing quality of the Forum that created the euphoria of commonality also effectively displaced the terrain on which such differences and conflicts could be confronted'.

Thus, while pointing towards shades of unity, Michael Hardt moves on to elaborate the differences affecting the WSF fraternity. He

says, "the most important political difference cutting across the entire Forum concerned the role of national sovereignty. While the neo-liberals or the reformist perceive the reinforcing of the sovereignty of the nation-states as a defensive barrier against the control wielded by the foreign and global capital, the other stream, called the revolutionaries, look beyond the national alternative to the present form of globalization. Thus the aim of neo-liberals is to strive for national liberalisation whereas the revolutionary stream oppose national solutions and seeks instead a democratic globalization.

Michael Hardt observes that it was the neo-liberal stream which occupied the most visible and dominant spaces of the Porto Alegre Forum. In a way it hijacked the Forum. He supports his observation with the facts like the neo-liberals were represented in the large plenary sessions, they were the official spokespersons and were extensively concerned by the press. The stream was also visible in the leadership of the Brazilian PT (Worker's Party) which was de facto host of the Forum, since it runs the city and regional government. The second dominant voice of national sovereignty at Porto Alegre, says Hardt, was the French leadership of ATTAC which according to him, laid the groundwork for the WSF in the pages of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. And the leadership of ATTAC is, in this regard, very close to many of the French politicians - most notably Jean-Pierre Chevenement - for whom solution to the ills of contemporary globalization lies only in strengthening national sovereignty. **On the contrary, the other stream representing the non-sovereign, alternative globalization position was in minority (in terms of representation) at the Forum, though quantitatively they outnumbered the neo-liberals.** For instance, the various movements registering protests from Seattle to Genoa are generally oriented towards non-national solution. In fact, the centralised solution of the state sovereignty itself runs counter to the horizontal network - form that the movements have developed. Further, at the base of the various parties and organisations present at the Forum in Porto Alegre, the sentiment is much more hostile to proposals of national sovereignty than at the top. Michael Hardt advances this argument to stress the point that neo-liberals manage to usurp the domination at the forum even if the majority of the participants are inclined toward the perspective of a non-national alternative globalization. He further explains this conflict by recourse to two different forum of political organisation. The traditional parties and centralised campaign generally occupy the national sovereignty pole, whereas the new movements organised in horizontal networks tend to cluster at the non-sovereign pole. He further points out that within traditional, centralised organisations, the top tends towards sovereignty while the base away from it. It follows, therefore, that those in positions of power would be most interested in state sovereignty and those excluded would be least. This perhaps may help to explain how the national sovereignty, anti-globalization stream could dominate the representatives of the Forum even through the majority of the participants tend rather towards the perspective of a non-national alternative globalization.

Thus, says Hardt, there is always a confrontation between the two positions. And if the confrontation did not take place at Porto Alegre, it was in part because of the dispersive nature of the event which tended to displace conflicts, and in part because the sovereignty position so successfully occupied the centre stage that no contest was possible. But the more important reason for

a lack of confrontation, Michael Hardt says, may have had to do with the organisational forum that correspond to the two positions. The traditional parties and centralised organisations have spokespersons who represent them and conduct their battles, but no one speaks for a network.

Towards the end of the piece, Michael Hardt convincingly expresses the hope that despite the apparent strength of those who occupied centrestage and dominated the representations of the Forum, they may ultimately prove to have lost the struggle. To him the representation of traditional political parties and centralized organisations at Porto Alegre look like the old national leaders gathered at Bandung - Lula like Ahmed Sukarno and Bernard Cassen of ATTAC France like Jawahar Lal Nehru. And Hardt is pretty sure that ultimately the movements will have the last laugh as he says - 'The leaders can certainly craft resolutions affirming national sovereignty around a conference table, but they can never grasp the democratic power of the movements. Eventually they too will be swept up in the multitude, which is capable of transforming all fixed and centralised elements into so many more nodes in its indefinitely expansive network.'

Grass-Roots Globalism

Reply to Michael Hardt

By
Tom Mertes

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Bird's Eye View

As is evident from the heading, Tom Mertes, in this piece of writing, replies to the questions raised by Michael Hardt regarding World Social Forum held at Porto Alegre in 2002.

To the question raised by Michael Hardt that the Forum at Porto Alegre was hijacked or dominated by the defenders of the national – sovereignty who occupied all the available spaces, Tom Mertes replies that there was certainly plenty of reminders of this in the form of Euro-Socialist politicians looking for photo opportunities, but then most of these were already known to be the ardent proponents of the neo-liberal cause. Similarly, in the run-up to the Brazilian elections the PT leadership - which certainly hijacked a number of the sessions at Porto Alegre, but did not succeed in controlling its agenda – has been notable not so much for demanding sovereign control over capital flows as for its alacrity in complying with IMF demands on debt repayment. **But the experience presented by activists at Porto Alegre, says Mertes, proposed a more modulated view of the specific units and gradations of power than Hardt's 'all or nothing approach'.** Says he, rather than an intuitive uprising of the multitude against Empire, they suggested a more differentiated field. For instance, it is against their own governments that both South Africans and Latin Americans have been mobilising to fight against water and electricity privatization. Peruvians successfully resisted an electricity sell-off- at local state level, in Arequipa – earlier this year; Bolivian 'Water Wars' rattled Banzer's regime in April 2000; 'Vivendi, go home!' is the cry in Argentina. CONAIE, the national confederation of indigenous peoples, brought down the Ecuadorian government in early 2000 and after broken promises from the military and the new regime were back on the streets a year later to oppose austerity measures, deforestation, privatization of electricity and oil pipelines. There have been protests along similar lines in El Salvador, India, Nigeria and Ghana. Similarly the shanty towns of Caracas rallied to the defence of Chavez in order to fight US-backed plans for the privatization of their oil and the still greater reduction of their living

standards.

Mertes points out that for Hardt and Negri 'the first question of political philosophy today is not if or even why there will be resistance and rebellion, but rather how to determine the enemy against which to rebel'. For them the Latin American mobilisations of the past few years display not a faith in the transcendent power of national sovereignty but, precisely, a grasp of the immediate enemy – and, often, a clear intuition of the forces that stand behind him.

Tom Mertes also raises question of US role within the coming global sovereign power that Hardt and Negri depict in the '*Empire*'. Here Mertes finds a contradiction in *Empire*. Mertes says that the actually existing United States constantly threatens to emerge from the pages of *Empire* like the face in a nightmare, and has to be perpetually repressed. Instructed that Empire exercise its control by means of 'the bomb, money and ether', we are warned that 'it might appear as though the reins of these mechanisms were held by the United States as if the US were the new Rome (centre) of a cluster of new Romes: Washington (the bomb), New York (money), and Los Angeles (ether)'. But then any such certainty is immediately withdrawn since we are continuously assured that 'Empire has no Rome' – despite the fact that US defence spending is more than that of the next twenty five governments combined and it has basis in at least fifty nine countries.

As for Michael Hardt's argument in support of the no-national alternative to the present form of globalisation position which opposes any national solutions as against one which reinforces the sovereignty of nation-states as a defensive barrier against the control of foreign and global capital, Mertes has this to say - 'there are real debates to be had around the questions of counter – globalisation strategy at national and - more commonly proposed today- at regional level'. For instance, Via Campesina's campaign for 'food sovereignty' which aims at acquiring right to raise protection tariffs that will prevent multinational companies wiping out local farmers by their dumping practices. Similarly it is widely acknowledged that the ability of the Malaysians and the pre-WTO Chinese to impose controls on capital flow during the 1997-98 financial crisis protected their populations from much of the devastation that ravaged Indonesia. Besides, Focus on the Global South suggests 'deglobalisation' to build strong regional markets within the South that would have some autonomy from global financial interests. Mertes says that the real questions to be asked are not about the nation states from which sovereignty is draining away, but the one it is being sucked into.

Mertes also questions Hardt's contention that the division at Porto Alegre between the 'national Sovereignty' and the 'democratic – globalisation' positions correspond to a conflict between two different forms of political organizations; one the traditional parties and centralized campaigns occupying the national sovereignty pole while the other is the form of new movements organised in horizontal networks tending to cluster at the non-sovereign pole' may have prevented a clear debate between the two positions at 2002 WSF since the formally constituted organizations have spokespersons to represent them while the new groups do not have. **Says Mertes – 'one difference Hardt seems to miss is the question of scale. Many seemingly traditional bodies at Porto Alegre were actually mass organizations. The Brazilian Sem Terra is a case in**

point. It counts in its ranks over a third of a million landless families and this is not a passive, card –carrying membership but one defined by taking actions. Within this layer there are, again, around 20,000 activists who have helped to organise their neighbours. Hence spokespeople – accountable to the membership become a necessity with numbers of this size.

Tom Mertes further says that Hardt’s maritime metaphor – the ‘sea’ of networks’ – raises a further question, crucial to the ‘mutual adequation’ of the current movements i.e. waves do not speak. **And the question is, how is Hardt’s network or multitude to hold an internal conversation, to debate and to decide its strategy if it can not argue but only ‘sweep away’ its opponents. Says Mertes – It seems more useful to conceptualize the relation between the various groups as an ongoing series of alliances and coalitions, whose convergences remain contingent.** ‘Genuine solidarity can only be built up through a process of testing and questioning, through a real overlap of affinities and interests. The Turtles and Teamsters will no doubt meet again on the streets of North America, but this does not mean they are in the sort of constant communication that a network implies. The WSF provides a venue in which churches and anarchists, punks and farmers, trade unionists and green can explore issues of common concern, without having to create a new web.

Tom Mertes says that by focusing only on questions of national sovereignty and organization, Hardt neglects other areas where there is perhaps a greater need for ‘adequation’ in some form.

He says that if the distinctions between North and South has more to do with power and elite lifestyle than geographical location, it still denotes a significant split in current experience and historical perceptions: one obvious difference for activists is that the repressive nature of capitalist state power is posed much more starkly in the south. For instance, in Argentina at least 30 protestors have been killed since March 2001. At least 14 Sem Terra activists have been murdered and hundreds have been jailed. In June 2001 four Papuans were killed by the state during protests against austerity measures and privatizations. On the other, Genoa notwithstanding, people in the North stand a better chance of getting home safely after a demonstration. Thus Mertes concludes that the divergence over the economy and the environment may prove more crucial than the Left’s organizational forms. He points out the case of ‘green production’ laws for which North Atlantic groups have campaigned. He says that these laws have often worked as a form of protectionism, favouring Northern Capital – and labour – while increasing poverty and unemployment in the South. Mertes points out that Walden Bello and others have spoken passionately of the need to redress this, calling for a visionary strategy that would protect the jobs of Northern workers at the same time as strengthening the rest of the World’s working class – forging a common front against the re-stratification of labour that global capital is currently trying to push through.

As for Hardt’s strictures on national – sovereign solutions, Mertes points out that African governments that have refused to accept the poisoned gift of Monsanto’s unlimited, self-sterilizing corn have for once been acting in the interests of their citizens. In another instance, Via Campesina – a North-South alliance of working farmers – held its own mini-forum

at Porto Alegre and logos of Monsanto and Coca-Cola were ritually burnt at its closing ceremony.

A third division, though no longer on North-South line, points out Mertes, was over the question of global capitalism itself. While all the speakers and participants were critical of the IMF, World Bank and WTO, there was disagreement over whether these institutions could be reformed or whether they were inherently linked to a system that is fundamentally unequal, corrupt and unsustainable. There was far less debate on the current world political situations.

Towards the end of this article, Mertes that any debate over the WSF needs to remember the exhausting logistic problems that global organizing presents to the dispossessed. For time, money and a daunting sense of distance present real obstacles to students, activists, trade unionists, the rural and urban poor in stark contrast to the well-funded global structures of the ruling class.

Tom Mertes concludes by saying that grass-roots organizing remains crucial for building up relationships of mutual support, coalitions of resistance. 'Chaotic, dispersive, unknowable' as they may be, these messy, mass-scale face-to-face encounters are the life-blood of any movement – an element that telecommunications metaphors can never attain.

What is the Point of Porto Alegre?

Activists from two generations in dialogue

Bird's Eye View

This is a very brief document on the debate, generated on the eve of WSF 2002 at Porto Alegre, over the alternatives to globalization. Here, two key activists - one from Argentine and the other a Franco American – discuss frankly the best way forward for a movement at a pivotal moment in its history. The discussion is between **Susan George** and **Ezequiel Adamovsky**. The topic of discussion relates to the priorities for the World Social Forum.

Susan George feels that it is utmost important to fix your priorities before you arrive at WSF conclave because if you don't decide before you get there what you want to do and who you want to do it with, you are going to be frustrated and come back feeling you did not really get that much accomplished. That's why she thinks that all should be concentrating on strategies in whatever area they feel is most important and that they know most about.

Ezequiel Adamovsky, the other activist engaged in the debate, also thinks that the Forum will deal mainly with strategies and says that his priority at the WSF will be how to strengthen the network of movements that has been built up in the last few years. But during his dialogue Ezequiel expresses some concerns as well. Says he, 'The first is that the Forum risks reproducing, in the way it functions, some features of the society we want to change'. For example, he says, 'there is a danger that the Forum will become unduly focused around big names or intellectuals who get most of the funding while many grassroots activists can't afford to attend and don't get the space they deserve. Besides, I think the intellectuals should try to meet activists on an equal basis to listen to each other'. **Ezequiel apprehends that Forum will become ritualized into an annual meeting with famous intellectuals and big names on panels but without enough real exchange between activists and movements from all over the world.**

To this Susan replies, - ‘ I am not looking to be a star and I think that many people in the movement that you call the intellectuals aren’t looking to be stars either. --- Movement was really launched now and that the presence of this or that big name was really not important. I stressed exactly what Ezequiel is saying because the organisation has very little money this year. They should use whatever little they had to bring people of the kind that Ezequiel is describing. --- But I don’t think it’s the case that there is a single pot of money out of which some big names are being brought and then other activists aren’t’.

Susan agrees that we all have the same goal of establishing contacts with people on the ground, grassroots activists, and others who are attempting to write about and popularise this movement and to help it to channel it into particular directions. In her opinion WSF could be the rare place where all things could happen.

On the question of WSF alienating radical voices and movements, Ezequiel Adamovsky replies in positive and points out that many radical movements are feeling more and more uncomfortable with the WSF. He further points towards the attempts to create alternative spaces within the Forum and even outside it in front of Counter - Forum. He says, ‘I see a danger there, and I think that at some point the Forum will have to address the fact that different groups have different approaches to social change.

Elaborating further, Ezequiel identifies two approaches to social change – one, the approach of most Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) wanting to reinforce the role of civil society as a check on the power of corporations, thereby restoring the balance the society has lost and making capitalism more humane, whereas the other is a more radical approach which wants to strengthen the antagonistic movement against capitalism to fight this society and build a new one.

He does not believe in any need to put a fence between these two approaches. Rather, he feels, that WSF should provide a space in which radical movements feel comfortable. He says, ‘**I think that radical movements should play a larger role at the Forum than NGOs.** It feels really annoying that we have to share the space with a person like the Mayor of Buenos Aires Anibal Ibarra against whom we are fighting in the city. --- Likewise, I know that the guys from Indymedia are angry at the Forum because all space for the media has been occupied by corporate media, and there is no space for the alternative or the independent.

To this Susan George replies, ‘we felt exactly the same way in France as Ezequiel and his movement feel in Buenos Aires when we witnessed that every French politician on the left who was going to run for the Presidency was rushing to Porto Alegre to show off. **But I think it is always healthy to have people on your left, of course only those vouching for peaceful movements’.**

On the other, Susan George gives no weight to the ‘talks about revolution’. She says, ‘what do they mean? Taking state power? I think it could end in facisim.’

Nevertheless, Susan is ready to listen to what Ezequiel calls radical strategies and whatever they can do to help to build a different sort of

society, provided it's done in a non-violent way.

Susan also disagrees with the notion that all NGOs simply want to make capitalism with a human face. She says, 'I think people recognize more and more whether they are in the North or South, and I don't know whether you qualify my own organization ATTAC as an NGO, but we certainly don't think it is enough to have capitalism which is just slightly nicer, we go a lot further than that.'

Ezequiel Adamovsky counters the arguments put forward by Susan George by saying, 'People have many different ideas of what a revolution means. The same is true with violence. What is violence to some people is not violence for others.'

He completely disagrees with Susan's argument of making the forum a pressure movement. He says, '**I would like this movement to help us take control of our own lives, not just to pressure the representatives to change the world in ways that we want, or to pressure the state or the corporations to change anything. We need more than that. Perhaps that is the point of the strategy needed to be discussed.**'

On the issue of Comintern Syndrome, Adamovsky refers to the proposal of creating a network of networks and movements but expresses his apprehensions in clear terms. Says Adamovsky, 'My fear is that it could become centralized, with a homogenous voice or a visible location. This would actually lead to the destructions of the existing networks, which are being built every day and getting stronger every day. To have a sort of secretariat of a network means actually the opposite of a network. This could lead to struggles for power, which could end up destroying the existing networks.'

On the contrary, he feels that, the forum should offer economic and technical support and resource for the network to actually happen rather than try to centralize or give the network a voice or a space or a location.

Susan George is also against the idea of Comintern. She thinks such an idea would be a disaster. She is in agreement with Adamovsky as for as idea of centralizing the movement is concerned but differs on giving economic and technical resources to movements which are struggling to exist, wondering where those are going to come from. **She says that some people think that there is lots of money floating around in northern NGOs in particular, but this is not so. Some may be having money but on the whole everything works on volunteer labour. She further says, 'If we want to get economic and technical support for our allies, then the best way to do that is to keep working on issues such as international taxation, reducing the burden of debt, and municipal budgeting systems on the lines of Porto Alegre. That's where the real money is?'** To her, 'it is better to be more specific about how we can try to help the existing networks, how they can be identified, how the serious ones can be separated for the less serious ones and then the question of getting together the resources comes'.

She poses a direct question to Ezequiel regarding the sort of declaration issued by the WSF 2001. She asks, does he also object to it as a sign of centralization? Ezequiel replies to it by saying that, of course, he does not object to any attempt of the movement to come together and to think, produce statements or design a political strategy. But he again asserts

that a secretariat or any other form of centralization would destroy the possibilities of a network. He also talks about his priority being one to help build networks with other movements, and keep on learning with other movements and sharing our own experiences with other movements.

Here Susan George fires another question – Means are fine but what about goals?

To this Adamovsky replies: ‘ I can only speak about what I would like to do in my own struggles in my own place. I am an anti-capitalist. I would like to create a completely new society, quite different from the actual one. For that we need to link our struggles with the struggles of others all over the world. He further says, ‘I think that we are all working towards the same goal, even if we don’t have the same strategy and disagree on certain issues. I think that we have that in common: the idea to create a world where you can decide by yourself.

Here Susan registers her differences with Adamovsky. She says, ‘ **It’s all very well to say we are going to create spaces where people can make their own decisions. Those decisions are more and more hemmed in by the fact that there is not any decent bus service, there is not decent school for your children, food prices are going up because it’s all imported, and housing is impossible inside the city because there is no social housing, and so on. That’s why I focus on trying to challenge the bastards and get rid of them.** And since I can not do everything, I have picked one particular corner of that now. My big fight used to be about international debt and I have said everything I have to say on that.

She vehemently asserts, ‘We must get rid of the killers who have got most of the money, most of the power, and are already in position, controlling most of the structures. For me that’s the urgent task, because without that, what Ezequiel is proposing is simply never going to work.

Showing agreement with Susan’s assertion, Ezequiel clarifies that when he speaks of creating spaces where we can live the way we want to live, he means in an antagonistic way. ‘I mean that we have to challenge and to confront the power of corporations. But we need to do both the things at the same time because it’s the part of the same issue and the same struggle. You challenge and confront corporations while you are creating something different, a different space which is organised with different rules, different bases.--- Building a world beyond capitalism always means confronting capitalism.

Economics and Politics of the World Social Forum

Aspects of Indian Economy,
No.35, September 2003

By Research Unit for
Political Economy, Mumbai

Bird's Eye View

Gatherings of the World Social Forum (WSF) in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, and a series of regional gatherings following the same pattern, have witnessed massive and increasing mobilisations of people voicing opposition to globalisation. The WSF, conceived as a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum, has been seen by many as the potential source of a new politics, as an emerging alternative to the dominant political trends of the day. It is impossible for anyone opposed to, or fighting against, imperialism to ignore it.

The September issue of the 'Aspects of Indian Economy' journal looks critically at the WSF from the perspective of those who see the term 'globalisation' as a misleading description of worldwide economic changes. **The essence of these changes is that Capital is armed with greater freedom of entry and exit worldwide, while Labour remains trapped within national boundaries. Ownership of capital is more centralised and concentrated than ever before in imperialist hands, and is by no means dispersed over the globe. What has been 'globalised' is merely the ability of capital to maximise the exploitation of labour everywhere.** It is not only the people of the Third World countries who bear the brunt of these changes but also the working class in the imperialist countries. The resistance to this intensified onslaught of imperialism has begun to take shape across the world, and is being tackled basically by repression on people's movements and military aggression.

Since purely repressive measures would only breed more resistance, imperialism cannot have its way without combining these with more sophisticated political means. This perspective informs the journal's attempt to grasp the character of the WSF. There are two chapters: - "**How and Why the World Social Forum Emerged**", and "**WSF Mumbai 2004 and the NGO phenomenon in India**" - followed by two appendices: "**Ford Foundation - a case study of the aims of foreign funding**" (discussing the foundations' links with CIA, its influence on Indian policy making, particularly in agriculture, and its recent emphasis on funding NGO activism), and "**Funds for the World Social Forum**" (listing sources of funds for the WSF Secretariat and some of the WSF participants).

I. The first chapter looks at the emergence and development of the WSF against the background of "the remarkable international upsurge of protest and confrontation" that have dogged every major gathering of the leading international powers and institutions ever since the Seattle conference of the WTO in November 1999. "The immediate thrust of the protestor's action was straightforward: to physically prevent the delegates from gathering, and thus prevent these conferences from completing their agenda... these militant protests were remarkably effective in disrupting 'business as usual.'" For example, in Seattle, while there were pitched battles with the police on the streets, the trade talks broke down. These protests exposed a wide diversity of participating forces, previously non-political or limited to single issues, to broader political perspectives. These experiences of struggle contributed to radicalising wide sections of the protestors.

In response, with each successive meet, more physical and legal barricades were put in place, and increasingly brutal methods of repression were used. But these could not stem the tide of people drawn towards the movement, representing growing numbers affected and getting ruined by the current processes, even within the imperialist countries. The aggressively pro-globalisation magazine 'Economist' warned - "The radicals on the streets are

voicing an organised and extremist expression of widely shared anxieties... the protestors are prevailing over firms, international institutions and governments because, for now, they do reflect that broader mood. **If their continuing success stimulates rather than satisfies their appetite for power, global economic integration may be at greater risk than many suppose.**"

Top officials of international bodies had also started talking of the need to create structures within the "incipient structures of world governance" where "the fears and anxieties of civil society can be fully aired and addressed." Parallel NGO meets have been organised at each major summit, sponsored by the World Bank, IMF and the UN agencies. The WTO had itself hosted a parallel Social Summit a day before its Seattle conference. It failed to carry any credibility with the protestors since it was being organised by the very targets of the protests.

"The alternative to Seattle-type confrontations" started being given shape barely three months after the Seattle protests. In February 2000, the heads of a French NGO platform ATTAC, a Brazilian employers' organisation and an association of Brazilian NGOs first discussed a proposal for a "world civil society event", and secured the support of the municipal and state governments controlled by the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT). The World Bank website dates the WSF to a UN meeting held in June 2000 in Geneva, where the above proposal was discussed.

The chapter then takes a look at the backgrounds of what it calls "the two principal authors of the WSF": ATTAC and the Workers' Party of Brazil.

1. **ATTAC** aims to build a coalition of diverse groups - farmers, trade unions, intellectuals - devoted to lobbying international financial institutions for reforming and humanising themselves. It was originally set up in 1998 to campaign for the Tobin tax (whereby speculative financial transactions would be taxed at the rate of 0.1 percent in order to raise funds for productive and socially desirable purposes). ATTAC opposes a write-off of third world debt, believes that the IMF could be turned into an instrument for "enlightened governments", and accepts job cuts as a last resort for the survival of companies. It believes that the militant anti-globalisation protests "failed" to propose "credible alternatives." ATTAC is held in high esteem by the governments of France and Germany, and sees no wrong in receiving funds from the ruling quarters in Europe. Some of its funders are the European Commission, the French government's Department of Social Economy, the National Ministry of Education and Culture, besides a large number of local governments. It received 80,000 Euros from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs "to help them organise the WSF".
2. **The Workers' Party (PT) of Brazil** has been scrupulously implementing the stipulations of the IMF after being voted to power at the national level. The party had committed itself during the election campaign to maintain the budget surpluses required by the IMF. After the elections, by a remarkable feat of extraction from a poverty-ridden economy in recession, it actually managed to increase the budget surplus from 3.5 percent of the GDP to 4.6 percent. The PT has earned the praise of the World Bank and the IMF for the stringent fiscal orthodoxy it has imposed on the people of Brazil. In fact, Brazil's policy makers today mouth the phraseology of the IMF itself in asserting that sustaining the budget surpluses would lead to economic growth and thus make it possible to shift the surpluses from debt payments to social development.

The next section tries to see the emergence of the WSF against the backdrop

of "the great wave of workers' and peasants' struggles sweeping Latin America," beginning with the Zapatista uprising of 1994 in the Chiapas in Mexico. These include: several land struggles inspired by the Zapatistas, many of them armed; the guerilla war led by FARC and ELN in Colombia; the people's war in Peru; the direct occupation of land by the Movement of the Landless (MST) in Brazil; a series of factory-occupations in Argentina; a near-insurrection in Ecuador against IMF-imposed policies, resulting in the fall of a government; anti-privatisation struggles in Bolivia; mass mobilisations in support of the Chavez government in Venezuela, defying both the local elite and US imperialism. Latin America has thus become an important zone of class struggle, confronting international capital.

It is argued that since "many of these struggles have been spontaneous or led by amorphous forces," it is important in the interests of international capital to find ways for "channeling them along the 'constructive' paths charted by organisations like ATTAC." This is the point of convergence of all the WSF funders: the PT governments in Brazil; the European Union; the French government; the Ford Foundation (always a close ally of the US CIA); the Heinrich Boll Foundation (controlled by the German Greens Party, a supporter of the wars on Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, and whose leader is the foreign minister); and major funding agencies like Oxfam (UK), ActionAid (UK), Novib (Netherlands), etc. Details of funding for the WSF available with the publishers are given in Appendix II. **There has been a significant absence of discussion within the WSF bodies about the possible relations of dependence that such funding could generate. A case study of the Ford Foundation is given Appendix II, showing how it has helped to shape Indian policies in favour of American interests.**

The next section is a critique of the both the original WSF charter, adopted in June 2001, and the revised one prepared by the WSF India Working Committee after the Bhopal consultation in 2002. Following are the main points of the critique:

1. The WSF is "a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives... opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism." But "the participants... shall not be called upon to take decisions... on declarations and proposals of action that would commit all, or the majority, of them." **In other words, the WSF as a body will not take a stand on any issue, however pressing and immediate it might be.**
2. The WSF's diversity has its limits. It claims to welcome the entire diversity of opposition to "any form of imperialism", but excludes any struggle that defends or advances its cause by use of arms (i.e. "organisations that seek to take people's lives as a method of political action.") This is blind to the fact that forms of struggle develop out of concrete situations, and is an attempt to create divisions among people fighting imperialism in their own particular contexts. This can only harm the struggle against imperialism, since it requires coordination among various forms of dissent, opposition and resistance. In other words, the WSF organisers think that it is possible to be "a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives" without involving the Palestinian or Iraqi resistance fighters, and the numerous other armed national liberation and revolutionary movements today raging the world.
3. The WSF-India does not intend "to exclude from the debates it promotes those in positions of political responsibility, mandated by their peoples, who decide to enter into the commitments that result from those debates." In other words, government leaders will participate in their official capacity. Since the charter clearly bars participants from taking decisions

on declarations and proposals for action that commit anyone, these government leaders will have the freedom to express their positions without the responsibility to act according to what emerges from the debates. Moreover, the WSF organisers have decided that elected governments are necessarily "mandated by their peoples" and, by keeping armed movements out, have got away without the basis of this assertion getting questioned. The inclusion of government leaders also weakens the claim of "non-governmental and non-party context" of the WSF process. Are government leaders not party to carrying out what has been the primary role of the State: that is, to maintain by all means a monopoly on the use of violence? So why are they exempt from the ban on "organisations that seek to take people's lives as a method of political action"?

4. **The two clauses have different objects: one ensures the participation of the very governments, who are aggressively pushing the agenda of globalisation, and the other keeps out those radical forces that these governments consider undesirable.**
5. The WSF will "increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanization the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State." In other words, the organisers prescribe the course people's struggles must stick to in order to be part of their "open, plural, diversified" gathering: intensified exploitation dehumanizes the world; states employ violence to accomplish this; but resistance must be non-violent. The organisers, of course, have no idea of the humanizing, self-liberating quality of the violence used by the most oppressed against their oppressors. Perhaps they find the violence of dehumanizing exploitation and the violence used by the State against the people a little more acceptable than the violent resistance to both.
6. It is simply impossible to fight "domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism" by "mobilising resources" (i.e. taking funds) from "external sources" (primarily governments, funding agencies). After all, he who plays the piper calls the tune.

The critique of the charter is followed by an assessment of the actual gatherings that took place in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Writing of WSF 2002, James Petras refers to the sharp polarisation between the 'reformers' and the 'radicals', and "the significant differences in the social composition of the meetings and the public demonstrations." The main-stage events, where one addressed more than 1000 delegates a time, were dominated by establishment politicians, NGO big-shots and academics; only the too numerous parallel workshops, with very limited reach, were occasionally turned into sites of fruitful exchange among activists from movements fighting imperialism.

Who was included? The President of Brazil and the party he belongs to; high-level delegations, including several cabinet ministers from the French government, like the minister of cooperation (who deals with the foreign debt of former French colonies in Africa); a top-ranking UN delegation (representing a body in whose name several bloody wars have been fought, especially since 1991); Italian members of parliament (including the secretary of the Left Democrats, who had spoken strongly in favour of Italy entering the war against Afghanistan); NGOs and foundations from Germany linked to political parties and the church; etc.

The Italian coordinator of the WSF is quoted saying: "Several thousand politicians were present, many of whom are members of parliament, mainly from Europe, who voted for the US war against Afghanistan. Many of these had declared themselves against our movement... These are the same people, who in Genoa, while the police was beating us up,

called upon the population not to join the demonstration, in order to isolate us and leave us in the hands of the repressive state apparatus... These people in their municipalities and regions have expelled immigrants." But the organising body of the WSF considers them "government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this charter"!!

"The largest non-Brazilian representation was of those who had funds, or who could be sponsored by those who had funds -- not social movements, but NGOs and parliamentary parties." Little wonder then, that the World Bank president's message to WSF 2003 that "we can work together much more closely" is also quoted.

The next section mentions those who were excluded from the three gatherings. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the main target of US's Plan Colombia, enjoying great solidarity in Brazil, received a lot of sympathy from some participants in the first gathering. Their representatives were, however, not allowed to register as participants in the second and third WSF meets. The Zapatista fighters, representing perhaps the most prominent 'anti-globalisation' movement in Latin America, were also kept out. The Cuban delegation was refused official status at WSF 2002. Hugo Chavez, fighting intense US efforts to overthrow the elected government in Venezuela, was refused space in the WSF 2003. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an unarmed organisation of the mothers of those who 'disappeared' during the Argentinian military dictatorship of 1976-83, was excluded, despite the support of one of the official organisers, the Brazilian Movement of the Landless (MST).

A speech delivered by Hebe Bonafini, the head of the Madres, at a mass rally in Argentina after the WSF 2002, is reproduced in this section. An excerpt: "People flocked to this WSF to fight and organise against globalisation only to find out, when they arrived, that the organisers had staged the event so that all we were supposed to be talking about was 'putting a human face' on globalisation."

The next section deals with the "opaque and undemocratic" structure of the WSF. It quotes one of the International Council of the WSF members saying: "The WSF does not have internal procedures for collective democratic will-formation." The much-celebrated "horizontal" structure hides the "force that decides who will be invited and who not; and who will be given prominence at the plenary sessions and press meets, and who will be consigned to the oblivion of a workshop." A "vertical" structure has scope for communication and representation from the bottom to the top, whereas a "horizontal" structure only allows top-down decisions by an inaccessible body. No wonder, all WSF meets have been confronted by demonstrations outside their sessions. The chapter concludes that the WSF serves the purpose of imperialism by "entangling many genuine forces fighting imperialism in its collective inaction."

II. The second chapter deals more directly with the WSF phenomenon in India: the funding, and nature of the leading organisations. The initiative to organise the WSF 2004 in India has been taken by an alliance of NGOs and leading cadre of certain political parties - mainly, the CPI(M) and the CPI -- along with their mass organisations of workers, students, peasants, and women, besides certain mass organisations with close ties to NGOs. Others would join in either as organisers of discussions or as participants.

The funding for this meet is of two types: the infrastructural funding flowing to the WSF central bodies; and the funding for the various participating organisations. Maximum international fundings are to be raised and managed

by the International Council/Brazilian Organising Council "as per their own policy." No principle has been laid down regarding the kind of sources they may tap. 'Project World Social Forum 2004', a document of the WSF secretariat, estimates total expenditure for the event at Rs 135 crore, the bulk of which is the cost of the delegates' transportation, accommodation and food. Much of the latter cost will be borne by foreign funding agencies, since nearly all the major foreign-funded NGOs in India and many from abroad will participate. These funds will never enter the WSF Secretariat accounts.

The next section looks at "the NGO institutional phenomenon" in India, in order to point out its political significance. Nearly 20,000 organisations were registered under the FCRA with the Home Ministry by the beginning of this millennium, receiving Rs 4,535 crore of foreign funds. International funding agencies depend heavily on funds from government, corporate and institutional sources. **These huge funds put to question the notion of NGOs as something that emerged from society, not imposed from above. This section lists out the ways in which NGOs serve the interests of imperialism:**

1. **"Developmental"** NGOs come in handy to the State for maintaining a façade of democracy and welfare, even as it slashes the people's basic survival needs from its budget. Their activities happen within "the basic context of enormous, conscious suppression of development." **In other words, they perform the task of bringing about micro-adjustments to distract attention from the intensifying macro-loot, and to enable the State to deny even the existing meagre social claims that people have on the social product. The sums spent by them are peanuts compared to the cuts in social expenditure. But their mere presence signals the entry of private organisations to fill the gap left by the State, bolstering the propaganda of "privatisation".**
2. **"Grassroots"** NGOs give employment and a small share of the gains to locally influential or dominant persons. NGO employment also serves to buy over to the side of the establishment potential opponents of the authorities. NGO workers thus form as "a network of local political influence that stabilises the existing order."
3. **"Activist" or "advocacy"** NGOs take people's struggles from the path of confrontation to that of negotiation. The World Bank recognises this role well: "Social tensions and divisions can be eased by bringing political opponents together within the framework of formal and informal forums and by channeling their energies through political processes, rather than leaving confrontation as the only form of release." No wonder, NGOs are promoted with a vengeance wherever people's struggles threaten the State, e.g. in Andhra Pradesh. **Moreover, NGO-led movements claim to represent the people but are directed by 'big bosses' who are paid by funding agencies to carry on their activity. They are accountable to their funders and not to the people.** It is often the NGOs that respond first to any political or social issue, including globalisation, alienating political life itself from popular presence and representation.
4. **The ideological underpinnings of the NGO phenomenon** is provided by "post-modernism", an important strand of which is the dismissal of any worldview that attempts to comprehend all reality in an integrated way. This has serious implications for the practice of social movements, positing 'class' as just another category, besides gender, ethnicity, nationality, etc. So it rules out the possibility of united action by various social sections on the basis of common objective interests, talking instead

of varying "coalitions" or "alliances" joining hands for limited specific aims. It denies the possibility of drawing a clear line between the people and their oppressors, and attempts to bring them together under the category of "civil society". The WSF-India charter therefore makes space for "local businessmen and industrialists, as well as parliamentarians, sympathetic bureaucrats and other concerned sections from within and outside the state."

5. NGOs have been promoting **the notion of a "non-party political process"**. Any single political force that aims to represent all sections of the people is seen as an imposition on the diversity of groups and ways of being. But NGOs themselves are emerging as "a single political force", spanning a wide range of social sections, with consensus on most issues.

This section concludes that the WSF provides an opportunity to NGOs for legitimizing themselves as a political force and to influence mass organisations that have been deeply suspicious of them.

The next section looks at the other part of the "alliance" that has brought the WSF to India, i.e. the CPI(M). It begins with the party's critique of NGOs, articulated in "Foreign Funding and the Philosophy of Voluntary Organisations", an article published in 1988 in its theoretical journal. Prakash Karat, a politburo member of the party, had argued in this article that the 'activist' stance adopted by the NGOs was "a sophisticated imperialist strategy": "How else can one explain the strange spectacle of imperialist agencies and governments funding organisations to organise the rural and urban poor to fight for their rights and against exploitation? ... Open access to foreign funds allowed by the Government of India has become one of the major sources of imperialist penetration in the country." He called for an amendment to the FCRA to prohibit from receiving foreign funds "all voluntary organisations which claim to organise people for whatever form of political activity", and for a "campaign against the eclectic and pseudo-radical postures of action groups".

This section argues that the CPI(M) has since then changed both its practice and its theoretical formulations regarding NGOs. This is not surprising, since sustained opposition to foreign-funded NGOs makes sense only as part of a broader opposition to imperialism. But as a ruling party, "periodically in Kerala and continuously in West Bengal", the CPI(M) "actively invites foreign investment, negotiates large foreign loans with the Asian Development Bank, represses labour organisations, privatises public sector units, hikes electricity charges... the measures labelled 'globalisation'". PriceWaterhouse Coopers, an MNC, is the financial adviser to privatisation in West Bengal. The American consultancy McKinsey was commissioned to advise on agro-based and IT industries. The party's organ reported: "This initiative is aimed at attracting national and multinational investors to the state. McKinsey has already established contacts with several such investors. Now our plans and efforts should be commensurate with their requirements and demands."

The concluding section spells out the basic criterion that determines the actual political role of any forum: Does it advance the people's struggles against the current imperialist onslaught, or does it "divert the fighting forces to a dead-end"? **The WSF's relation to the anti-imperialist struggle can be figured out from the silence of the ASF 2003 organisers in Hyderabad on the "armed globalisation" being carried out by the Chandrababu Naidu government. This fact alone should expose the WSF's character as "not an instrument of struggle, but a diversion from it."**

New Revolts Against the System

New Left Review 18,
November-December
2002

By Immanuel Wallerstein

Bird's Eye View

This article locates the World Social Forum (WSF) in the context of the history of popular movements from the 1850s to the present day. The purpose is to assess the Forum as the representation of a "qualitatively new alignment of forces and strategies of change".

The author divides the history of movements into two broad phases: one from 1850 to 1970, followed by a period of search and transition that still continues.

The author sees two distinct and "in many ways rival" kinds of popular movements -- the 'social' and the 'national'. The first refers to class struggles within each state, while the latter refers to struggles for the creation of national states. The two types mostly worked at cross-purposes to each other, and cooperated occasionally as a temporary tactic. However, between 1850 and 1970, these movements shared certain features:

1. For a long time, those in power regarded all these movements as threats to their stability;
2. They were "politically weak", subjected to systematic violence by the state and private forces, often leading to their destruction;
3. They faced great debates over their orientation towards the state - between Marxists and anarchists, and between political and cultural nationalists;
4. Those holding the "state-oriented" position won out, arguing that the political centrality of the state does not allow any move towards anarchism or cultural nationalism;
5. Socialist movements often used nationalist arguments, just as nationalist discourse often had a social component;
6. They deployed similar processes of popular mobilisation;
7. The 'reform' versus 'revolution' debate dogged both kinds of movements. The difference between the two increasingly blurred as the movements advanced along their political course. Once in power, by whatever route, they sought to stay there, often by sacrificing their militancy as well as international solidarity; and
8. They all discovered that state power, being constrained by the international system, was more limited than they had thought.

By 1960s, despite coming to power "practically everywhere", these movements had "not transformed the world." And then the "world revolution of 1968" happened. Revolutionary movements everywhere now shared two fundamental features:

1. Opposition to the hegemony of the USA and the Soviet Union's collusion in this hegemony; and
2. Assessment of the "Old Left" as "not part of the solution but part of the problem".

The erstwhile supporters of the "Old Left" were disillusioned by their actual performance in power: Wage labour had increased as a proportion of total work activity; democratic participation in the government and at the workplace had declined; the position of the countries at the world level did not change. The people lost

confidence in these movements and ceased to believe in the state as a mechanism of transformation. When they voted for these parties, it was merely to choose "the lesser evil".

1968 thus marks the turning point in the history of popular movements. The search had begun for a better kind of movement that would "actually lead to a more democratic, egalitarian society". The author lists "four kinds of movements" that came to the fore:

1. **Maoist movements inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China** -- They argued that "Old Left" failed because it was not "preaching the pure doctrine of revolution". But these movements rapidly became either "tiny, insulated, sectarian groups" that "quarrelled bitterly" over the "pure doctrine", or as happened in India, "evolved into newer versions of the Old Left". And the source of their inspiration disappeared with the sweeping changes in China following the death of Mao. The author claims that "no such movements of any significance exist" today.
2. **New Social Movements** - The movements of the environmentalists, feminists, and of racial and ethnic minorities flowered in the 1970s, deeply suspicious of state-oriented action and rejecting the Old Left's internal hierarchies and priorities. Like the Old Left, these got embroiled in the 'reform versus revolution' debate, which the 'revolutionaries' lost, and began to appear no more 'antisystemic' than the Old Left.
3. **Human Rights Organisations** - These spoke in the name of "civil society" and became a major political force in the 1980s and 1990s with the USA adopting "human rights" to deal with Central America, the focus on violations in East and Central European regimes, and the intense media coverage of ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and the Balkans. While some states began taking note of "human rights concerns", these organisations began looking more "the adjuncts of states than their opponents", and only rarely try to mobilise public support.
4. **"Anti-globalisation" movements and the World Social Forum (WSF)** - The term "anti-globalisation" earned media popularity during the protests against the Seattle WTO meetings in 1999. The protestors included many who were drawn from the "Old Left", the trade unions, the new social movements and the anarchist groups. **According to the author, the series of demonstrations against intergovernmental meetings that followed led to the "construction of the World Social Forum." The WSF represents the new "antisystemic movement."**

What makes the WSF different from all previous movements?

- ❖ It seeks to bring together all the previous types of movements, both from the North and the South, within a single framework: the Old Left, new movements, human-rights bodies, and others;
- ❖ It includes local, regional, national and transnational groups;
- ❖ The basis of participation are a common fight against the social ills resulting from neoliberalism and a mutual respect for everyone's

immediate priorities;

- ❖ The only slogan is "Another World is Possible"; and
- ❖ It does not attempt to create "an overall superstructure" (there is only an international coordination committee with about 50 members).

The success of the WSF stems from its "negative rejection" of neoliberalism. It remains to be seen whether it can advocate "a clearer, more positive" programme, without losing its unity and without creating a hierarchical structure.

This is a period of transition. The issues confronting movements are different from those of the 19th and most of the 20th centuries. Strategies that involved the capture of state power have become irrelevant. This explains the failure of both the Old Left and the Maoists to propose either long-term or immediate sets of political objectives that would enthuse the people. In this period of transition, those in power would no longer try to preserve the existing system, because even they know that it is doomed. They would rather try to ensure that the transition leads to a new system that replicates the hierarchy, privileges and inequalities of the present system. It is also a period of uncertainty where no one knows what the outcome would be, since no one knows what the others would do. The framework of the WSF is in tune with this reality.

The last section lists four components of a strategy the author considers appropriate to our time:

1. A process of constant, open debate about the transition and the outcome we hope for, which the WSF's structure encourages;
2. Serious engagement with "short-term defensive action", including electoral action, to prevent the negative effects of the "falling system" from getting worse in the short run;
3. Establishment of "interim, middle-range goals", including "selective, but ever-widening decommodification" - opposition to the private sale of the human body, water and hospitals, creation of structures "operating in the market" that aim not at profit but at performance and survival, running failing industries along these lines;
4. Developing the actual content of our "long-term emphases" -- a "relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian world"; and
5. Stop assuming what the "better society" will be like - let it emerge from debates and experiments with alternative structures.

First Reflections on the 3rd World Social Forum

From "Comrades' Agreements" to the Reinvention of Social Emancipation on a World Scale

February 2-4, 2003

By Peter Waterman

Bird's Eye View

The original title of this article written after the third WSF gathering was 'Out of Control', a phrase that, according to the author, connotes both the positive and the negative in the context of the WSF. The negative connotations include: "too big; lacking in openness, transparency and accountability; reproductive of traditional Party and big international non-governmental organisation politics." At the same time, the WSF is also positively "out of control": "its initiators can no longer control the process they invented and developed; the idea of the social forum is now out of the bottle and subject to numerous and varied local or specific claims, forms and inflections."

The author places himself "somewhere between the Centre of the WSF event/process and one of its several peripheries," on "a critical but committed edge of the Forum." The author's space has significant overlaps with the "decision-making Centre," but is also shared with "intellectuals like myself who prefer the incalculable freedom of cyberspace to the measurable power (lessness?) of the political institution that the Forum has been increasingly becoming."

Two key beliefs, stated in the introduction ("Dis/Orientations), filter the author's perspective on the WSF. One, that the movements must "keep moving" as their institutionalisation "will be, or should be, or could be" challenged. And two, that today the site of power struggles has clearly shifted from the political to the cultural/communicational sphere. The article deals with the following issues in separate sections:

- "1) The danger of going forward to the past of social movements and internationalism;
- 2) The problematic relationship with the trade unions;
- 3) The uneven composition of the Forum;
- 4) The uncertain future of the social movement network; and
- 5) The necessity of a communications/media/cultural internationalism."

The first section is titled: "**The Future of the Movements and Internationalism: Forward to the Past?**" It deals with the author's fear that, like the movements of the past, the WSF too would result in the domination of movements by the institutions they spawn and by political parties that turn such movements into their own instruments. These movements would be oriented towards or identified with the state. And, as a result, internationalism would remain a relationship between nations and nationalisms.

The author claims that the Centre of initiative and decision-making within the WSF allows neither participatory nor representative democracy. The space that WSF has created is not really far removed from the "old politics and parties".

The NGO constituents might address themselves to social movements and civil society but are accountable only to themselves. Parties like the Brazilian Workers' Party have "often hidden their political lights behind NGO bushels." Various inter-state agencies, such as the United Nations organisations for women (Unifem) and for labour (ILO) have free access to the WSF. State-dependent national and international funding agencies and the massive private-capitalist US foundations have supported the WSF or its several important NGO constituents. The author doubts if most members of the International Council represent and are accountable to anyone at all.

The Forum itself is divided between the "large, well-publicised and well-placed" star-studded centralised events and the numerous competing "marginal events". Since the WSF is not a policy-forming body, the official programme, conceived without public discussion, dominates.

The author argues that the demand for the WSF's decision-making bodies to consist of regional/national representatives challenges the dominance of the Forum's NGO elite. However, as major politicians and governments recognise the importance of the WSF, its focus on 'new global solidarity' is under

threat from nationalist diversions. For example, at the Asian Social Forum in India, dominated by "certain traditional Indian communist parties," not a word was spoken about the Indo-Pakistani conflict.

The second section titled "**The Union-Forum Relationship: Movable Objects and Resistible Forces**" deals with the "growing and deepening relationship" between the WSF and the "traditional international union institutions". The global unions and independent left unions have shared platforms with leaders of social movements and NGOs and have begun recognising themselves as institutions lacking the other's "appeal, dynamism and reach".

The author sees a sort of "understanding or alliance" between the Unions, the WSF and "Progressive States/men", represented by Brazil's Workers' Party government and President Lula, taking shape. This alliance can only work towards a recreation of the post-1945 Keynesian "Social Partnership model" on a global scale by the unions and their friends in the ILO and WSF. The author wonders whether the WSF's role would be limited to supporting this attempt at making capitalist globalisation 'decent'.

The third section is titled "**Combined and Uneven Development: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and Age.**" The author was alarmed at the White, Male, Middle-Aged and Middle-Class bias visible on various platforms and other public events at the third WSF. Differences in power and wealth among Forum participants were conspicuous. Without irresistible pressure from outside or below, the elitism would continue. If the WSF elites are made to confront their declared principles and forced to "re-balance" the actual power equation, they might begin facilitating rather than dominating or controlling the Forum process.

The author suggests two measures for this "re-balancing": quotas for under-represented categories, and "an official programme structured according to collective subjects (e.g. Labour, Women, Youth, Indigenous Peoples) rather than, or as well as, major problems."

The fourth section, titled "**A Social Movement Network: Decentralised?**", deals with the necessity and possibility of a movements' network of a new kind -- one that provides information and ideas on a continuing basis, including to "those people/places otherwise excluded from the periodic Forums." This network may go beyond a WSF that remains "largely earth-bound and institutional" into the freedom of cyberspace. The very existence of the Internet ensures that any network would be "supplemented or challenged by other networks."

The fifth section is titled "**From Organisation to Communication in the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement**". The author feels that though the broader movement reflects "the logic of the computer", the WSF does not do so. The Forum "does not think of itself in primarily cultural/communicational terms, nor does it live fully within this increasingly central and infinitely expanding universe." The WSF website "remains a disgrace", where the stress is on the "written and spoken word." The author finds that the dominant modes used by the WSF - the Panel and the Demonstration - actually "immobilise" people. Because "to mobilise" means to "make people more mobile than they are". The author feels that the new media have the power to do it, but the WSF has not adequately explored the possibility. Moreover, the author was amazed by the "paucity of cultural expression" at the WSF. He stresses the necessity to combine "dramatic cultural expression" with the more conventional modes used in the Forum.

The author finds inspiration in the attempts by "emancipatory and critical forces" to influence the WSF process from within. He concludes by reaffirming his faith in the possibility of a "meaningfully civil global society." For building such a society, transparency is "not only the best policy but the right one."

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- New Revolts Against the System
- First Reflections on the 3rd World Social Forum

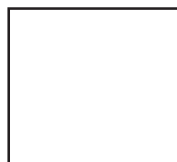
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