

# 1

*Chapter*

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## The Early Days

### 1. PUTTING THE PROPOSAL

By the closing months of 2000 the proposal to hold the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre at the end of January the following year, on the same dates as the World Economic Forum in Davos had gone out across the world. A large number of organisations had signed up to take part, although most of the confirmations were yet to come in late December and January. Many people, however, were still asking themselves what this initiative was; where the idea had come from—and how—of holding this Forum which seemed to be neither a congress, nor an assembly, nor a meeting of clearly defined political forces.

In order to satisfy this interest, I was invited to write an article for the weekly *Correio da Cidadania*, in São Paulo Brazil, explaining how the World Social Forum had arisen<sup>1</sup> and what it intended. (The article is reproduced as Annex 2 ‘World Social Forum—origins and aims’ [9]) and can also be found on the Forum website [10]. What I want to point out is that in that article published in December 2000, probably one of the first ever published on the Forum, I was already able to present its organisers’ basic orientations, which they had formulated quite clearly even before the Forum was held for the first time.

Those orientations were a result of applying in practice a number of political insights which drew on all the experimentation that had been going on over the preceding decades by people struggling to free themselves from domination of all kind (see Annex 8, ‘Citizens uprising against the established order’).<sup>2</sup> The shape that the World Social Forum

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came to take confirmed those insights as the breath of fresh air that was needed to confront capitalist domination.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. THE EVENT IS A SUCCESS<sup>4</sup>

The success of the event held in Porto Alegre took everyone, including its organisers, by surprise. I remember taking part in a debate on *TV Educativa* in Porto Alegre the night before the Forum started. Afterwards the moderator, journalist Geraldo Canali,<sup>5</sup> admitted to me: 'Prepare yourselves for what's going to be in the newspapers tomorrow. They are all set to say that the Forum was an enormous failure, because you invited Noam Chomsky, Nelson Mandela and so on, and they didn't come.' I met that same journalist the following day at the Convention Centre of the Catholic University.<sup>6</sup> It was almost impossible to talk in the midst of the throngs swarming through the corridors of that huge place where the Forum was taking place, but quickly he shot off to me: 'Forget what I said yesterday. No one's going to be able to say this was a failure...'

Contagious high spirits reigned. The event had far outgrown all the organisers' expectations, but everyone seemed fired by a rediscovered enthusiasm and accepted the resulting organisational shortcomings they encountered.<sup>7</sup> It was as if they all felt that simply by being in Porto Alegre to take part in the first World Social Forum, they were jointly responsible for this triumphant occasion. It was doubtless this atmosphere, far more than the number of people present that led the journalist to tell me the Forum was visibly an enormous success.<sup>8</sup>

The Annexes to this book include two articles (Annex 3, 'World Social Forum—balance and outlook' and Annex 4, 'World Social Forum: meaning and outlook') that I wrote evaluating that first Forum just after it got over. In both, it is clear that the organisers' initial insights had been confirmed.

It was unthinkable not to press ahead with the process. It had been so welcomed in Brazil and around the world that there was no other option. It was fundamentally important to hold new editions of the Forum. The struggle against neo-liberalism had indeed gained a new instrument with great power to summon and mobilise.

### 3. ONWARD, NECESSARILY TO THE WORLD LEVEL

The Organising Committee formed by the eight organisations that had called the first Forum<sup>9</sup> felt duty bound to take on the responsibility of

ensuring that the process continued.<sup>10</sup> However, all the proposals put forward to that end reflected a second certainty: the Forum experience must spread out across the world. It would be senseless for a world process of struggle against a system that is planet-wide to hole up at one spot in one country. The issue that now arose was how to go about doing this.<sup>11</sup>

The idea that prevailed was to hold a second World Social Forum again in Porto Alegre in 2002, while at the same time encouraging smaller forums to be held in other countries, and then to hold the third World Forum in another country. All would be on the same date as the Davos Forum, so as to mark the alternative nature of the World Social Forum, and always on the initiative and under the responsibility of civil society organisations. The 2003 Forum would be held in a country chosen after an evaluation of the conditions in which the 2002 forums were held.<sup>12</sup>

That was how what came to be called the ‘World Social Forum process’ started with an Information Note from the Organising Committee. That Note spelling out those decisions was read at the closing session of the first Forum and is reproduced at the end of this chapter.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. THE DIFFICULT CONSENSUS RULE**

It was only after lengthy, laborious discussions that the eight groups on the Organising Committee were able to reach the decision to take the process forward and on a world scale, because the Committee had adopted the consensus rule for all its decision-making. That rule was later stated explicitly in a Programmatic Agreement signed by those eight organisations during the process of preparing for the second World Social Forum.

In the Agreement, the rule was formulated as:

Decisions by the Organising Committee shall always be reached by consensus. Upon failure to reach a consensus, a vote shall be taken to determine the will of the majority, with immediate confirmation as to whether the minority accepts the proposed decision. If not, discussion shall continue until a consensus, or the consent of the minority, is obtained. Partners who are not represented by their chief representative or deputy at meetings of the Organising Committee shall be consulted by telephone, fax or email, and their response confirmed in writing within 3 days. Failure to confirm shall be considered as acceptance,

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unless, in the opinion of all those present, it is materially impossible to contact the absent Partner in a short time, in the case of decisions involving the Committee's responsibility for policy.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, that rule is really quite exacting and very different from the usual system of deciding by majority vote which is commonly regarded as crucial for institutions to function democratically. However, both at the time of the decision on whether and how the Forum should continue and also throughout all the Committee's subsequent experiences, it has proved to be the only rule that allows decision-making to respect the diversity among the eight organising groups' outlook, nature and type of activity. It was also able to ensure that all would take equal responsibility for whatever decisions were reached, each giving ground where acceptable in order to arrive at an agreement that would secure their collective purpose. The consensus decision rule indeed made it possible to build unity in diversity (see Chapter 3:5, 'Building unity among the organisers') without the normal and necessary divergences leading to traditional divisions, dissidence and ruptures, which would have made it unworkable to organise World Forums. It involves a difficult, continuous and sometimes painful learning process that is nonetheless consistent with the proposal for a new world that the Forum embodies (see Chapter 4:6, 'History of the WSF International Council—a search for identity and function').

#### 5. THE CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES

Once it was decided at the end of the first World Social Forum in 2001 that new editions of the event would be held, the organisers felt that to ensure their success the same configuration must be given to subsequent editions and to other forums organised elsewhere in the world. Thus, in the Information Note released at the end of the first edition, they undertook to draw up a Charter of Principles and Guidelines for holding forums in 2002.

This they drafted in the early months of 2001,<sup>15</sup> reaffirming the goals and main organisational arrangements adopted at the 2001 Forum, which expressed the political insights underlying the whole proposal. Called the World Social Forum Charter of Principles (transcribed at the beginning of this book), it came to constitute the Forum's basic document. From then on, all the forums organised, at whatever level, were framed by it.

There was some resistance to the Charter at first because it introduced requirements that are rather unfamiliar in political activity (see Chapter 3:6, 'Charter of Principles—doubts and issues' and 4:3

‘Forums spreading and taking root around the world’). Nonetheless, in terms of process, that rule is what really sets the Forum apart from the other instruments in the struggle for ‘another world’. Its point of departure is the decision to organise the Forum as an ‘open space’, with no leaders or followers—and that choice is the issue most exhaustively discussed among the Forum’s organisers and participants—is it a space or a movement? (see Chapter 3:1, ‘World Social Forum—a space or a movement?’)

To this day, the organisers of the World Social Forum are not unanimous about the Charter.<sup>16</sup> Little by little, however, it is becoming harder to dispute, and is referred to more, often with the realisation that it alone ensures the conditions for the forums to enjoy the same success as the various editions of the World Social Forum.

## **6. AN INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT GROUP**

The World Social Forum Organising Committee felt that without the support of organisations in other countries it would be impossible to fulfil the responsibility it had accepted of continuing the process set in motion in 2001 in Porto Alegre and taking it to the world level. The Information Note issued at the close of the first Forum thus announced the Committee’s intention to set up an international body to ensure such support.

The initial idea of a WSF International Committee gave way to a proposal for an International Council, because this new body would not be an executive organ. International organisations and networks that could give the necessary support were identified from among those that had taken part in the first Forum and invited to the first meeting of the Council on June 9-11 2001 in São Paulo. For three days, the 45 organisations present at the meeting—another ten could not attend, but agreed to participate in the Council—discussed the conditions necessary for the Forum process to continue, plans for holding it in Porto Alegre in 2002 and the real prospects for its becoming a world process. With minor amendments, the Council also ratified the Charter of Principles proposed by the Brazilian Organising Committee.

The Council also decided to hold a second meeting in Dakar, Senegal, now with a view to extending the Forum’s presence in Africa.<sup>17</sup>

It was felt that a Council meeting on the African continent, with the participation of African organisations that had not been able to get to Porto Alegre, would help internationalise the process.<sup>18</sup> The Council also decided that after Dakar its third meeting would be held in Porto Alegre

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in January 2002, on the days immediately preceding the Forum. That decision has become a tradition: the Council now holds its regular meetings on the days immediately preceding or following each Forum, and its extraordinary meetings whenever necessary taking advantage, as far as possible, of dates when forums are being held and as many as possible of its members are present, as occurred in November 2002 at the European Social Forum in Florence, Italy.<sup>19</sup>

## 7. ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The second World Social Forum held in January 2002 in Porto Alegre, completely justified the choices embodied in the Charter of Principles drafted six months earlier. It was an even greater success, bringing together more than twice the number of participants in the first Forum.<sup>20</sup> It was then up to the organisers to draw lessons for the future of the endeavour. Also emerging, however, were the doubts and tensions that persist so typically to this day.

Already in late February 2002, the article 'Lessons from Porto Alegre' (see Annex 5) that I wrote shortly after the second Forum, and which was published in several countries raised the issue. Towards the end of that article, I say:

In fact the great challenge facing the organisers of the World Social Forum is not identifying new and better content that will lead to ever more concrete proposals, but rather ensuring that the shape given to the Forum continues unchanged—a case where the means are decisive to the ends to be attained.

By the end of 2002, the Forum was really becoming a world process with expectations that the 2003 Forum would draw an even bigger number of participants. The article I wrote in December 2002 announcing the 2003 Forum (see Annex 6, 'World Social Forum 2003—another step forward'), points to all these signs and talks about the Forum that would be held in India in 2004.

### **NOTE RELEASED BY THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM ORGANISING COMMITTEE AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE 2001 FORUM.**

#### ***Information Note***

At the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre we have unleashed strong resistance to neo-liberalism with a view to building another world.

Nothing can contain that process.

In order to increase our strength still further, we have to unleash this resistance the world over by holding World Social Forums in many other countries.

To that end, the Organising Committee of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre proposes to:

1. Hold World Social Forums every year;
2. Hold these Forums always on the same date as the Economic Forum in Davos;
3. Hold a further Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002 on the basis of a Charter of Principles and Guidelines drawn up in advance from the experience of this Forum that we are closing today, as well as from consultations that will be held with the participants; and at the same time to encourage forums to be held on the same date at other venues around the world;
4. In the course of that process, to set up an International Council of the World Social Forum;
5. Hold a World Social Forum in 2003 in another country where the best conditions are found for holding the forums in 2002;
6. Hold a new round of forums in many countries in 2004, and so on successively.

By April 2001, the Organising Committee of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre will prepare:

- the charter of principles and guidelines for holding forums in 2002;
- the list of places willing to hold forums in 2002, in addition to the Forum in Porto Alegre.

The documents, conferences, declarations and proposals of the participants in the World Social Forum that we are closing today will be made available to everyone on the Internet websites <[www.forumsocial-mundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocial-mundial.org.br)> and <[www.worldsocialforum.org](http://www.worldsocialforum.org)>.

Porto Alegre, 30 January 2001

## NOTES

1. The article 'Everything continued at Mumbai' (Annex 10) contains another mention of the discussion on how the Forum proposal originated.

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2. Annex 8, 'Citizens insurgency against the established order', is the text of an account I gave at a panel discussion with the same title at the 2003 Forum. It describes more fully the organisational experiences of social movements in the 1980s and 1990s.
3. Just how innovative the World Social Forum is was not realised immediately, or for quite some time. In January 2003 it was still necessary to explain what it actually was, as can be seen clearly in an article I wrote for a special dossier of *La Vie* magazine and *Le Monde* newspaper in France for the third Forum. It reads: 'Porto Alegre is not a "summit of grassroots organisations" nor is it a world congress of a new international movement, but rather a free-form context designed for encounters to enable mutual recognition and learning, which respects all individualities. The Forum brings together delegates from social organisations that are striving the world over to build a world centred on people instead of on accumulating wealth. Today the Forum's organisers are certain they are on the right track to help citizens rid themselves of their feeling of powerlessness.'
4. The Forum's drawing power can be explained by the expectations it had raised. Significant in this connection is the article 'The promise of Porto Alegre', published in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in January 2001 and written by its director Ignacio Ramonet, particularly its first sentence: 'The new century is starting in Porto Alegre.' The text goes on to say: 'The "significant sectors" that will be arriving at the World Social Forum from the four corners of the earth are opposed to the present climate of economic barbarism. They reject the ethic of neo-liberalism as a step too far. A new spirit is aboard, a spirit of renewal and the people gathered in Porto Alegre will be looking to establish a basis for effective forms of counter-power.' In the end, it announces clearly the goal to be attained: 'But at the start of this new century, the dreamers gathered in Porto Alegre will remind us that globalisation extends to more than just the economy. The protection of the environment, the crisis of social inequality and human rights are also matters of global concern. And the time has come for the world's citizens to take them in hand' (Both quotes translated by Ed Emery: LMD English-language edition). That article, which was circulated the world over, certainly helped spur even greater international participation in the Forum.
5. Journalist with *TV Educativa*, Porto Alegre.
6. *Pontifícia Universidade Católica (PUC) de Porto Alegre*, in whose Convention Centre the Forum took place.
7. Particularly exciting for those who went to Porto Alegre in 2001 were the masses of Brazilians who flocked to the town, although less than half the number that would attend the following Forum in 2002.
8. In an interview published in the book *O espírito de Porto Alegre* [16], I pointed to the context where these encounters took place: 'I think that, in this regard, the Forum comes at a good time for Brazil. We were at a tremendous ebb. Suddenly that meeting, the high spirits, people hugging each other—What? *You're* here? Still alive and kicking, eh? —being part of that synergy and absorbing that spirit, that gave us the energy to go on fighting.'
9. The eight Brazilian groups that make up the World Social Forum Organising Committee are:  
ABONG—Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organisations  
ATTAC—Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens

CBJP—Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission (National Episcopal Conference, CNBB)

CIVES—Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship

CUT—Central Trade Union Confederation

IBASE—Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies

CJG—Centre for Global Justice

MST—Movement of Landless Rural Workers

10. The Organising Committee met every night, after the activities of the Forum ended, and sat through into the early morning in intense and at times difficult debates. The consensus expressed in the 'Information Note' had to be reached at the last early morning meeting before the Forum ended.
11. With regard to the options discussed at the time, it may be useful to quote the information I gave *Courier de la Planète* magazine in 2001 when it asked me where we were in preparing for the second Forum: 'At the end of the first Forum, we had the idea of holding a multi-centre Forum, grouping several forums that would take place simultaneously on different continents. But Porto Alegre had become a very strong reference point. [...] A multi-centre Forum would run the risk of Porto Alegre's becoming such a strong centre that the other regional forums would go unnoticed, or might even be seen as simply preparing for Porto Alegre. Now we are looking for the best way to take the Forum to the world level. [...] The next necessary step will be to achieve that multi-polarity. The results of the first two Forums should enable us to manage that.'
12. The reason for the decision to hold World Forums in other countries was not understood immediately. In December 2003, shortly before the World Forum was held in India, the Indian newspaper, *Labour File* [8], was still asking: 'Why was that important decision taken to leave Brazil?' My answer was: 'At the first World Forum, it was already clear that in order to fight against neo-liberalism it was essential to inter-link actions at the world level. The proposal to organise forums in all parts of the world was a response to that need.' I had given the same argument in an article for the French publication *Foi de Developpement* [13] in March 2003: 'The Forum gradually went beyond being an isolated event to becoming a world process. Its organisers knew very well that resistance to capital-led globalisation could not be exerted in or from just one country. It necessarily had to be worldwide.'
13. When the Information Note was read at the closing session of the Forum, it put an end to the suspense that had built up during the event ('Would the Organising Committee take on the task of holding other forums like that one, and where?') It was received with great enthusiasm by the participants who packed the largest hall of the PUC Convention Centre—especially, and naturally, by those who lived or worked in Porto Alegre itself, and had even gone as far as to lobby Organising Committee members and distribute stickers among the participants for another Forum to be held in their city in 2003.
14. Item 18 of the Programme Agreement for Incorporation of the World Social Forum signed on 8 June 2001.
15. The World Social Forum Charter of Principles was adopted by the Organising Committee on 9 April 2001 and approved with modifications by the International Council on 10 June the same year. It is that final version that came to be followed by the World Social Forum process.

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16. The third European Social Forum, held from 15-17 October 2004 in London, was perhaps the most flagrant example of non-observance of the Charter—it was organised with decisive participation by a political party and the municipal government—and of the possibly damaging effects of that non-observance on prospects for the process in Europe.
17. The Dakar meeting was held from 30 October to 1 November 2001.
18. The same reasoning later led the Council to call a meeting in Bangkok—in order to take the Forum process to Asia and with a view to holding a future World Social Forum in India, for which the Council had held consultations at its Dakar meeting. Later on, the same concern would bring it to decide to hold a meeting in Miami as a gateway to the North American sub-continent.
19. After Dakar, Council meetings were held in Porto Alegre on January 28-29 2002; Barcelona, Spain, 28-30 April 2002; Bangkok, Thailand, August 13-15 2002; Florence, Italy, 11-13 November 2002; Porto Alegre, 12 and 22 January 2003; Miami, United States, 23-26 June 2003; Mumbai, India, 15, 22 and 23 January 2004; and Passignano, Italy, 5-7 April 2004.
20. From 4,400 delegates in 2001, it went to 12,000 in 2002, while the number of participants who registered individually rose from 15,000 to 35,000.

## 2

### *Chapter*

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## Organising Social Forums

### The Basic Choices

The original insights of the World Social Forum's organisers can be expressed in terms of the organisational choices presented below, which are key to the innovation that the Forum brings to political practice.

#### **1. FORUM—AN 'OPEN SPACE'**

The first option taken up explicitly in the Charter of Principles is to organise Social Forums as an 'open space' (item 1 of the Charter). This expression took on a decisive meaning that gave the forums their specific character and defined the role of whoever was going to organise them. It is also one of the main reasons for the forums proving to be so attractive. It is this way of organising that enables them to draw together the different social movements and civil society organisations that believe that it is possible to build a new world.

By being an 'open space' with no owner, no sectarianism and no ruling bodies, they insure that all participants are welcome without supervision or 'policing', that their autonomy is guaranteed and that there is no question of their being exploited instrumentally.

Thus, by its very nature, the Forum is not a deliberative gathering. It starts 'open' and it ends 'open'. The organisers have tried to encourage participants to network and collaborate even more intensively in the periods between the editions of the Forum so that each event becomes a moment in a continuous process of launching new initiatives and forging closer

relations among organisations. This effort gained in intensity during preparations for the 2005 World Social Forum (see Chapter 4:2, ‘The 2005 World Social Forum’). The event in itself, however, remains ‘open’.

The World Social Forum is therefore not a new organisation or institution that takes positions as a social subject,<sup>1</sup> just as it is not a social movement. That fact confuses many institutions and groups (see Chapter 2:7, ‘Horizontalty’). Meanwhile, the fact that it is not a new movement confuses the leaders of movements (see Chapter 3:1, ‘World Social Forum: a space or a movement?’).

The Forum’s Charter of Principles does place some limits on how open a space it is (see Chapter 3:2, ‘Open space—who for?’). It is not open to participation by political parties, governments or international inter-governmental institutions; that is, they may not organise activities in a Forum, although people representing them may participate as ‘observers’ or even take part in debates at the invitation of Forum participants. Military organisations may not take part or send representatives (see Chapter 2:14, ‘Rejection of violence’). These choices stem from the organisers’ decision to make the Forum a civil society space (see Chapter 2:11, ‘World Social Forum—a civil society space’).

## **2. ORGANISER-FACILITATORS**

The word ‘forum’ has always meant open encounters held in keeping with certain criteria, but with no intention to be deliberative. Today, forums are spreading around the world in ever growing numbers. It is possible that many of them use the name because the World Social Forum has been so successful. Other forums—of parliamentarians, local authorities and magistrates etc.—have been organised for the days before, during or after the various editions of world and regional social forums.

These forums are very different from the World Social Forum whose organisers play no directive role: they do not decide, from the top down, either who is to take part or how. They do not play the same kind of role as the organisers of congresses, encounters, assemblies, conventions and other forums. Their role is simply to ‘facilitate’ the creation of an ‘open space’—a great meeting place on the world, regional or local scale—which they offer to all social movements, trade unions and different kinds of non-government associations and social organisations interested in meeting there.

In this light, therefore, these organisers’ only function is to provide a service, with no view to taking command of a collective event, and still

less to becoming the leaders of the initiatives that arise there. For this very reason, there is no need for them to represent the various sectors of civil society. What they—and their organisations—must enjoy is sufficient credibility so that the invitation to take part in the forums is heard and accepted.<sup>2</sup>

True, the Organising Committee of the first World Social Forum scheduled conferences and debates on subjects that it regarded as appropriate.<sup>3</sup> In their concern to attract participants—no one knew yet whether the Forum would interest many people<sup>4</sup>—the Committee went as far as to invite world-renowned intellectuals and activists to take part in conferences, and people respected for a life of political struggle to give ‘testimonies’. It even paid their fares to be sure they would come. That is to say, it did exactly what is done at forums generally.

In parallel, however—and this was the greatest organisational innovation at the first Forum—it proposed to prospective participants that they should undertake ‘self-organised activities’ on their own initiative. The invitation was for them, freely and truly to the diversity of their aims and types and levels of action, to discuss and denounce the impasses and hazards facing the world, relate their own activities in response to these, propose alternatives that could lead to ‘another world’ actually being constructed, exchange their experiences and thinking and build and coordinate—non-directive—relationships towards new initiatives to move beyond capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. SELF-ORGANISATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT**

In practice, the self-organised activities were what interested the organisations the most. Many found in the Forum an opportunity to make their work and struggles more widely known. In fact, the workshops—as the self-organised activities were first called<sup>6</sup>—made for more active participation than is common with passive auditorium audiences. In the event it was these activities—and not the conference speakers’ analyses, which tended to be repetitive—that brought out most strikingly the greater wealth of the debates and the new ideas and proposals brought before the Forum. As a result, given the interest that the organisations have shown, the number of workshops at the first Forum far exceeded expectations, and has practically doubled at each edition.<sup>7</sup>

From the first to the fourth Forum, the thematic terrains for activities programmed by the Forum organisers expanded steadily to take in more content, while the workshops began to address themes not provided

for initially. The organisers also began to introduce new forms of programmed activities, such as controversy round tables. Gradually, however, this ‘top down’ scheduling of conferences and debates was abandoned because of the prejudicial effect that they had on self-organised activities.

That responsibility was at first passed on to the participants themselves—even with regard to paying guest speakers’ airfares. Then at the fourth Forum, in Mumbai, India, the—let’s call it—‘over-development’ of this part of the event that most resembled traditional forums was interrupted:<sup>8</sup> the organisers programmed only a minimum number of conferences and debates intended for the general public<sup>9</sup> and facilitated the free—‘bottom up’—organisation of as many activities as possible.

That inversion marked the Mumbai Forum as the one that most fostered the presence of grassroots groups. Its ‘open space’ was taken up literally by an endless multiplicity of activities (see Chapter 4:1, ‘The social and cultural impact of Mumbai’) as a clear opportunity for oppressed grassroots sectors to make their struggles known to one another and to the world. Their organisations invaded all the space outside the buildings where conferences, debates and workshops were being held.<sup>10</sup>

In organising the 2005 Forum in Porto Alegre it was decided that the option for self-organised activities dominating the programme would be pursued more radically. To that end, it was the participants themselves who put the programme together,<sup>11</sup> and they also took on the role of ‘facilitators’ at the service of the rest.

One of the important results of a programme of predominantly self-organised activities is that it offers opportunities for experimenting with self-management—a principle that looms large on the horizon of the new society we would like to build. To overcome domination, you must throw off dependence; that means building autonomy and co-responsible citizenship. Autonomy and self-management have to be learnt in order for us to outgrow the childishness that the capitalist system forces on us. Self-managing activities at a forum marked by different types of diversity—among them the varying paces at which different people tread their paths—is an experience that makes the World Social Forum also a great school for citizenship.

#### **4. CO-RESPONSIBILITY**

The greater importance given to self-organised activities, combined with the non-directive nature of the overall event (see Chapter 2:6,

‘Non-directiveness’), brought a spirit of co-responsibility to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre which is the keynote in relations between participants and organisers. That spirit was evident in the delayed publication of the programme for the 2003 event.

Problems arose in the computerised distribution of rooms for the more than 1,000 self-organised activities and, as a result, the printed programme was not distributed until the first day of the event. On the Forum’s opening day, there was thus no way of knowing where and when activities were going to be held. Such a situation could have sparked outright rebellion. However, instead of rounding up the organisers and demanding that they deliver an essential service they should have been able to provide, the participants found ways to identify their venues—by consulting the Internet on the evening of the opening—and circulating the information to anyone who was interested. Some even rescheduled their activities and distributed information pamphlets to announce the new arrangements.

This hands-on experience of co-responsibility forms part of the apprenticeship in cooperation that the Forum can offer its participants. If everyone takes on the responsibility of making the event a success, each one contributes in his or her own way and according to their own means,<sup>12</sup> the Forum cannot help but go from strength to strength in performing its role in the struggle for a new world.

##### **5. ‘DELEGATES’ OR INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS?**

To encourage self-organisation, the organisers of the first World Social Forum stipulated that enrolment to participate was open only to ‘delegates’ from organisations and not to isolated individuals. It was a minor, apparently unimportant detail, but it may have been essential.

By using that rule they gained an important result: the people who came to the Forum were already activists of one kind or another.<sup>13</sup> That kind of participation precluded people coming for the sole purpose of finding out what they ought to do, or taking part as non-committal intellectuals, ‘social tourists’, people looking for direction or just being there out of curiosity. By interacting with other people also engaged in specific struggles, everyone was enabled to examine their own choices and commitments in greater depth and put in a position to return to their own engagements with enhanced awareness of the magnitude of the mission of changing the world, fortified by the knowledge acquired at the Forum and by the exchange of experiences,<sup>14</sup> and better inter-connected with

other organisations, right up to the world level. At the same time, the rule that participants should come as ‘delegates’ reduced the risk of manipulation that ‘unorganised’ individuals may be prone to.

The Forum was so enormously attractive, however, that many ‘isolated’ individuals interested in its aims also wanted to take part. From one Forum to the next, the number of delegates increased geometrically, thus ensuring the hoped-for developments,<sup>15</sup> but nonetheless there were generally four or five times as many ‘individuals’ present as there were ‘delegates’.<sup>16</sup> This is clearly good for spreading the ideas debated at the Forum, so a way was found to give ‘non-delegates’ the right to participate too.<sup>17</sup>

The rule that participants in the Forum had to register as ‘delegates’ was not necessarily followed at other forums.<sup>18</sup> Exactly what approach is most appropriate is still being discussed, and will depend on the beneficial or adverse outcomes of whatever registration arrangements are being adopted.

## 6. NON-DIRECTIVENESS

One of the most structural principles in the Charter is the one that makes the forums a horizontal space with no leaders or led. As said earlier, its organisers are just ‘facilitators’. Item 6 of the Charter of Principles stipulates that ‘no-one [...] will be authorised, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants’, and also that the Forum ‘does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings’.

It is thus an encounter with a dynamic that makes it inappropriate both for command structures to be present or to function, and for there to be individual leaders who formulate watchwords to be followed by all participants or who decide, from the top down, what programmes of work or political action they should all carry out.

Not only is there no hierarchy of any kind either among participants or among coordinators and leaders, but the self-organised activities are also free to inter-relate at will. The Forum, ‘by decentralised networking, inter-relates organisations and movements engaged in concrete action’ (item 8 of the Charter of Principles). In this way it consolidates the organisational principles of this kind of horizontal structure, one of the most prolific insights to come out of 1968 (see Annex 8), which denies categorically, as insufficiently democratic, the traditional pyramidal organisation of nearly all social institutions.<sup>19</sup> The Forum ends up being

an intense moment in networked living,<sup>20</sup> with no chiefs or commandos,<sup>21</sup> and with absolute autonomy guaranteed to each organisation, movement or individual.<sup>22</sup>

As pointed out earlier, on the one hand, this networked organisational feature of the Forum utterly confuses (pyramidally-organised) governments, institutions and organisations: they are far more comfortable being challenged or confronted by similar pyramidal organisations and formations with whose ‘chiefs’ they can dialogue<sup>23</sup> (see Chapter 4:7, ‘Davos—Porto Alegre’). On the other hand, it is contested by leaders of movements and organisations which would prefer to take advantage of the Forum’s power of summons to marshal the political force they need for the grand show-down with neo-liberalism (see Chapter 3:1, ‘World Social Forum—a space or a movement?’).

## **7. HORIZONTALITY**

The Forum’s horizontal nature means that no activity at the event is more important than any other. No one should gain time or venues that lend greater visibility.

Thus, all that is done to build a new world, regardless of the level or scope of the action being taken, has its own specific importance and is the priority concern at least of whoever is taking that action. Time slots and spaces are allocated on the criterion of what resources are available to meet the applicants’ requirements and to facilitate participation.

No one can expect their proposals for action to be adopted by everyone, as if whatever they are doing is the most important activity. Rather, each participant has to decide what is relatively more or less important and to seek out the activity he or she considers useful to learn about or to connect with.

In practice, however, horizontality was actually being denied in that the organisers were proposing activities such as conferences or debates with the presence of well-known political leaders or intellectuals (see Chapter 2:3, ‘Self-organisation and self-management’). It became ‘natural’ to reserve the biggest and best venues for these activities—and, depending on what topics they addressed, they came to feature as ‘show-cases’ for the Forum.

That there were fewer of them at the 2004 Forum in Mumbai, pointed to an assurance that the option for horizontality was respected. At the 2005 Forum, none of the major activities scheduled were proposed by the organisers. Rather, in order to facilitate participation and

encourage inter-linking among participants, they divided the entire ‘space’ of the Forum into sub-spaces named after the issues and challenges to be addressed in each.

### **8. RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM**

Respect for diversity, with an acceptance of pluralism as its corollary, is one of the principles that best characterises the Forum’s spirit—and may be one of the most direct reasons behind its drawing power. It is a value that is basic both to the Forum and to the society we want to build.

Discrimination or intolerance is, of course, completely out of the question; such attitudes have no place at the Forum. One of the aims of the struggle for a new world is to overcome all and any kind of exclusion, marginalisation or oppression.

The respect for diversity that the Charter of Principles speaks of goes further still. It hinges on both respect for cultural differences and respect for choices as to political engagement, which entails respecting pluralism in that engagement too; it must also be practised as respect for differing individual rates of progress and intensities of engagement in social struggles. A Social Forum is not just a forum of militants. It must accept the participation of people who are not yet open to political engagement—as may be the case with a large number of those who attend the Forum not as ‘delegates’, but as isolated individuals. And respect for this different kind of diversity must exist both on arrival at the Forum and on leaving it.

If—contrary to the belief that the ends justify the means—the means used shape the results that will be attained, then the process by which a new world is built will determine what that world will be like. At the Forum, as a ‘space’ ‘open’ to all those who are working to build a new world, we have to learn to respect democratically the plurality and diversity of aspirations, experiences, aims and dreams that move people.

It really is a learning process, and more demanding than may be imagined. The difficulty is even greater with regard to political action, where political motivations and personal ambitions mingle with power struggles and considerations of effectiveness. It is an effort—and not always an easy one to make—to accept that others may regard as paramount what we regard as secondary, let alone to work alongside them and even endeavour to inter-link with them. At the 2003 European Social Forum,<sup>24</sup> at a panel debate discussing ‘The Social Forums as spaces where

diversity is respected, I suggested changing its title to ‘The Social Forums as spaces for learning how to respect diversity’.<sup>25</sup> I added the following thought: ‘Respect for diversity, from which all the other characteristics of these forums follow, is a challenge we face within our very selves.’

## **9. RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

Working for the new world by opening up avenues that are already the new world in construction means that Social Forums, in the very way they are organised, must contemplate one of the greatest threats hanging over humankind. As long as the world continues to be dominated by the logic of capitalism, planet earth will face the threat of destruction.

Experimentation carried out at the 2005 Forum proved significant in this connection. Organisations fighting specifically to protect the environment and to ensure sustainable life on earth demanded that the forums be held in certain conditions, that participants adhere to certain standards of consumption and behaviour during the events and that only certain materials be used in whatever facilities are necessary.

A wide variety of proposals were applied, as far as was practicable, in organising the event: zero waste, no pollution of any type, bicycle parks for participants to get around the event, participation by food and service suppliers from the solidarity economy and biological farming movements and environment-friendly building materials. All of these have the potential to trigger processes of innovation within the Forum.

## **10. FINANCING THE EVENTS**

The issue of how the events are to be financed gains special importance in view of the requirement of actually always building a new world. Misappropriation is, quite evidently, just unthinkable. It would not even be admissible for such an issue to be raised with regard to the organisers of Social Forums. The corruption that is so prevalent in the societies we live in—and which degrades governments on both the right and the left—would totally destroy the World Social Forum process. Social Forums must therefore be organised in such a way as to guarantee totally transparent accounting.

It has to be ensured that the organisations that contribute co-responsibly to holding the forums—and also the governments of the places that host the events—accept that they cannot interfere in how the events are organised or in their participants’ freedom to express themselves or to launch initiatives.

It is also more or less evident that the Forum cannot receive funds from organisations that do not want a new world to be built. Such a relationship could be nothing but disingenuous on all sides.<sup>26</sup>

### **11. WORLD SOCIAL FORUM—A CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE**

Although many people dream of a World Social Forum that would accomplish the ‘other world’ that everyone aspires to, it is quite clearly not the Forum’s function to build that other world, however disappointing or discouraging this statement may be. As has been said in the Foreword to this book, the Forum will not change the world—society will do that. It will have a lot to contribute to that endeavour, but its position cannot even be central—and far less directive—in the political action necessary to build that new world. This book’s whole approach is to recommend accepting clearly that the Forum’s role is instrumental and intermediary, and of all that follows from that.

For this very reason the Brazilian organisers of the first World Social Forum ruled out the possibility of holding it as if it were a great congress that would bring together intellectuals and activists to draw up alternative proposals, then to go on to lead a world movement for change. They also opted not to reduce it to the level of summons to a great demonstration or assembly of militants which would swell the ongoing process in opposition to globalisation. What they decided was to set up a space where civil society could meet, where this new political actor that had been emerging over recent decades could consolidate its presence on the world stage alongside the other actors in the fight for change.<sup>27</sup>

It was felt—and still is—that ‘civil society’ means non-governmental institutions, associations, movements and trade union groups, corresponding to that part of society that organises to achieve specific goals, thus going beyond individual action that is divorced from society more broadly. As has been said earlier, this understanding of civil society excludes political parties,<sup>28</sup> governments and their international institutions and military organisations (whose exclusion is explained later). Political parties were excluded because it was realised that they,<sup>29</sup> governments and international institutions already have forums and other gatherings where they can meet and inter-relate.

Many of the different kinds of civil society organisations also have spaces where they meet and coordinate their activities, even at the world level, including the alternative sectorial meetings that are held in parallel with UN-organised summits. However, until the World Social Forum

came into being, civil society as a whole, in all its multiplicity and diversity of organisations, had no meeting places (at the local, national, regional and even world levels) comparable with the Forum. There was nowhere for the fabric of organised society to emerge from the fabric of unorganised society.

This inter-linking that the Forum has fostered at the world level entitles us to say, as I did in an article published in France [13]: ‘Civic consciousness still has a long way to go to reach the great national majorities. But it has gained a world dimension, and is giving birth to a truly new actor on the international stage: international civil society.’

## 12. ENCOURAGING NETWORKING AND ACTION

Items 11, 12 and 13 of the World Social Forum’s Charter of Principles deal with three concomitant functions: the Forum as a space for debate, as a space for the exchange of experiences, and as a space for networking. At the first three Forums, however, these three functions were performed with differing emphasis: at the 2001 Forum, new networking began and experiences were exchanged, but the first function prevailed, in the form of a debate and denunciation of what was going on in the world. At the 2002 Forum that denunciation continued, as did the networking, but organisations began to explore their mutual recognition in greater depth. What predominated at the 2003 Forum was the emergence of new inter-connections, at the same time as people began to feel the need to give more visibility to the proposals for action that were being put forward at the Forum. In that direction, the 2003 Forum experimented for the first time with setting up a Mural of Participants’ Proposals for Action.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, enrolling ‘delegates’ from organisations was designed to bring people who were already engaged in taking concrete action to the Forum (see Chapter 2:5, ‘Delegates or individual participants?’). For them, the Forum would thus not be the beginning of their concrete action, but would rather give it continuity at a higher plateau. However, special attention had to be given to the Forum as an opportunity for setting up new inter-relationships and actions, even at the international level, as stated in the 13<sup>th</sup> Principle of the Charter:

As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organisations and movements of society, that—in both public and private life—will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to

the process of dehumanisation the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanising measures being taken by the action of these movements and organisations.

This approach is already presented in the first item in the Charter, which describes the World Social Forum as an open meeting space for '[...] interlinking for effective action'.

Thus, after the 'culture shock' that the Mumbai Forum (16-21 January 2004) gave to the World Social Forum process (see Chapter 4:1, 'The social and cultural impact of Mumbai'), many participants felt the need to take this step forward: to begin to propose action to actually change the world at all levels, and with a more comprehensive scope than the actions that each individual organisation was already taking. Discussions at the Forum would have to result in recommendations and concrete plans for action in this direction and these would have to contemplate great diversity.

This concern was expressed more intensely at a meeting of the Forum's International Council on 15, 22 and 23 January 2004, also in Mumbai. A need to change the way the forums were arranged so as to cater better to the purpose of eliciting proposals was seen.<sup>31</sup> The concern with action had to be nurtured—which corresponded in fact with following more radically the orientations given in the Charter's 1<sup>st</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> principles.

At its following meeting on 5, 6 and 7 April in Passignano, Italy, the Council approved a methodological proposal designed to embody the experience gained in Mumbai by its Methodology and Content Commissions, and which served to guide the organisation of the 2005 Forum. The many innovations introduced included the intention to stimulate joint endeavours and the formulation of action plans before the Forum event. Provision was also made for the participants to have free time each day to discuss networking and to plan concrete action.<sup>32</sup> All and any plans would always be the participants' responsibility, however, not the Forum's, as stipulated by the Charter of Principles. Also, returning to the idea of the 2003 Mural, a large number of proposals (352) were given widespread exposure, with no hierarchies or priorities, on a Mural of Participants' Proposals at the 2005 Forum in Porto Alegre, which was called the 'Mural of Proposals for Building Other Worlds'.

### **13. MULTIPLICITY OF POSSIBLE COURSES OF POLITICAL ACTION**

Changing the world depends on an enormous multiplicity and variety of action for change. The action of political parties is decisive because it

determines what laws are drafted and how governments act. That is not to say, however, that all political action has to be channelled to political parties, as was wrongly believed in bygone times. Street demonstrations, for their part, generally undertaken by social movements, trade unions and parties, are the most visible way of denouncing, contesting, protesting and pressuring. They can also have an educational effect on those who take part in them and on the rest of society. But they too have their time and their place.

Resistance and pressure can be exerted against oppressive power in many ways. Action can even be taken individually—by civil disobedience, for example—even though isolated acts of resistance only produce effective results if they are well coordinated collectively. These days, in addition to the mass media as a means for circulating proposals for action, there is (thus far, at least) limitless scope for horizontal communication by Internet, fax and cell phones, to spur people into taking action (even just as consumers, for example, by boycotting certain products). Civic campaigns using these means alone, or in combination with street protests, can be very successful and even yield electoral gains.<sup>33</sup> When individual attitudes coincide, they can very often have surprising results.

Thus, the results of a Forum cannot be gauged by the number and size of the street protests that are decided there and then carried out, as many representatives from social movements to forums tend to think. Political action cannot be reduced to a large number of demonstrations. Nor can forums be considered successful just because they have managed to fill the streets with marches and protests with which they tend to open and close.

The real success of a Forum—or of the World Social Forum process—can only be seen with time. There is no such thing as the new world will start being built, after we ‘take power’.<sup>34</sup> It is already being built, from the inside out and from the bottom up, by innumerable actions that are extending the terrain wrested from the old world. These are creating the conditions—including cultural conditions—so that at a certain point the changes that are ongoing can be consolidated, in lasting form, from the top down.<sup>35</sup> Action for change exists before the forums and continues after them, and must increasingly expand and go deeper. The real success of a Forum, its political outcome (see Chapter 3:4, ‘How is the Forum politically effective?’) can be measured by its ability to raise the level of cooperation and inter-linking among different types of action for change, among different types of political actors on whose action changing the world actually depends.

#### 14. THE REJECTION OF VIOLENCE

The organisation of the Forum Organising Committee, which formulated its Charter of Principles, and those who make up its International Council, which approved it, took a clear position against the use of violence. It is set out both in item 9 of the Charter which precludes military organisations from participating in the Forum, and in item 13, which says of the inter-relationships forged at the Forum ‘that—in both public and private life—[they] will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanisation the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanising measures being taken by the action of these movements and organisations.’<sup>36</sup>

When the Charter was being drafted one proposal on this issue said, more directly, that participation by organisations that use the elimination of human lives as a method of political action was inadmissible in the ‘open space’ of the Forum. The proposal that prevailed was that this ‘space’ should not be open to military organisations.

There are many arguments why—on the principle that the means shape the end results—non-violence is essential to building the new world. This is not the place to state or discuss them. In any case, the rejection of violence marks out the paths taken by the Forum’s participants to achieve their purposes. The Forum thus holds no place for proselytising in favour of violence, nor even for discussing whether or not it may come to be a necessary means. Any participant wanting to discuss that possibility can do so at other forums and gatherings. Respect for diversity in the Forum includes respect for those participants and organisers who feel that the possibility of using violence should not even be entertained. They cannot be ‘violated’ within the Forum space.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the world is increasingly dominated by the militarisation imposed by the present United States government, with its counterpart, the terrorist response. Powerless, we witness interminable conflicts that tend to trivialise violence.<sup>38</sup> It would be nonsensical if the quest for ‘another possible world’ were not also resolutely a quest for a peaceful world. The longing for peace the world over gives the World Social Forum a special responsibility in this regard.<sup>39</sup>

#### 15. NO FINAL DOCUMENT

This set of organisational choices is crowned by the refusal to have Social Forums end with a final declaration or document. This option is rather

the keystone to how the forums are constructed: just like domes built of stone, if this keystone is removed, the whole construction will collapse. It is the door most battered on by those who still do not realise that the Forum has a specific role to play in the struggle against domination by capital—either they do not accept that role, or they think there is no need for the Forum to play it. Among the choices that structure the Forum, this is the one most insistently attacked by the tentacles of the old world.

In fact, of the organisational options that make the Forum unique—as a non-directive, horizontal, ‘open space’, where the diversity of choices and rates of progress are respected and participants are co-responsible in a network dynamic. None of these would be possible if the Forum were to end with a final document for all participants to endorse. That is the shortest and quickest route to start imposing a new ‘one truth’ to replace the one that we are combating and the ones imposed on us in times now ended. It is the easiest way to turn the Forum into a space for struggles between positions, each wishing to impose a hegemony of its own, or to foster divisive dissatisfactions.

In any case, it would be unimaginable for a final document to be drafted with everybody’s participation—the (fruitless) discussions would take up the whole duration of a Forum.<sup>40</sup> It would also be impossible, as well as contrary to the whole nature of the undertaking, for a Forum to elect a number of ‘representatives’ with the task of drafting a final document. It would be equally unthinkable for such a document to be submitted, with no manipulation, for approval or even praise by those thousands of participants. What generally ends up happening is that such purportedly ‘final’ documents are drafted before the event.

Just as the Forum has no leaders, it also has no final document. As it is open to discussing different kinds of action necessary to change the world, it cannot sum up everything in a necessarily impoverished single document, which would be of no use anyway because no one would pay it much attention or act on it. Besides, to satisfy everyone, it would have to be as generic and superficial as possible.

The only use a final document could have would be to meet the needs of many leaders to feel they really are leaders summoning the masses to a radiant future.<sup>41</sup> But that would just be to make instrumental use of the forums, which would drive away all those who currently feel drawn to participate in the World Social Forum process. However

hard the media finds it to understand, a Forum's final document is the sum total of the final documents of each and every one of the activities and inter-relationships that grow out of it, containing the proposals for action that their authors really feel committed to and are prepared to put into practice.

## NOTES

1. In an interview to *Clark* magazine in France in 2004 [4], in answer to a question on what had to be done to make 'the Forum's ideas' more effective, I said: 'The ideas discussed at the Forum are not "the Forum's ideas". They are the ideas of the people who come to the Forum to present them, discuss them and compare them, looking for the means and alliances to make them more effective.'
2. In an interview to *Caros Amigos* magazine in March 2003 [3], I was asked if my being on the Organising Committee made my words official. I replied: 'The Organising Committee's function is strictly executive, it is not a representative Committee. I do not even represent the Church on the Committee, although I am the representative of an organisation connected to CNBB. I am just an organiser, it is not my role to represent any of the forces that make up the Forum.'
3. In doing so, the Forum's organisers tried to take a broad view of what would be needed to build 'another possible world'. They also formulated what they called 'thematic areas', which functioned to mark out broadly the topics that could be discussed and depict the various kinds of issues that were thinkable with a view to building a new world: Area I—The production of wealth and social reproduction; Area II—Access to wealth and sustainability; Area III—Asserting civil society and the public realm; Area IV—Political power and ethics in the new society.
4. Remember that another reason that Porto Alegre was chosen to host the Forum was that the city government had brought in a 'participatory budget' system. That experiment in political democracy was already being noticed outside Brazil, and the opportunity to see it up close could attract more people to the Forum.
5. It is often proposed to meetings of the Forum's International Council that, before starting work, they should conduct analyses of the current situation. This concern may be a reflex of 'leaders' used to analysing the situational context where their organisation is going to take action, so that they can reach the most appropriate decisions. Such analyses may thus exert pressure to bypass the fundamental principle of eschewing any directive action in the World Social Forum process and in each of the Social Forums. Provided this does not happen, they may be very useful to the 'facilitators' of this process in situating their work better, without excessive optimism or disheartening pessimism. Indeed, they need to be aware—in world terms—of where we stand in the real correlation of forces and to have a realistic view of the advances and setbacks that are occurring.
6. Later, these activities could also take the form of seminars, controversy round tables and even conferences—as occurred in Mumbai and Porto Alegre in 2005—where the whole Forum came to be self-organised.
7. In 2001 the organisers expected at the most 80 workshops to register. That year there were 420; in 2002, 622; in 2003, 1,286; and in 2004, in Mumbai, 1,169. In 2005, 2,000 self-organised activities were carried out.

8. Despite the concern to give pride of place to self-organised activities, the disadvantage caused to these activities by the organisers' programme reached a peak at the 2003 Forum where guest 'personalities' were invited in line with what was then a growing tradition. Major 'stars' drew enormous audiences—sometimes 20,000 people to venues designed for 15,000—at the same time when small debates and workshop presentations were taking place. That competition may possibly have hindered new ideas and relationships from emerging.
9. Of the 1,182 activities held there, only 13 were programmed by the organisers.
10. In Mumbai, during an interview that I gave to the French magazine *Nouveaux Regards* [14], I was asked what had happened that was new at the World Social Forum held there. I answered: 'There are new features that follow from the very nature of India itself. The most important is that grassroots movements were present on a massive scale. It has to be recognised that in Brazil we managed to mobilise mainly delegates and representatives from such movements. The movements themselves never managed to be present at the WSF. Here you could say they invaded the streets of the Forum. And they came bringing their culture. In all the corners of this Forum, shows and artistic performances were given. To those of us who do not speak the language, they may look like just displays, dances and plays. But when someone translates what they are saying, you see that their content is highly political. For example, I watched a show by dalit 'untouchables'—and, incidentally, their very presence here en masse is a remarkable occurrence for India. They presented a song which has the same inspiration as a French song about the *canuts* (19<sup>th</sup> century French textile workers): "You have your idols, you have your gods. But it is we, untouchables, who make your statues, and then are forbidden from touching them". In another performance, a play, they said: "Attention, next year there are elections". [...] To a certain extent the grassroots movements accepted the Forum politically, which is a considerable advance over previous forums. And it has revealed new problems. Three-fourth of the participants spoke no English. In the debating rooms, translations were organised however possible. In the streets of the Forum, though, there was no need, it was not a problem.'
11. The organisers even held a prior consultation with all the participants in previous forums for them to state what issues, problems and challenges they felt the Forum should address, and what self-organised activities they intended to undertake.
12. Note in this regard the collaboration from funding institutions directed to the struggle for a more just world. Precise information in this connection can be seen in the Forum's balances on the websites [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br) or [www.worldsocialforum.org](http://www.worldsocialforum.org).
13. In January 2004, in an article for the French magazine *Messages* [15], in response to a question on the need to put forward concrete proposals for action, I explained the meaning of this organisational option taken by the Forum: 'Each organisation, each group taking part in the World Social Forum is engaged in concrete action every day. The WSF simply enables them to make themselves known to other groups or organisations that are similarly engaged in action, and to coordinate broader action with them. [...] These are totally new ways that the Forum has invented to decide on action and to pool common experiences.'
14. In an interview published in the book *O espírito de Porto Alegre* [16], I gave an example of what participating in the forums could mean to activists: 'They can leave

nourished, as Susan George (Vice President of ATTAC in France) said to me at the airport as she was leaving: 'I'm energised for at least the next six months.'

15. In 2001, 4,700 delegates registered, far exceeding the expected maximum of 2,500. In 2002, there were 12,274 (representing 4,909 organisations) and in 2003, 21,763 (representing 5,717 organisations). I do not have the figures for Mumbai, where some of the enrolment criteria were slightly different, nor for Porto Alegre in 2005.
16. In 2001, there were calculated to be 15,000 isolated participants. In 2002, the number rose to 35,000 and, in 2003, it is calculated to have been far more than 50,000.
17. The pressure from interested individuals was so great that even in 2001 individual registration was permitted after the Forum had started, so that individuals could attend activities as 'spectators'. The same was done in 2002 and 2003. For the 2005 Forum, two types of prior registrations were offered: for 'delegates' and for 'individual participants'.
18. The European Social Forum in Florence, Italy, was the first major regional forum that did not use this rule, instead offering only individual registrations.
19. This is what nearly always happens with political parties, trade unions and churches, and is what happens inexorably in government structures.
20. In an article in 2003 for the French publication *Foi et Développement* [13], I drew attention to this feature of the Forum: 'In this way, the organisers of the WSF went beyond the traditional forms of major national and international gatherings—Davos among them—by proposing simply to set up a "space" for horizontal inter-communication, mutual learning and coordination, which is open to all those interested, breaks down the barriers that separate movements and civil society organisations so that, by coming together, they can reinforce each other's struggles. It thus aligns itself very clearly with the network approach, enabling a multiplicity of organisations and networks to meet freely, and many others to form, with no need for watchwords for everyone to follow, nor charismatic leaders commanding them, nor final documents being voted on by "representatives" or proposed to everyone by those who control the higher echelons of power.'
21. 'This is decisive: we will not get anywhere unless, on the way, we invent a new political culture based on horizontal, non-directive relations. [...] I believe that with the forums we have gone beyond the time of vanguards, for civil society to become a permanent actor and an innovator of the changes the world needs' (interview in the French magazine *Mouvements* [17]).
22. In an interview to an Italian magazine in 2004 [18], I answered as follows when asked about the need to 'organise' the struggle: 'It is a learning process, one that the various forums foster. The fact that people are accepting that there is no single direction already seems to me to be a major innovation. We have to get used to this new idea of political participation at the world level with no one giving orders from the top down. We generally feel more secure when someone else points out a direction to us. Now people have to do things on their own responsibility at all levels, from the local to the world. That is a cultural change that does not take place overnight.'
23. Very often the Forum's organisers are invited to events where they are to be welcomed as 'representatives' of the World Social Forum as an 'entity', alongside representatives of other 'entities'. It is not always easy to make it clear that—if they attend—each member of the Organising Committee will be representing his own 'entity' and not the Forum (on this issue, more specifically, see Chapter 4:7, 'Davos—Porto Alegre').

24. A panel on racism, laicism and solidarity, in the debate over the World Social Forum as a space where diversity is to be respected.
25. At the same panel, I remarked: 'Respect for diversity confronts the same challenge as solidarity: it has to be learnt, it has to be experienced, it has to be suffered. And that is particularly difficult in political action.' The title of an interview I gave to the French publications *La Croix* newspaper and *Croire aujourd'hui* magazine [19], shows the beneficial side of that effort: 'Social Forums—a wonderful apprenticeship in diversity.'
26. This issue was discussed at length in the process of organising the World Social Forum in India, a country marked by a great number of controversies over civil society organisations' receiving funding from abroad. In this connection, it is worth repeating how the Indian organisers addressed the issue in a text [2], where they try to respond to questions raised in India over WSF:
- 'To recapitulate, the position has been the following:
- Being an international event, it is not possible to avoid sourcing international funds to help support the event. However, care needs to be exercised that such funds are not from sources that are clearly aligned to forces that promote globalisation. Funding agencies that will NOT be approached to fund the WSF in Mumbai include DFID (British government funding agency), USAID, and corporate controlled funding agencies such as Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.
  - Funding from large corporates in India aligned to imperialist globalisation are to be avoided.
  - The event itself should be modest and ostentation should be avoided.
  - Attempt should be to access solidarity funding from organisations, individuals opposed to globalisation.'
27. In an interview to *Courrier de la Planète* [12], I tried to show how the Forum could be seen in terms of civil society: 'We indicate clearly in our Charter of Principles that we have no intention of being the only or the most important international organisation of civil society, nor even to represent it. We position ourselves in a process of construction which has yet to end and which existed prior to the Forum.'
28. The Charter of Principles excludes political parties from participating in organising forums, but this obviously does not exclude them—from a theoretical standpoint—from civil society, or that part of society that is regarded as politically organised.
29. On the perennial issue of the exclusion of parties, I transcribe below a passage from an interview I gave to the Brazilian magazine *Caros Amigos* [3]:
- 'Marina Amaral: I asked Chico Whitaker why politicians were excluded from the WSF.
- CW: The aim is to ensure that the Forum space continues to be a civil society space.
- MA: But don't parties form part of civil society?
- CW: Of course they do, but parties aspire to power. We don't want them to use the Forum instrumentally, just as we don't want to divide people, which happens inescapably when they group ideologically. This is a forum of an organised civil society fighting against neo-liberalism, exclusion and war and asserting the principles of humanism, dignity and equality among people. It is a space for discussion, exchange of experiences, and inter-linking among organisations and social movements working towards alternatives for a better world.'

### 30 TOWARDS A NEW POLITICS

30. That Mural did not achieve all its aims because so little time was available to set it up and because participants were insufficiently informed about it. Nonetheless, by the end of the Forum some 150 proposals for action had been submitted to be posted on the Mural. They came from all levels and varieties of fields of activity. Little by little, they were circulated more broadly by way of the Forum's website, but it was only at the 2005 Forum—in 2004 it was not possible to set up the Mural—that efforts were made to use a Mural of this kind to best advantage.
31. One of the suggestions made in Mumbai and brought up again at the Council meeting in Passignano, Italy, was that the first two days of the Forum should be reserved for debates and exchanges of experiences, the third day should be devoted to networking and coordination and the fourth to developing action plans.
32. The decision to reserve free time for networking and planning action, as well as for any kind of meetings that the participants wanted to hold—without competing with any other activity for time on the programme—was reached firmly at a meeting of the Methodology and Content Commissions, with other members of the International Council and the Brazilian Organising Committee's Working Groups, held on 13-15 November 2004 in Porto Alegre, Brazil.
33. The most recent example was the Internet and cell phone drive that, in 2004, resulted in the defeat of the Spanish government that supported the Iraq war.
34. This was what I tried to say in this passage from an article for the 2005 *Agenda Latino-Americana* [5]: 'Underlying the Forum's proposal of horizontal relations is the conviction that change is not assured automatically by taking power, much less just by taking political power—as if such change were a natural consequence of storming "Winter Palaces". It may be necessary to storm them. Real, lasting change, however—over and beyond the equally necessary actions to set up resistance and bring in new mechanisms of social oversight and counter-power—depends on action for change working from the bottom up and from the inside out, involving new practices based on solidarity and greater respect for nature and for the human person, at all levels and in all types of action, that can draw more and more pieces of the new world that we want out of the very fabric of the present world.' Similarly, to the question from the French magazine *Clark* [4]: 'Isn't the Forum initiative another way to bring about the revolution?' I answered: 'Certainly, if the word revolution means bringing about major change in our systems of life and power—but with no illusions that those changes can be brought about by taking political power, by coups or mass demonstrations. Great changes are not brought about that way, or at least any that are, will have feet of clay. Really great changes are brought about by an accumulation of qualitative and quantitative changes both in the rules of play for collective living and in people's consciousness and behaviour, with all the discontinuities that may possibly occur along the way.'
35. Suggestive in this regard is the title of the book *O direito achado na rua* (Law found on the street) [20].
36. I would like to highlight how this article specifies the public sphere and the private sphere as places where there should be no room for violence. Indeed, one of the requirements to be met by those fighting for a new world is that their struggle should not be limited to the political arena where collective interests are addressed. It should also take place in the field of inter-personal relations. Otherwise, we fall into the all-too-common inconsistency: leaders who in their social endeavours call for democracy and whose activities are democratic, but whose behaviour at home,

especially towards their spouses or companions, is one of domination and oppression—exactly what they are combating in society.

37. The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) applied unsuccessfully to participate in the 2001 Forum. As that was impossible, one of its representatives, acting without any authorisation and on his own initiative, called a press conference in the Forum press room on FARC's activities. It had limited repercussions, but inevitably led to misunderstandings because some of the press reported on the conference as if it were a Forum activity, although the organisers had subsequently announced that they knew nothing of the initiative. At the 2002 Forum the same organisation tried again by way of a representative on a panel discussion organised by some participants. On this occasion, the move was brought to the Forum organisers' attention in advance and they tried to persuade the people organising the activity to call it off. This dialogue was unsuccessful, however, and the panel was held. As authorisation was denied, its sponsors decided to hold it at a venue outside the Forum grounds.
38. In a talk on the World Social Forum that I gave in 2003 in Lisbon [21], I addressed the issue of the banalisation of violence, a threat that hangs over us all: 'The cruelty typical of wars now hardly makes any impression on us. I recently read a declaration somewhere by one of the masters of war saying that all war is necessarily cruel, and the crueler it is the quicker it is over. That may be so. But that sort of thing can only be said by people who have become so hardened inside that they are able to count the dead in combat without thinking about who those dead people were, about their personal histories, their interrupted dreams—who see them just as losses that shift the balance of forces.' I also recalled the testimony of the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado about people's ability to adapt: 'When I return to places I had been to before when they were at war, and where the war was still going on, I realise that the anguished people I had met earlier were now no longer intimidated by the dangers they faced. It was as if they had moved on to a new kind of life which had come to be—so to speak—"normal".'
39. At the same talk in Lisbon (mentioned in the previous note) I also noted: 'In order to globalise peace, it is not just a question of putting an end to all those wars. Behind them lies a choice about how to resolve conflicts. There always have been—and always will be—conflicts. At home, at work, wherever people live together. Conflicts arise for all kinds of reasons: for divergences of interests and aspirations, ideas and personalities, political projects. The problem is not that conflicts exist, but rather how they are resolved. The most human way of resolving conflicts is through dialogue. The most primitive is by using violence. That way it is the strongest who win, but actual resolution of the conflict is just postponed. Later, the vanquished who have not been killed—or those who take their place—will, in their turn, try again to pursue their aspirations and interests, perhaps even by the same violent means. All of which means that what actually has to be resolved is the problem of violence in order for us not to arrive always at the various kinds of wars that are its collective expression. [...] Violence is accepted today everywhere as the only way of resolving conflicts. [...] There is a veritable culture of violence that continues to impose itself on hearts and minds.'
40. During the 2003 Forum, I was still insisting to a journalist from *Caros Amigos* who interviewed me [3]: 'The Forum is not deliberative, there is no final document. There are specific proposals for workshops and panel discussions. But there is no way to summarise all that diversity, that universe of people, concerns and thinking into a

single final document.’ And in 2004, during the Mumbai Forum, by now rather exasperated by these insistent complaints about the WSF not producing a final document, this is how I answered a Spanish journalist [22]: ‘It would be madness. Imagine issuing such a document! There are 100,000 people out there. There would be thousands of objections. There is no time to discuss something like that. There can’t be anything like that. Diversity is welcome. Afterwards, back in their home countries, each person will do what they feel they have to do. There should be not one, but 100 final documents. That is the genuine Forum.’

41. In an article published in the French newspaper *L’Humanité* [23], I gave the following explanation for some people and organisations insisting on having final documents at the forums: ‘They would like to use the occasion provided by WSF—even though the millions of citizens who demonstrated against the war (on 15 February 2003) may not be willing to take to the streets again in that way against capitalism—to set in motion a movement sufficiently radical to shake the present lords of the earth and to overrun the Winter Palace all over again in order to change things more quickly. To do so, they would have to override certain principles of the Forums’ Charter and have them adopt final documents—which would naturally be strongly worded and directive.’

# 3

## *Chapter*

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### **Issues and Developments**

#### **1. WORLD SOCIAL FORUM—A SPACE OR A MOVEMENT?**

‘The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action...’ That is first thing that the Charter of Principles says about the Forum’s being an ‘open space’ (item 1 of the Charter). It embodies a new concept of how to organise political action, which fires many with enthusiasm, but unsettles just as many.

This difficulty lies at the root of one of the most recurrent discussions among those concerned with the future of the World Social Forum. Two contrasting points of view are in debate: is the Forum a space or a movement? In fact, that is the first major question arising out of the options (presented in the previous chapter) taken in organising Social Forums.

It really is a crucial choice, and the whole methodology for organising world, regional, national and local encounters in the Forum process flows from it, as does that process’s future. Whether or not the Forum will continue to play the role it does—the basic issue addressed in this book—depends on the choice made between Forum space and Forum movement. So it is important that this choice be made clearly.<sup>1</sup>

I explored this discussion at length in the article ‘Notes for the debate on the World Social Forum’, that I wrote in March 2003. The article is transcribed in full as Annex 1, I will not repeat the arguments here. Although the other annexes appear in chronological order, this one is

placed first because of its importance in the discussion of how to see the World Social Forum.

The text circulated widely, particularly among the Forum's organisers and members of the WSF International Council, was also published in a number of books and magazines in several countries.<sup>2</sup>

The option to make the Forum a 'space' can be seen to predominate more and more. Nonetheless, the Forum is doubtless still at a great risk of turning into a movement. The issue continues to be raised in all the discussions that go on when regional or national forums are being organised. In Europe especially, it is generally difficult to say in language and concepts how the 'other world movement', proposed as a new stage in the 'anti-globalisation movement', differs from the Forum. It is even possible that the term 'other world' may have grown out of the Forum's proposal to fight for 'another world'. The movement's leaders at least liken it to the European Social Forum. Thus, if the movement begins to ebb, as they feel it is, they believe that the Forum is going into decline too, and conclude that it must be reshaped in order to regain its ability to mobilise.

In fact, if the World Social Forum ever does turn into a movement, thus ceasing to play its role as an 'open space' then it will dwindle and disappear. A 'movement of movements' will not take its place. All that will remain of it will be just one new movement, alongside and of the same kind as the others that already exist, all of them competing and leaving nothing to perform the Forum's present function. Now, that can continue to reinforce or worsen the divisions among us and weaken us as we run this veritable race against time to prevent the spiral of violence overtaking the world.

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To complement the article 'Notes for the debate on the World Social Forum', I refer readers to another article I wrote just before it, which touches on other points to be borne in mind. That article: 'The three present challenges facing the World Social Forum', is reproduced as Annex 9.

Now, also as complements to a discussion on the same issue, I present extracts from four other texts: a) my reply to an interview question; b) and c) passages from two of my articles; and d) a passage from an article written by members of the World Social Forum's India Organising Committee.

- a. My answer to an interview question from the French weekly *L'Hebdo des Socialistes* [24], during the Mumbai Forum:

*Question:* But what is your position on the current debate, particularly in France, about the need to structure (the Forum) more, to adopt a final declaration, to make the Forum a movement?

*Answer:* That debate encapsulates what has been the fundamental, historical battle of the Forum since its foundation. There are those who feel that the Forum should become a 'movement' and, sooner or later, engage in the struggle for power; others, like myself, see the Forum as a space, a horizontal dimension, a method, a new type of process for political action. The former are very worried about the need to be effective, but this gathering, first in Porto Alegre and now in Mumbai, is already a change in the world.

- b. A passage from an article I wrote for the French publication *Foi et Développement* [13], pointing out what would have to be avoided for the Forum not to become a movement:

There are a number of ways of turning the Forum space into a Forum movement. The most direct route would be to make its organisational bodies—designed precisely for the purpose of creating spaces—into process-steering bodies. These new political leaders would then have to set common goals for all Forum participants by way of guideline documents and slogans that would frame everyone's actions. That would introduce the need to discuss strategies for attaining these goals, how to organise action etc. There is a second, indirect route. Given that the Forum space is arranged to accommodate as many activities freely self-organised by the participants as it does activities programmed by the Forum organisers, it would be enough simply to give less importance to the participants' self-organised activities. That route would open up scope—to party militants in search of new legitimacy and to the more combative networks and movements—for making the organiser-programmed conferences and debates the real showcase for the Forum; they could then direct all the discussions that take place at the Forum towards the issues that they feel should be the overall point of convergence. With that, their interpretations, strategic choices, platforms and programmes of struggle would become the interpretations, strategic choices, platforms and programmes of struggle of all participants in

all the forums, who would need to do nothing more than become militants of the new movement thus created.

These two routes would lead unerringly to an interruption in the World Social Forum's expansion, because a large number of movements and civil society organisations that are drawn to the encounters—because they are horizontal, non-directive, open and freely diverse—would no longer feel comfortable taking part. Indeed, non-compliance with the Forum's Charter of Principles would lead participants to regard it more as an instrument for spreading specific ideas and choices.

Rather, if the Forum were fitted with leaders and oriented towards one option or another—even though these fell within the common terrain of the struggle against neo-liberalism—it would alienate participants in disagreement with those options and also those who—even though agreeing—would not submit to direction—or manipulation—by whatever organisations or movements did adopt them.

- c. A passage from the article I wrote for the French newspaper *L'Humanité* [23]:

All of this is an enormous—even a courageous—innovation, because for over a century left-wing political action has meant vanguards, discipline, representation, vertical information circuits, slogans and masses. The World Social Forum was bound to feel pressure from participants shaped by those long-standing practices. They may not have fully realised the role it plays and so would like to turn it into a movement—or a 'movement of movements' to be able to announce by decree that it is now stronger. They seem to disregard the lessons of history, the real correlation of forces and the level of consciousness and organisation among 'the oppressed'.

- d. A passage from a text written by two members of the Organising Committee of the World Social Forum in India [2], which shows the virtuous dynamics of the struggle against neo-liberalism that result from the Forum space option:

[...] The WSF was consciously created as an open space for movements to meet in spite of their differences. The dialogue was designed not only to cut across ideological differences, but also to bridge historically and geographically disparate backgrounds. And it is this heterogeneity that makes WSF attractive for a large number of groups.

The ‘open space’ concept of WSF did not arise in a vacuum, but in opposition to imperialist globalisation. The European Social Forum has added the vital component of war and militarisation, bringing the economic and military components of imperialist globalisation together. Yes, it is possible that this broadening of the canvas has also drawn into the WSF, as a part of its heterogeneous character, groups and organisations whose primary focus is not the struggle against imperialist globalisation. But it is preferable to have such groups come in and preserve the current heterogeneity than try and build a monolithic movement with a common agenda, which may immediately lead into competing agendas.

The Forum thus provides space for alliance building for developing struggles. These are not spaces in which the WSF organisers are privileged but where resistance and movements are foregrounded as leaders of the global resistance to globalisation. These could encompass not one resistance but diverse resistances and multiple alliances either issue based or larger ideological alliances.

[...] The WSF is, at times, accused of being a ‘talking shop’ from which no concrete ‘actions’ emerge. Interestingly, this is an accusation that is levelled by both those who are ranged on the side of imperialist globalisation as well as those who are among its ardent critics. Both reactions arise from the same premise: if so many people meet regularly, why do we not see an output in the form of a common declaration, a plan of action, a blueprint of the ‘another world’ that the WSF claims to stand for. The premise is flawed because it is attempting to assess WSF with the presumption that it is designed to take positions and ‘lead’ the struggles all over the globe against imperialist globalisation and its myriad ramifications.

The premise is also flawed because while WSF itself is not doing any of the things mentioned above, the open space provided by it is doing precisely that. Not as a single output, but as a number of outputs. The blueprint of ‘another world’ is emerging, not just from the interactions in WSF, but through debates, discussions, and most importantly, struggles across the world. WSF is only providing the opportunity to enrich these debates, to bring in a larger number of perspectives—some contending, some complementary. Not just that. It is providing the opportunity to build common

strategies for struggles, to synergise energies that come together. Such synergies do not involve all those who come to WSF, or even the majority in many cases. But such synergies are built.

## 2. 'OPEN SPACE'—WHO FOR?

The expression 'Forum open space' has also served those who want to criticise the World Social Forum by saying that it is not really as 'open' because political parties, governments, international institutions and military organisations are not admitted; still less those that favour neo-liberalism or feel it is not as harmful to the world as is claimed by those who combat it.

In the previous chapter, when talking about the Forum as a civil society space, I had pointed out the reasons why the space created by the Forum is restricted to civil society organisations, and also why military organisations are not allowed to take part.

It is also closed to parties, governments and international organisations, but only in that they are not allowed to undertake self-organised activities.<sup>3</sup> This choice is also designed to limit the possibility of their introducing the dynamics of competition into the Forum—which would happen if political parties were to enter and is completely contrary to the Forum spirit—or making instrumental use of it for their own ends.<sup>4</sup> Either of these practices would end up destroying the Forum in the middle, or even short term.

This is not to say that members of political parties cannot take part in the Forum. That would make no sense because many of those who come to the forums—and even their organisers—belong to political parties. They are thus perfectly welcome to participate, but as members of the civil society organisations to which they also belong. Even without meeting that condition, they may participate at the invitation of other participants in the discussions planned for their self-organised activities. They can also take part in a personal capacity or as envoys of their governments or parties, but in such cases as observers—a practical solution hit upon to meet the demand for participation especially from inter-governmental organisations. That is the condition on which the Forum admits members of parliaments and local authorities every year, who use the opportunity to hold their own parallel forums (see Chapter 2:2, 'Organiser-facilitators').

And if the Forum is an 'open space' why not allow people who have opted for neo-liberalism to take part? In practice—however incredible it

may seem and however much it may surprise those who prefer radical positions in combating neo-liberalism—the Forum actually is open to such people. Registration to take part requires no ideological testimonials or certification that you are engaged in the struggle that the Forum forms a part of, nor are its organisers going to investigate the lives and opinions of either the people who register or the organisations that they belong to. There is no way that they can be dissuaded or prevented from participating, even if only as observers, if they so wish.<sup>5</sup>

What can be said is that the Forum meetings are not academic gatherings with no commitment to action. Universities or seminars and forums organised for the purpose of contrasting and discussing points of view are the proper places to find more theoretical kinds of debates and discussions.<sup>6</sup> The Forum is a space for free encounters among as many people as possible who have made the option for ‘another world’ and are taking political action for that world actually to be built. It exists to enable that option to be pursued more fully and for the social fabric woven by civil society organisations to grow ever thicker.

Although the Forum is open, obviously not everyone will feel entirely comfortable there. People who favour neo-liberalism and would like to contest those who are working to surpass that system will have to consider whether the Forum is a good place to do so—but of course they are free to take whatever decision they prefer.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. HAPPINESS AS A HALLMARK, AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

One of the most outstanding features of the World Social Forum is how buoyantly cheerful all the proceedings are.

True, the first edition in Brazil was tantamount to a resurgence of social action, at a time when social movements were at their lowest ebb there. So it was a really happy occasion with people meeting up again. The same contagious high spirits have marked all the subsequent forums too and tend to set the tone of all Social Forums that are organised.

The deepest-seated reason for this happiness may be the all-pervading feeling of working to build a new world, which will be a happy one because it will mean the triumph of humanity over domination and injustice.

To a question from the *Adital* news agency [25], about what concrete results the forums had achieved, I answered: ‘From the very outset—and this explains the happiness that is the Forum’s hallmark—they have restored our utopia of a just world.’

I have given a similar explanation on several other occasions. For instance, in a talk during the Social Weeks of France [26], I said:

The Forum meetings—and preparations for them—have thus become an enormous school in the difficult task of re-education towards horizontal relations and more thorough-going democratic practices, as well as towards respect for diversity of choices and the rate of progress of each and every one of us who wants to build a new world. Each Forum encounter is itself an opportunity to experience this new world in construction, and that is why the mood among the participants is so festive and joyous.

In the same way, at a round table at the 2003 Europe Social Forum, I situated the new practices experienced at the forums as:

Running counter to what is today the dominant current in—call it left-wing—political action for change which despite its marked concern for effectiveness, has not yet shown what it actually can achieve. The lived experience of spaces like the forums, of organising them to be really open with no voices of command or slogans, and of making them multiply, always horizontally, is a real education where, just as in learning solidarity, there are ups and downs, advances and reversals, but where nonetheless it is always true to say that, more and more, the insight embodied in the Forum restores our hope—which is why the encounters are so conspicuously festive and joyous.

That happy climate means, of course, that there is no lack of people who say that the Forum is just a Woodstock of the left. I answered such an allusion in an interview to the French magazine *Alternatives Economiques* [28], by saying:

We do not give ourselves over to the idea that everything comes from the bottom up and is wonderful. The forums are not one big party, like Woodstock. Turning our diversity to advantage takes rules. A considerable proportion of the participants must actually be engaged in concrete action, and have come to the Forum to work, which does nothing to prevent them from taking the opportunity to join in this collective happiness!

Another characteristic of the forums, which doubtless also explains this climate of happiness, is the large number of young people present. That in itself is a favourable new feature in certain regional forums—in

Europe for example—where young people are widely believed to no longer have any interest in politics. International Youth Camps are becoming a trademark of the forums. Thousands of youngsters camp on sites set aside for that purpose—and in 2005, in Porto Alegre, these areas were central to the space where the Forum was held—and they organise seminars, workshops and a host of other activities.

Certainly the free-and-easy atmosphere that the young people manage to create is especially attractive to press photographers keen to push the idea that the forums go little further than that. Equally true, though, is that these camps, which are self-organised by the participants, have been the source of a great deal of experience in how to organise the Forum overall.

Young people also participate in another decisive area of the World Social Forum process by providing administrative support for the events.

The Forum's 'organisers' represent the groups that have decided to hold the forums. They therefore play a policy role in the decision-making process without being able to take on this role 'professionally' as paid work. The time they devote to the organisational meetings and the resulting tasks is transferred to the Forum by its member organisations. That is those organisations' contribution to making the forums happen. The organisers thus need to rely on paid staff to undertake the multiple technical tasks involved in administering the process: putting out information, correspondence, translation, maintaining equipment and websites, obtaining and preparing the sites for holding the forums, managing financial resources and preparing reports etc.

Now this technical support—which has increased greatly as the forums have grown—is assured basically by young people, who approach their tasks not like bureaucrats, but in the spirit of militants, as can be seen from the amount of time they give to them. As the Forum dates draw near and during the event, this work also attracts a large number of volunteers, nearly all of them young. Overall, young people's availability and generosity, both of which are essential qualities for living in the new world and come almost naturally to the young, contribute fundamentally to making the forums actually happen.

#### **4. HOW IS THE FORUM POLITICALLY EFFECTIVE?**

While there is much discussion among the organisers and participants over whether the Forum should be a space or a movement, the larger question that lies behind that discussion asked by all those who know of

the Forum's existence and proposals is: how politically effective is it actually?

That, at least, is the question most often posed by journalists covering the forums<sup>8</sup> who have interviewed me.<sup>9</sup> What they are expressing is the concern of the general public about their future, wanting to know if there may be more than just a hope, as summed up in a question from the French magazine *Messages* [15]: 'The World Social Forum proclaims "another world is possible". But when?'<sup>10</sup>

The Forum's organisers and participants feel the need for effectiveness especially strongly because of the historical experience of the struggle for change.

Indeed, the past century ended with enormous feelings of frustration and disappointment among those whose intention was to replace the capitalist logic with a different logic directed to liberating the human person, which was given the name of socialism. Various paths were proposed and tried out for the world to make that enormous historic leap. Major victories were won, but they were not lasting; many mistakes were made at enormous social cost,<sup>11</sup> and the defeats were many and tragic. Many lives were lost, and countless men and women gave themselves up so that all these efforts would bring about the changes they longed for. In addition, all too often, the democratically-achieved political changes were undermined because elected leaders submitted to the demands of the dominant economic system.

Capitalism recovered lost ground in that way and—for lack of cultural revolutions to enable new values and behaviour to prevail—imposed itself on people's minds. And so today the earth is dominated, even militarily, by capitalism in its new guise as globalised neo-liberalism, the only strong reaction against which—the terrorism that is presently local, but also liable to spread worldwide—is as reprehensible as capitalism itself.

Methods thus had to be reconsidered, or new avenues discovered that could give a chance and a voice to the world's great majorities oppressed by capitalism. It was in this context that the World Social Forum emerged, in the first year of the new millennium, lighting a flame of hope with the political 'invention'<sup>12</sup> it was able to produce.<sup>13</sup>

What is more, the Forum's success also raises new expectations. Many tend to feel that we are finally building the way to surmount our frustrations. Now almost everything is expected of the Forum. The well-known North American intellectual, Immanuel Wallerstein, gives the

proportions of the responsibility now being attributed to it: 'Either we make the WSF work or we go down with it' [35].

In what ways can the Forum really be effective? To what ends?

Here we have to return to the basic proposal of this book of how the Forum should be seen. The 'Introduction' says:

The foregoing enumeration of the functions taken on by the World Social Forum—or more precisely by the process that it has launched—shows clearly that it is not the Forum that is going to build the 'other possible world'. It will not change the world; society will. The Forum plays an entirely intermediary role in the struggle for change. In order for us to achieve that goal, it makes a specific contribution which is different from those expected of other instruments of political action. That difference characterises it as a means at the service of those instruments.

Thus, the ways in which the Forum can actually be effective are as intermediary as the Forum itself. In the first place, it offers an opportunity for analysing situations in greater depth, for discussing alternatives, for experimenting with new political practices and for launching new initiatives. However, it also produces a variety of instrumental results. One of these is its repercussions within the participating organisations.

The experience of horizontal relations—as practised both in how the forums are organised and how they are held—may persuade the participants to believe that it is useful to go beyond pyramidal structures and towards fuller internal democracy and more transparent decision-making processes in their home organisations. They may also discover how much the non-directive network structure does to develop co-responsibility and creativity, besides enabling broader participation.

Indeed, during the Forum gatherings, each person enjoys the happy experience of doing whatever he or she feels is most important, of not having to follow orders, nor to dispute or compete for space, nor to feel they are under watchful eyes, nor to commit themselves to proposals they do not fully agree with. That experience may give them the courage necessary to introduce their own organisations to new ways of working, with no ordering about, nor imposed hierarchies, with greater mutual confidence, with no tensions and with more collegiate decision-making processes. The features of the new world will thus start to emerge in concrete form, even if on little islands in the midst of the vast ocean of power-concentrating logic inherent to the capitalist economic and political system.

Such a change is easier to bring about in non-governmental organisations and movements, but it is also imaginable in the rigid pyramidal structures of trade unions. Even political parties whose members take part in forums in compliance with the Charter of Principles may benefit. It is a lesson in politics that civil society networks have to offer them. Parties that allow themselves to be permeated by horizontal networks of inter-communication among their own members, and thus break with the discipline of controlled, vertical circulation of directives and information, will certainly experience greater growth.

Another kind of instrumental result that can be achieved through the Forum in political action against neo-liberalism stems from its repercussions on relations among organisations. ‘Divide and rule’ is an all-too-familiar maxim, and one of the greatest difficulties for those engaged in the struggle to progress beyond capitalism is that they are permanently divided and sub-divided into endless dissident groups resulting from the struggle to accumulate power and gain hegemony, proper to the logic of the system that they are fighting. The left’s now emblematic ability to splinter endlessly is cause for rejoicing in the dominant system.<sup>14</sup>

Now, such disputes are, so to speak, forbidden in the World Social Forum, not by orders from above—‘it is forbidden to forbid’ young people said in 1968—but by the rules of play adopted and by the dynamics of how the Forum is held. The principle of respect for diversity obliges people who feel that their activities are more important or higher-priority to share the space with humbler, lesser, more limited initiatives and proposals. There is room for everyone, and there are no mechanisms for imposing anyone’s point of view on others.

At the same time, barriers between organisations are broken down. The different social movements working towards specific goals, such as trade unions, diverse associations and non-governmental organisations—so-called civil society—all participate in the Forum and so have an opportunity to recognise each other mutually, to overcome prejudices, to identify points of convergence and to inter-relate with a view to joint action.<sup>15</sup>

Competition throws up many barriers, even among organisations engaged in the same kind of struggle (trade unions, for instance), among movements of militants working for similar causes (such as women’s movements) or new movements which have grown in the Forum process (such as those working for a solidarity economy). Making the alliances strong enough to confront the common enemy is so difficult that it may even lead to their destroying one another.

Other barriers, relating to differences in goals, strategies or political options, are still harder to surmount. Many, however, may result simply from mutual ignorance. The Forum's horizontality means that no one comes with the intention of being more important than the rest and so the conditions are right for everyone to at least get to know each other a little better, and to go on to cooperation, to solidarity and to mutual support, to embark on new actions with greater scope than permitted by each one simply continuing with individual endeavours.

In this way it is possible to bridge the gaps between, for example, trade unions, women's movements, solidarity economy groups, ecologists, teachers, civil servants, youth and retired people—and even between generations. In the process, people discover that, however unlikely it may seem, it is possible to work side by side even though at times it is extremely laborious and even painful to build such unity. That, however, is the only way to fulfil the old saying: 'unity is strength'.

The dynamics of the forums also help people discover that they can take part in different kinds of struggles at the same time. Thus, if a young woman is moved to engage in an ecological struggle by what she has seen and heard at the Forum, that does not mean she cannot also take part in specifically young people's or women's movements; at the same time as she can become a trade union member and join an NGO directed at any of these aims. The inter-relationships produced at the forums can put people in a position to militate for many causes rather than just for one organisation or another in competition with the rest.

Quite evidently, the Forum's role in all these situations is intermediary—though irreplaceable. All of this helps weave the fabric of civil society more tightly and that can make it an extremely strong political actor. The discovery that there are so many of us wanting to change the world, in spite of our apparently irreconcilable differences, leads us to realise that we can be much stronger than we had ever imagined.

People who worry constantly about the need for the forums to seek political results could already draw satisfaction from these examples.

## **5. BUILDING UNITY AMONG THE ORGANISERS**

We have talked about the Forum's repercussions in building the unity we need in order to fight neo-liberalism, by overcoming the permanent divisions of the left which seem to arise from a curse cast by those who dominate the world. Horizontality and respect for diversity enable us to build new alliances and gain strength.

This effect is felt particularly among the Forum's organisers. Their endeavour to ensure conditions in which horizontality and respect for diversity will actually occur obliges them in fact to 'learn to unlearn'. While participants come away from the forums far better inter-connected, the organisers also leave much more united.

Of course, none of this occurs without its ups and downs, comings and goings, and very often even difficult, near-breaking-point situations. However, their awareness of the responsibility they have assumed generally leads them to do everything possible to avoid being separated by divergences and differences of opinion.<sup>16</sup> The consensus decision rule, which I have already talked about is very valuable in that process (see Chapter 1:4, 'The difficult consensus rule'). Organisational tasks require endless meetings and that shared experience begins to build friendships which would have been unimaginable if organisations' isolation in their respective fields of activity were allowed to prevail.

This experience marked both the joint endeavours of the eight organisations in setting up the first three World Social Forums and the activities of the World Social Forum's India Organising Committee. In the latter case, the effect is even more significant because India is historically a deeply divided country with its castes and those excluded from the castes, its many different religions, languages, social movements with diverse aims and practices and its more than divided left-wing parties (and with them the associations and trade unions). All those who experienced the Forum in India are witness to that progress whose effects will be felt in the struggle to overcome capitalism there and throughout Asia.

In short, what the Forum really needs is to set up mechanisms tailored more and more to producing the unification effect—with all due respect for differences and autonomy—in yet another practice typical of the new world we want to build.

Several interviews have given me opportunities to draw attention to this. In India, for example, the French magazine *Nouveaux Regards* [14], asked me: 'What is your overall impression, while we are still at the Mumbai Social Forum?' I answered:

First of all, I think this is all serving to confirm an insight: that it was possible to use the same method as at Porto Alegre (horizontal, non-directive relations, with respect for diversity and so on) in a country that is extremely diverse and deeply divided.

Today, Indians are telling us that this is a historic experience for them. People who never worked together have now been doing so for over a year, nearly two years. The divisions here are not just religious, ideological or caste-based. They also affect the sectors that the people work in: grassroots associations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, people connected with political parties, but they are all together here [...]. That came as some surprise to me. The people I met are very different—I have been here several times over the past year—and are working very closely together. Of course there were tensions and conflicts, but all are unanimous in saying ‘it was worth working together’. In the Indian context, that necessarily means respecting diversity. To them, that represents an enormous step forward.

To the French magazine *Croire Aujourd’hui* [19], I said:

I recently took part in a meeting with the Indian organisers, all connected with different parties that are working for these changes. I asked what preparing for the Forum meant to them. They all answered that the fact that they were working together was already a triumph.

In an article for the book *FSE 2003* [6], I recalled what had also happened in Europe:

In organising the European Social Forum, that challenge (of building unity) was confronted and overcome by the organisers—not without difficulties naturally, because WSF’s non-directive way of working is an innovation in political action. But we still have a long way to go together, continuing with horizontal networked relations that can provide a follow-on to the lived experience.

This is therefore the dimension of the World Social Forum process which, if it is maintained, will certainly yield important results in political action in the time to come.

And if that experience can be enjoyed in an organisational undertaking at the world level, it can perhaps occur more easily at the national and local levels, which will really help make ‘unity is strength’ a reality.

## **6. CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES—DOUBTS AND ISSUES**

The World Social Forum’s Charter of Principles is, as has been said many times already, its basic reference document, a kind of Constitution of the Forum process. But that does not mean it leads an untroubled life.

The Charter has steadily become known and accepted.<sup>17</sup> Although it has gradually gained currency, it is still not completely adopted, far less totally abided by in the forums that are organised at various levels in different parts of the world.

In fact, such challenges to the World Social Forum Charter of Principles expressed both clearly and directly and indirectly are one of the biggest obstacles to the Forum's continuing to play its role in the struggle against neo-liberalism.

The principles most often called into doubt relate exactly to the World Social Forum's most innovative rules—for example, the refusal to produce a final document, which is, so to speak, the keystone to a whole construction. The methods that prevail at many forums are the ones commonly used for organising political action, designed more for marshalling militants towards specific goals on the basis of 'calls to action' formulated by the leaders of movements or parties.

Also many people are confused by the document issued at the first Forum, the *Apelo para a mobilização* (Appeal for mobilisation), which falls within the tradition of 'calls to action'. Signed by 100 organisations of the over 1,000 represented in 2001 in Porto Alegre,<sup>18</sup> that Appeal was intended to gain the stature of a 'final document' of the Forum—and it nearly did. Due to the organisers' lack of attention to what was being posted on the website, the Appeal for mobilisation translated into the four languages used on that site, was posted prominently, even before the organisers' 'official' Information Note, which appeared in only two languages (see Chapter 1:3, 'Onward, necessarily to the world level'). The mistake was not seen or corrected for almost a month.<sup>19</sup>

At the following editions of the Forum, the same organisations put out further 'appeals' formulated on the basis of situational information on the context for the struggle against neo-liberalism and then adopted by so-called 'assemblies of social movements' (see Annex 1, 'Notes for a debate on the World Social Forum'). Organisers of some forums go so far as to make them basic reference documents for participation in those forums, as if they resulted from some conclusion-drawing activity at previous World Forums.

When the organisers of the European Social Forum (ESF) came together in Brussels in March 2002 for their first preparatory meeting—the first edition of the ESF was scheduled for November that year in Florence, Italy—they did in fact adopt the appeal to social movements

issued in January that year as their reference document. The Charter of Principles was relegated to secondary importance.<sup>20</sup>

Several Social Forums organised that same year also adopted both the Charter and the Appeal as reference documents, and some even made acceptance of both a condition for participating. That was the case, at first, at the Moroccan Social Forum. Realising their mistake, however, the organisers amended the text of the invitation that they had sent out.

There can be no doubt that this insistence on the need for calls to action resulted from the success that the Forum had enjoyed. That success kindled the hope that the Forum could leverage major progress in political struggle—and was thus an opportunity not to be missed. Certainly, in the overall fight against the worldwide resurgence of capitalist domination, it was seen as the new force that was needed to confront that domination. Many people felt that a new international force, broader than any of its predecessors, was coming into being, one that, whatever its name, had shown itself capable of a power to mobilise—including and especially to attract young people—that had to be channelled towards a political struggle targeted directly at overthrowing neo-liberal power in its imperial dimension.

For this very reason in the years that followed as it became more and more urgent to step up resistance to the war and the vicious circle of militarisation and terrorism, many Forum participants became even more distressed that the Forum's power of summons was not being used to that end. For it to perform such a role, it should coin incendiary slogans, set concrete goals to work towards, build a combative body of militants, coordinate activities, formulate priorities, engage political parties, launch broader and endlessly more numerous street protests and set up directive bodies with a clear view of the challenges to be confronted, so as to shout out to the whole world: 'another world is possible!'

Thus it was that a meeting of the International Council in Miami, United States, heard remarks to the effect that the Charter was only a provisional reference document coming from people who had been involved in formulating the first Appeal. Saying that it was too strongly marked by the Brazilian political culture, they argued that it should be adapted to the real needs of the world struggle against capitalism.

Now, 'adapting it to the real needs of the world struggle against capitalism' meant completely changing how the Forum was arranged. It would have to cease being the 'open space' that it had set itself to be, which many considered inert and with a tendency to be repetitive—despite the fact that

the meetings held in this ‘open space’ had already resulted in networking and action by civil society, including political parties. As it had proved impossible to build a ‘world political party’, the Forum would at least have to be transformed into the great ‘movement of movements’ that everyone dreamed of—something on the same planetary scale as neo-liberal domination.

The Charter of Principles, the basis of the present Forum set up, sought to give it a specific role in this struggle and was thus a real obstacle to the change that they wanted—especially those principles that were considered limiting, such as the ones that prevent political parties from participating, preclude adoption of a final document and bar participants who opt for violent means. It had to be made more relative, less imperative.

However, all that the principles of the Charter did was to re-state insights gained and tested by social movements over the previous 30 years, after the various anti-authoritarian mobilisations of the late 1960s, particularly in 1968. By that time, we seemed to have exhausted all possibilities of change by taking State power through political parties, the only instrument to which all political activity was channelled. Also we were becoming increasingly aware that the political methods that had been used thus far to fight against capitalism were just as authoritarian as the system they intended to overthrow and were based on a ‘right thinking’ which was just as imposed as the credo expressed at Davos. In other words, they worked on the same logic as the system they aimed to surpass, and led to the same deadlock as we are led to by the similarity between the logics of militarisation and terrorism.

Now, it was to counter this that the Forum had come into being in the first place, as a space for experimenting with new practices built on greater respect for pluralism and diversity and a commitment to fuller democracy and civic awareness. What is questioning the Charter of Principles is in fact a tentacle of the old world that always reappears, trying to bind the Forum’s participants together around one specific interpretation of the realities and into political action of certain types directed towards certain goals.

I would say that these attempts will die out in the end. Such optimism may stem from the fact that the very process of organising the forums is demonstrating the Charter principles’ validity in practice at the same time as the ‘open space’ methodology is being consolidated, extended and improved.<sup>21</sup>

## 7. NETWORKS AND PARTIES

Several times in the course of this book I say that the World Social Forum functions on a network logic: it serves the participating organisations rather than competing with them. Its intention is for more organisations to emerge to fight capitalism, for them to inter-link more, to weave an increasingly thick web of resistance all round the world, to propose and build concrete alternatives to the world dominated by the interests of capital and capitalists.<sup>22</sup>

Working on that logic, the Forum has managed to find unexpected strength in society and to give it free expression. This was true of the now historic peace rallies of 15 February 2003. Accustomed as we were to vast rallies marshalled by fascist governments or in disciplined response to party and trade union calls for action, a vast proportion of the 2003 protests surprised even their most enthusiastic proponents.

There was no need to submit the proposal for street demonstrations to express public repudiation of an imminent war for approval by the Forum's participants or to adopt final or formal declarations in that regard. What followed was a clear example of non-directiveness being more effective. The proposal, one of many put forward at the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002, was repeated along with others at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2003, and spread around the world horizontally with no one coordinating the process through channels set up by the countless networks that inter-connect social organisations. The result: Fifteen million people took to the streets.

As I pointed out in an article for the French newspaper *L'Humanité* [23], the:

... success of Seattle was a clear demonstration of how relations of this kind can be politically effective: a surprising—enormous—number of militants from different countries went to Seattle (in 1999) to contest the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, with no need for a single, unified command to impose discipline.

In an interview published in the book *O espírito de Porto Alegre* (The spirit of Porto Alegre) [16], after saying that the Forum event 'was a moment when networked living intensified', I recalled:

Things endure in a network by virtue of their own truth, not the authority of whoever proposed them. That is the fundamental difference with action that grows out of a network. It happens not

because the big chief ordered it, but because it is a good proposal, which is accepted and which in turn depends on people taking it up.

Later in the same interview, I said:

I think that means a paradigm change. The characteristics of political struggle have changed in today's world. There is no need for it to be unified. Unification has a lot to do with order, homogeneity. The need now is to work with heterogeneity. That is precisely why networks make much stronger organisations than pyramids because they are based on a choice by all their members, who do only what they choose to do out of conviction. So, there is no unity but there is co-responsibility for goals that people work towards. When you have to bring an enormous mass to mobilise, it must be made up of people who are aware of the process that is going on. Otherwise, you may achieve the intended goal, but that achievement will be vulnerable to defeat later.

The network logic has been accepted and is beginning to take hold among forum organisers and participants—many of them also organised into networks—especially after its effectiveness was demonstrated so clearly in February 2003. Civil society had shown its strength at the planetary level.

The exclusion of political parties from acting as such in the Forum space does not command the same level of acceptance. Both the parties themselves and the media continue to call this Charter principle into question and even feel that it is not actually being enforced, as I was told during an interview to the French magazine *Messages* [15]: 'In spite of that, certain political parties are more and more present...' I answered:

...Political parties certainly have no place at Social Forums. They can be invited to take part in debates or to give testimonies. But they cannot organise activities at the Forum. They realise that the Forum is on an upswing and are tempted to come in to control it. That has to be prevented, because it would be the death of these dynamics. The Forum would become just a tool of parties and people would stop participating because they do not want to be used. By stipulating that parties cannot interfere in the Forum, the Charter installed an anti-virus against that kind of instrumental use.

*La Vie* magazine [33], asked me: 'But the dangers of instrumental use exist. Who makes them act? Can the ideas developed in Porto Alegre

come to anything without the intermediation of political and social organisations?’ I answered:

It is not easy to cast off old practices and theories that have now shown themselves to be ineffective for changing the world. Political parties were conceived to struggle for power and are certainly among the means that must be downgraded relatively in efforts to seek change. This is especially true if they distance themselves from society, isolate themselves from each other and allow themselves to be drawn into dynamics of rivalry and struggles for hegemony. The changes needed to build a different millennium are so sweeping—it’s a real social mutation—that nothing would be possible from the top down.

*Mouvements* magazine [17], insisted: ‘And the place of political parties? That seems to spur discussion...’ To which I replied:

Right from the outset we refused to let parties have an organisational role. Nonetheless, most of us were members of PT (Workers’ Party). Other left-wing parties then accused us of in fact wanting to co-opt the whole process for PT. We had to show that was not true, which took months, until the very month the Forum opened, and we had no idea then how successful it was going to be.

Political parties raise the issue over and over again. Members of France’s Socialist Party who interviewed me in Mumbai [24], asked: ‘How does one go from horizontality to action? How can intermediation be found? What political results can be achieved?’ My answer was:

Political parties do not hold a monopoly on political action. The powers that be have to be interchanged and held to account; to do so is already to act on the political plane. The Geneva Pact, for example, is one model of what can be done.<sup>23</sup> It was an autonomous initiative that came out of civil society and showed that agreement was possible. Now it is a hot potato in the laps of the respective governments. We should do the same about reform of the United Nations. Before the end of June, we should—all together—make alternative proposals to those of Kofi Annan.

In an article for the book *FSE 2003* [6], I tried to show what to do in the relationship with parties:

For their part, parties and politicians have yet to understand completely what a Social Forum space is. [...] Of course, they would prefer to

absorb all that movement, where young people are a significant presence. [...] However, if they start frequenting Forum spaces as parties, they can kill them by bringing in the competitive dynamics of the struggle for power. Hence, there has to be a lot of dialogue with them to improve their understanding of this initiative, which really can contribute to changing the world if it keeps itself autonomous of them. And doing all this knowing very well that their militants will necessarily be present at the forums through the organisations that they take part in.

In an interview to *Alternatives Economiques* magazine [28], I talked about some of the beneficial effects of such a dialogue:

The forums are a civil society space. They must remain autonomous of governments and parties, without trying to replace them. That said our way of doing politics is already having its effects on how parties act in practice. In India, the Mumbai Forum led the various communist parties to dialogue. The Global Progressive Forum, held in November 2003 among socialists at the initiative of Poul Rasmussen, the new President of the European Socialist Party, is a demonstration of how strong an example the Social Forums are because that Forum was open to other political forces besides parties. But this influence will not be lasting unless, for our part, we manage to stay true to our principles.

## **8. TRANSLATIONS, COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND THE MEDIA**

Holding the forums raised one immediate problem that later became the focus of a great deal of creativity and innovation: the translation system.

All international undertakings naturally have to find a way for people to communicate independently of whether they speak each other's languages or not. News and information on the Forum was posted on its website and circulated in correspondence from the organisers in four 'official' languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English and French. At meetings, however, the system normally used involves specialists in simultaneous interpretations, with their portable or fixed booths and their translation receivers, all of which is extremely expensive.

That facility cannot be provided for all the activities and meeting rooms, with hundreds of groups, some of them small, working at innumerable places at the same time. In addition, as participation in the forums has grown, so has the number of languages being spoken, while

the number of people who can communicate in one of the four official languages has decreased. Increasingly diversified participation and the presence of grassroots groups—as in India with its many regional and local languages—have intensified this problem.

Little by little, in the natural course of events, participants who were willing to help with this task of translation free of charge began to emerge. These participants began to organise themselves to cover the needs of the various kinds of events and activities. They also started discovering the pitfalls involved in translating among very different cultures: words do not always correspond exactly across all languages. That problem came to be a subject of debate at the forums, and at the second European Forum in Paris-Saint Denis in 2003, a seminar held specifically on the subject generated a lot of interest and was very well-attended.

Today, there is a formally constituted international association of volunteer translators, tellingly called Babels. This association, which now has a network of translators in several countries, has had a seat on the WSF International Council since the April 2004 meeting and, at the same time, provides services at Council meetings.

In a parallel effort, other participants started looking for alternative solutions to the technology used to transmit the interpreters' words without using booths and related equipment and the corresponding receivers which are always expensive. The Forums in Porto Alegre in 2003 and Mumbai in 2004 experimented with portable radios that participants could buy at a very low cost. Another association—also with a significant name: Nomad—joined Babels in looking for solutions. Further experiments were carried out—although not fully successful—at the 2005 Forum in Porto Alegre with a view, among other things, to using communication technology that would make it possible for Forum activities to be followed anywhere in the world, live, via the Internet.

These advances in communication and inter-communication processes and the scope for applying them also have the potential to solve the Forum's media problems. This is a problem posed repeatedly, as shown in the interview I gave in Mumbai to *Dr!* Magazine [38], which asked me: 'Chico, Brazil's major media has completely ignored the Mumbai Forum. What do you put that down to?' I answered:

With all that was going on I had no time to be on the Internet reading what the newspapers were saying. I only found out through a journalist, who was also scandalised that in Brazil the big news from the Forum

was about a strange rape that happened in a hotel in Mumbai [...] However, it goes without saying why Brazilian newspapers neglected the Forum. WSF lies completely outside the stereotypes of political action and news that suit the dominant interests.

Later I added:

We saw this too when the Porto Alegre newspapers distorted what was happening at the Forum until the local *TV Educativa* (Educational TV) channel started live broadcasts of the talks and conferences going on there. The Forum is extremely dangerous to the system which would rather ignore, and if possible discredit it, because the network logic it forms part of confronts neo-liberalism like a thousand-headed monster: they cut off one and a dozen new ones grow in its place.

The change that came over the Porto Alegre newspapers at the 2002 Forum struck me when I returned to São Paulo. This is described in a text I wrote at the height of my indignation, for possible publication in the daily *Folha de S.Paulo*.<sup>24</sup>

Returning from Porto Alegre the day after the World Social Forum ended, I read the article in the Porto Alegre daily, *Zero Hora*, on the closing ceremony—which had been particularly charged with emotion. It was really quite an informative account, favourable even. That newspaper which had typically attacked the Forum strongly, had to be more objective this year. Its readers were now better informed by the local *TV Educativa* channel which throughout the six days of the Forum event, broadcast live the activities that were going on there. Reading the *Folha* on arrival in São Paulo, I first saw an extremely critical opinion article—any newspaper is entitled to that—but when my eyes fell on the headline for the article on the closing ceremony—*Saramago azeda a festa* (Saramago spoils the party)—I was amazed at how far the newspaper had gone to distort things. And all because Saramago's text—which he sent especially for the occasion—had criticised political parties and trade unions. Doesn't the *Folha* know that the Forum is a space set up by and for civil society exactly because, among other things, political parties and trade unions were no longer managing to 'represent' social aspirations for change? And was it also unaware that political parties as such do not participate directly in the Forum in order to prevent them from introducing the logic of power struggles that is intrinsic to them?

The bombardment by *Folha* had begun earlier, as I wrote in this article, which was not published:

The previous week the *Folha* put out a full-page article under the headline: *Fórum Social Mundial começa com disputa de poder* (World Social Forum starts with power struggle). On the basis of declarations by a now long-standing critic of the Forum proposal and relying on other opinions gathered by telephone in France—the interviewee later told me how surprised he was at what had been done with his words—*Folha* took a real deviation and blew it out of all proportion. Was the newspaper trying to say—wishful thinking?—that after all, as always on the left, everything would go down the drain? That difference of opinion, moreover, was not even raised at the International Council meeting held two days before the Forum started. Instead, calmly and by consensus, that meeting adopted—after a lot of discussion, naturally—nine guidelines on how what is now called the Forum process was to continue, among which was the decision to hold the 2004 Forum in India.<sup>25</sup>

I wrote further:

*Folha's* coverage of the closing ceremony ended relentlessly on the same note. A first page lead claimed: *Fórum Social Mundial termina sem unanimidade* (World Social Forum ends without unanimous agreement). Basing that claim on the banner of one group in the march on the second-last day of the Forum—which, in the freedom that is the great hallmark of that event, clashed with the overall tone of the other banners raised on that march—the headline in fact contradicted the content of the article it was drawing attention to: ‘independent [sic] of how appropriate their causes and conduct are, it is a triumph that they are all gathered together in advocating acts of solidarity, condemning militarism or setting up the broadest possible network in support of social justice.’

We know how the mainstream media works. The owners are one thing; media professionals are another. As I said to *Courrier de la Planète* magazine [12]:

...the Brazilian press assumed that the Porto Alegre event was typical of the rigid, old left. Little by little, however, as the Forum progressed, they began to give more space to the people involved and to their projects. The more time passes, the more press articles there are about the issues underlying the Forum and its repercussions. The coverage still falls a

long way short of what we would like to see. It does not bring out clearly enough how innovative the whole initiative is, nor the opportunities that open up there. Nonetheless, as we prepare for the second Forum we are going to be able to mobilise the press.

I added to these remarks in an interview to *Adital* news agency [25]:

Even here in Brazil, the attention that the Social Forums get from the major media varies greatly. It can see that we are against the ideological mainstream, but it has difficulty covering these events because it is unable to understand very well what the WSF is actually about—this space with no leaders, no spokespeople, no final documents, where one of the golden rules is to respect diversity. But the attention the media does give—and its understanding of these choices of ours—is visibly growing.<sup>26</sup> ‘Good media’ as you say, is important to make more people see more quickly that we all have to take up the World Social Forum’s invitation to join in the struggle, to join in a new experience in political action. But we do not depend on the media to move ahead. The way to overcome prejudices and show that we are resisting and looking for alternatives is to put up more and more forums, at all levels, in a continuous process of networked inter-connection and coordination among all those who want to build the world that we consider possible, necessary and urgent. Any media that wants to be independent of the money will end up swelling our ranks.

What is certain is that with the technological innovations being introduced by the Nomad association together with other possible kinds of innovation that the Brazilian Organising Committee’s Communication Working Group (supported by networks of journalists committed to the causes of the Forum’s participants) are exploring in alternative media (newspapers, television and radio) the media issue can be expected to gradually cease being a problem and become a solution in the struggle against neo-liberalism worldwide.

## 9. TOWARDS NEW WAYS OF DOING THINGS

If the Forum is attractive because of its new way of organisation and the rules it proposes for relations among its participants, then we need to be consciously aware of their originality. Otherwise, the Forum runs the risk of being diluted among the many other initiatives being taken up around the world to overcome domination, and so waste all its potential.

With that concern in mind in October 2002, during preparations for the third World Social Forum, a group of participants from France and Brazil, including myself, took the initiative of launching a process directed towards thinking about the Forum itself. That group also felt that organising the Forum entailed a series of personal changes in behaviour among the organisers in order for them to do things in ways that were really new. That feeling grew out of the difficulties experienced by the organising committees and by the International Council every time a tentacle from the old world reached out into one of these groupings.

In order to encourage that thinking process, the group set up an Internet discussion list—significantly called ‘WSF Itself’—on which everyone interested in the issue could exchange analysis and ideas. A number of Forum participants and International Council members from several countries who had expressed the same kind of concern were invited to join the list.

The proposal sparked a lot of interest, but insufficient debate followed. The effort was useful, nonetheless, in revealing that many people shared the same concern.

That dynamic led to activities at both the 2003 Forum in Porto Alegre and the 2004 Forum in Mumbai. At the former, on the initiative of the French association *Interactions*, a workshop was held on the theme ‘Getting over issues of rivalry and power—a challenge for WSF?’ At the latter, a round table was held for a larger audience on ‘The future of WSF’.<sup>27</sup>

The workshop held in 2003 in Porto Alegre was especially interesting for the method it used. *Interactions* distributed a note to all the participants of previous forums that said:

In order to decide on points to be considered jointly in Porto Alegre at the WSF 2003 workshop ‘Getting over issues of rivalry and power—a challenge for FSM?’ here we propose a series of questions designed to encourage debate and contributions from all those interested:

1. How can movements involved on the subject ‘another world is possible’ make pluralism into a strength and avoid the logic of mistrust and disunity among themselves? This question is all the more important right now, given the real risk of war: how able are civil society actors to produce peace processes?
2. How can we move on personally and collectively from the logic of the ‘power to dominate’ to the logic of the ‘power to create’?

3. How have the larger ideas put forward in Porto Alegre weakened—if they have—when applied to the WSF process and the various organisations that have built it?
4. How can the notions of pluralism, diversity and democracy expressed in the Charter of Principles be applied not just in WSF but also in our lives?
5. What are the most important real stories that reveal the difficulties arising out of the logic of rivalry and power? Conversely, which ones show how the logic of cooperation can do better?
6. What are our ideas and recommendation for surmounting these difficulties?

In order to develop its proposals for improving the WSF dynamic, the workshop of almost 50 participants used the inversion method proposed by Paul Watzlawick, a teacher from Palo Alto, California who wrote a book with the suggestive title *How to fail most successfully*.<sup>28</sup>

It made the following assertions its point of departure:

Capitalism, imperialism, the G-7, the major media and the multinationals have failed—despite their considerable means—to prevent either the emergence of a world civil and civic society or the success of its annual gatherings in the WSF space in Porto Alegre.

Continental or local Social Forums do fail so in order to ensure the future world we will have to rely on our own efforts. Therefore, it is time to put an end to these democratic forums that aim to ensure pluralism, creativity, independence from political parties, transparency and neighbourliness. A priori, the task seems impossible considering the assets accumulated by the first three World Social Forums. However, praiseworthy efforts have been made towards failure. If systematically exploited, they can enable us, against all expectations, to bring about the downfall of the Forum's future dynamics.

From there, the workshop's participants drafted a text setting out what would have to be done to implode the World Social Forum.

Having done so they came to the conclusion that if they issued such a document at the Forum it might be misinterpreted. It might lead to misunderstandings and reproduce the same faults that were being analysed, particularly with regard to 'attributing intentions' to others instead of 'building disagreements' frankly with them in the spirit of pluralism which has been a characteristic of the Forum's dynamics from the start.

They then decided—after amusing themselves with Paul Watzlawick’s method at times—to draft a document enunciating their concerns unambiguously and proposing that the Forum’s present and future participants should discuss the following points:

1. By organising hundreds of workshops and seminars it is possible to express diversity, exchange, creativity and the voices of the people involved in the various topics. That creative diversity of ideas, struggles, proposals or experiments must be our basis for organising the cross cutting dimension of seminars, panel discussions, round tables and plenary sessions, in order to avoid the risks of dispersion or exclusion. There is a risk of the inverse process developing: of organisations battling more or less covertly for space at the master conferences and the workshops and seminars being correspondingly relegated to lesser importance.
2. The absence of a final declaration is a guarantee of the Forum’s openness, pluralism and diversity. That rule is being steadily distorted by the ambiguous status of the declaration purportedly by ‘the social movements’. We may ask ourselves how democratically representative they really are, these movements with their very often self-proclaimed leaders. But what is most worrying is the formation of a kind of de facto leadership of the movement that gave rise to the Forum, with no regard for the pluralism that is a condition of the Forum. Are we going to plug back into the old logic of vanguards, without saying anything and maybe without even knowing it, when its historical failure is an acknowledged fact?
3. The Charter of Principles refuses to allow WSF to be organised by political parties, in order to prevent power games and the risk of the Forum being put to instrumental use. That fundamental rule is also being flouted more and more. The success of WSF and the continental forums will be seriously jeopardised if the old practices of infiltration and instrumentalisation begin to reappear.
4. The WSF dynamic is fundamentally democratic. It is designed to enhance traditional forms of democracy by stronger citizen participation and to contribute to the emergence of a world citizenry and world democracy. The logic of civic forums that expresses that demand for active citizenship was brought out clearly worldwide, both in the pro-democracy struggles in China and Eastern Europe against empires or communist dictatorships and in struggles against

the commodification of the world and United States' neo-imperialism. It would be fatal to the future of that dynamic if it became confused in any way with the authoritarian cultures still expressed in a large number of nationalisms, populisms or integralisms.

5. From the outset, the Forum's success has always been most strongly rooted in quality relationships, neighbourliness and its festive dimension. These would be seriously jeopardised by a return to the practices of the desperately sad professional militancy of the 1960s.

On all these points, as on many others that the workshop merely outlined, there are a large number of antidotes against the toxins that could poison the Forum's dynamic. In most cases, it may be enough to continue to be faithful to the spirit—and not just the letter—of the WSF Charter of Principles in order to guarantee high-quality democracy and relations that have ensured the Forum's success to date. In those conditions, it seems important to debate the problem openly.

The text concludes: 'We invite all those interested in this debate to continue it with us by signing up for the discussion list at the following address: [wfitself@no-log.org](mailto:wfitself@no-log.org).'<sup>29</sup>

I end my presentation of this experience at the 2003 Forum with my answer to a question from *Dr!* magazine [38]:

I am quite concerned that the Forum 'method' should continue. So I was struck by how more and more people are turning their thinking to this, with a view to improving it, with no discontinuity. In Mumbai in 2004, there was a large plenary of around 300 or 400 people, and a good seminar with another 100 to discuss just what the Forum, as an open space, brings to political action that is new. In Porto Alegre in 2003 there had been only one workshop on this subject.

At the very least, however, the explosive work of that small workshop, which brought together just over 50 people—and only a very small number of Forum participants ever really got to hear about—gave a lot of clues for anyone wanting to explore in greater detail the discussion of new practices being pursued at World Social Forum meetings.

## 10. THE NEED FOR INNER CHANGE

One new development at the second World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre in 2002 was that the participants from several countries said

clearly on a number of different occasions and in a variety of ways, that ‘inner change’ was needed as a condition for building the ‘other possible world’.

The question was approached from different angles in activities that attracted large numbers of participants, such as the workshop on mystique and revolution—attended by several hundred people—or the conference on ‘Principles and values’—scheduled by the Forum organisers themselves—which filled to overflowing a 2,000-seat hall. But it was also raised in other activities that drew substantial attendance, such as the workshop on the role of religions in action for change, or the seminar on the relationship between personal and collective change, or the morning ecumenical services held in *Praça do Pôr-do-sol* (Sunset Square) on the shore-front in Porto Alegre. At the Forum’s closing session, a Colombian indigenous woman used the expression ‘inner change’ directly, saying these two words slowly as part of an Andean ritual that moved all those present. The very way the WSF is held proposes new paradigms of political action—as I try to show in this book—which entail ‘inner changes’ of those who organise or participate in the Forum.

On all these occasions and in all these ways, what was being signalled was the importance of individual, subjective attitudes from those fighting for a new world and from its future citizens if that new world is ever actually to become a reality.

In today’s dominant culture of confrontation, which makes us all either ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ this new development at the Forum was particularly savoured by those who, over the last 50 years<sup>30</sup> have been led by their religious faith to engage in politics in response to Brazil’s need for change. They faced a dilemma: were they to work for structural changes in society, because structures determine the conditions of life and condition personal attitudes, or were they to ‘convert’ more and more people to do good, because more widespread attitudes of solidarity will necessarily lead to social changes?

The 2002 World Social Forum brought to light the only possible way out of that dilemma: our struggle must necessarily combine the two dynamics, by working to change structures and to bring about ‘inner change’.

In fact, historical experience has been showing that, separate from each other, both political action and individual person-to-person action are insufficient. We are starting to discover the fundamental importance of combining the political struggle for new structures with the inner

struggle for new kinds of behaviour. At the 2002 Forum, one of the organisers of a seminar on personal and collective change wrote a text, which was published before the Forum, setting out its rationale:

We must not forget that throughout history most major attempts at social and political change have ended in failure or gone adrift, when not leading to monstrous—very often totalitarian—deviations. Could that have been from a failure to give sufficient thought to humankind's rightful place and the issue of personal change in those processes?<sup>31</sup>

However simple to state, this requirement poses a challenge far harder to meet than may be supposed.

Indeed, there are three dimensions to 'inner change', all of them equally difficult. In the first place there is change in our relations with others: that has to occur within us, building from our own subjectivity, from the inside out, in our hearts and minds, to shape new relational attitudes and practices. In the second place, we have to change the way we live our practical politics if we intend it to produce real transformation.<sup>32</sup> These two kinds of change are particularly demanding precisely among those who engage in politics, where decisions tend to be strongly influenced by personal ambitions, vanity and the taste for power. In the third place, there has to be change in the habits and values that guide our day-to-day lives—in our consumerism, for instance, and in our relationship with the environment.

All these kinds of changes within ourselves entail living in solidarity with our 'neighbours' and with future generations.<sup>33</sup> Now, that means swimming against a strong current of individualism, competition and accumulation of material well being that is sweeping practically all of humankind along,<sup>34</sup> and has swollen even more since the capitalist system came to dominate the world practically uncontested. If such changes have to result from subjective attitudes, then at the very least they call for personal courage.

The changes needed in political practice also entail facing up to 'truths' that have been consolidating for decades in hegemonic left-wing thinking and have been defended by the sacrifice of countless lives.

We, therefore, cannot simply commemorate having discovered that inner change is needed, after decades under the illusion that in order to build 'another world' it is enough to take public power and make structural changes in how society functions. Those changes have to be made to run deeper, to be given real consistency and, if they really are an

essential condition for effective change, then we have to work to embody them in our lives.

So, the challenge is set. Building a new political culture depends on meeting that challenge.

## NOTES

1. Many other people agree with me in considering this issue being so important. The Finnish Network Institute for Global Democratisation (NIGD), for instance, held a seminar at the Mumbai Forum specifically on the subject 'Forum—open space'. I took part as a speaker, alongside intellectuals and activists who have applied their thinking to WSF, among them Aníbal Quijano, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Immanuel Wallerstein, Jai Sen, Meena Menon and Virginia Vargas.
2. Annex 1 contains a list of books and magazines where the article was published.
3. The World Social Forum's Brazilian organisers applied the rule in an even stricter form when they decided that performing a government function would be an impediment to participation in organising the Forum. As a result, after the 2003 Forum, two members of the Organising Committee, Oded Grajew, representing the *Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania*, CIVES (Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship) and Kjeld Jakobsen, representing the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores*, CUT (Central Workers Confederation), stood down when they accepted posts, respectively, with Brazil's federal government and the São Paulo municipal government. Both gave the Forum's International Council formal notification of their decision and the reasons. Oded Grajew—the person who first had the idea of organising the World Social Forum—subsequently rejoined the Organising Committee when he left the function he had taken on with the Presidency of the Republic.
4. Newspapers and commentators report that the present mayor of London saw the European Social Forum, held in his city in October 2004, as a good opportunity to gain stature in the English political context—and interfered in its organisation.
5. At the first edition of the Forum I was interviewed several times by journalists responsible for putting out the Davos newsletter published at that other Forum.
6. Many forums are organised around the world to set up dialogues among different approaches to the problems facing the world. Such is the case of Forum 2000, which Vaclav Havel, has been calling in Prague, capital of the country where he was President, with the title 'Bridging Global Gaps' (BGG) to which people with sometimes totally opposing views are invited.
7. The organisers of the 2002 Forum had some interesting experiences in this regard: World Bank representatives in Brazil applied to register as such at the Forum, not without first consulting the people responsible. They were told they could register as observers, but were also reminded that a vast majority of those present at the Forum regarded the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and World Bank as the three great villains of the capitalist-dominated world situation, and that it would at the very least be embarrassing for any representative of these organisations to be identified as such at the Forum. They thus desisted from registering—as far as is known... which did not prevent the media, after it found out about the application, to say that the Forum organisers had banned the President of the World Bank ... On the same occasion, the Belgian Prime Minister wanted a space to

be made available at the Forum for him to address all the participants as Head of State. It was possible to explain to him, however, that the way the Forum was set up to function made no provision for that kind of presence—and, of course, there was no question of telling him he could attend as an observer... On another occasion, President Chávez of Venezuela announced that he was coming to the Forum. He was told that, for the same reasons, no special allowances could be made for him as Head of State and that if he wanted to come he would have to be received by the local authorities. He then agreed to limit himself to a one-day visit to Porto Alegre where he gave interviews and attended meetings with those who supported him in his endeavours. There was, however, one near-exception to this criterion at the 2003 Forum, when President Lula was welcomed at a special ceremony where he was able to address all the participants. This was felt to be acceptable in that he was addressing the participants as President of the host country, just as the state governor and city mayor had done. In addition it seemed unavoidable to apply the rule more flexibly given that Lula had taken part in previous forums as a member of an institute he presided and that the Forum had been one of the contributing factors in the process of social mobilisation which had resulted in what was then his recent election. We still do not know what price the Forum will have to pay for making that exception. Lula was aware that an exception was being made, however. In a meeting with the members of the International Council at that time, he was asked if he would accept the invitation to the Forum the following year, 2004, in India. He answered that if possible he would prefer to go as a trade union leader and not as President of the Republic. He also reminded the Council members that they should not turn the World Social Forum into a parade of presidents. From Porto Alegre Lula flew to Davos, embarrassing the Forum's organisers... (see Chapter 4:7, 'Davos—Porto Alegre').

8. I transcribe some of these questions by way of example so as to illustrate their content. *Messages* magazine, France [15]: 'Many people are still unclear about the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum. They would like to see something concrete coming out of them, an action plan even.'; *Croire Aujourd'hui* magazine, France [19]: 'What are the main outcomes of this endeavour? Isn't it limited?'; *Labour File* newspaper, India [8]: 'What, in your opinion, are the main results of the Porto Alegre events?'; *Adital* agency, Brazil [25]: 'The World Social Forum is coming up to its fifth edition. In these four years, what has been achieved concretely in response to the demands that gave rise to an event of this social scope?'; *Campagnes Solidaires* magazine, France [29]: 'Aren't you afraid that your endeavour, which at first was a circle of "initiates", will be reduced to a place for discussion, with no real link to the social movement?'; *Bellaciao* website, Italy [30]: 'How can this type of Forum respond to the urgent needs of populations who have no access to water, to health, to education?'; *Solidaire* newspaper, Switzerland [31]: 'But don't you run the risk of dispersion?'; *Clark* magazine, France [4]: 'What concrete changes have taken place?'; *Caros Amigos* magazine, Brazil [3]: 'But isn't a political project lacking?'
9. I now transcribe some of the answers I have given in interviews that concentrated most on the issue of the Forum's effectiveness: 'Actually, the question is always being asked: what are the political results? I consider the World Social Forum itself to be a political result' (*Nouveaux Regards*) [14]; 'A lot of people at the Forum think that in order to gain effectiveness we ought to define themes, precise actions, that we should get a little more organised. I feel that if we head in that direction we run the risk of killing the Forum. It should continue as a space, and a space where each one's

progress, pace and ideas are respected. [...] one fundamental fruit of the Social Forum is its method. We realised that we were bringing in a new way of doing politics. No longer was it a question of slogans and everyone coming together under a single authority, but horizontal, networked political action that enables participation to expand' (*Croire Aujourd'hui* and *La Croix*) [19]; 'The idea of effectiveness at the forums is not the same as in movements and traditional political organisations, like parties. [...] The participants are militants not of the Forum, but of their own organisations' (book *FSE 2003*) [6]; 'Its effectiveness comes from the multiplicity of actions and not from a leader. [...] The Forum's real strength lies in renouncing the possibility of having power as the Forum. [...] We give people the opportunity to find common footings and to embark on new initiatives. A great many proposals grow out of the Forum thanks to this freedom. No one can control anything' (*Solidaire*) [31]; 'It is not up to the World Social Forum to answer that question (of how to respond to the urgent needs of populations who have no access to water, to health, to education): WSF is no more than a space to make encounters possible among organisations. If the movements do not take the initiative and use WSF in special ways as a prime opportunity to inter-relate their actions, then nothing will happen' (*Bellaciao*) [30]; 'These are organisations of different kinds that are willing to recognise each other mutually, help each other and inter-link with a view to pursuing their struggles more fully, and to gain effectiveness in that way' (*Campagnes Solidaires*) [29]; 'On the basis of what the organisations participating in the Forum inter-change their extremely diverse initiatives and activities learn from and inter-relate with each other before, during and after the events, they begin to enjoy mounting successes, changing society from the bottom up and from the inside out. [...] We are building a new political culture based on co-responsibility, cooperation and horizontal relations, which is already starting to penetrate even into political parties. [...] We are discovering that our struggle can in fact be planet-wide. [...] The effects of all this soon surprised a lot of people. [...] The Forum is a new current of optimism that is starting to spread into more and more countries around the world' (*Adital* news agency) [25]; 'The WSF makes things move forward faster. The presence and increasing power of civil society shows that it is not political parties and governments who are going to say what should or should not change, but citizens themselves. [...] If the "social movements"—as they say in France—hold assemblies in parallel with the European Social Forum and take decisions on a calendar of calls to action, that is their action plan, not the Forum's. Each one does what they want and comes to the Forum to share what they are doing. That is a complete change in the way of doing things. Each one should act as the subject of their decisions and not as an object of the decisions of others' (*Messages*) [15]; 'Another direction people are working in, and which will soon have concrete results, is action by citizens using their power as consumers, a subject that will start to be discussed at the Forum meetings. [...] The new world is already coming into being, in all corners where people are starting to live in cooperation and in a relationship of respect with nature, and are changing to enable themselves to live those values. [...] The challenge of WSF is to communicate all this to as many people as possible, in all the corners of the world, so that they can start to believe again in a utopia and engage in collective and individual efforts to achieve it' (*Clark*) [4]; 'If you look for proposals in Porto Alegre, there are thousands, some more advanced, other less so, on all scales, addressing all concerns' (*Faim et Développement*) [32]; 'I believe that we, the Forum's organisers, are starting to feel one certainty: we have hit on the right formula

to help people surmount their feelings of powerlessness in the face of a power that is inhuman and impersonal, that admits no questions and offers no future—an “end of history”...—which offers no security for people or for our daily lives’ (*La Vie*) [33]; ‘To me maybe the greatest result of the Porto Alegre events is that they have restored people’s belief in the utopia of a world of peace, democracy and equality, by enabling them to discover that there are a lot of people fighting for just that’ (*Labour File*) [8].

10. As already mentioned in Chapter 2:13, on the multiplicity of possible political actions: ‘The real success of a Forum—or of the World Social Forum process—can only be seen with time. There is no such thing as the day the new world will start being built, after we “take power”. It is already being built, from the inside out and from the bottom up, by innumerable actions that are extending the terrain wrested from the old world. These are creating the conditions—including cultural conditions—so that at a certain point the changes that are ongoing can be consolidated, in lasting form, from the top down. Action for change exists before the forums and continues after them, and must increasingly expand and go deeper.’
11. From Stalinism to Pol Pot, there is much to regret in the history of the struggle for socialism.
12. I borrow this word from the suggestive title of the book *Fórum Social Mundial—A história de uma invenção política* (World Social Forum—the story of a political invention), by José Corrêa Leite [34].
13. Everything seemed lost when, the same year as the first edition of the Forum, terrorism struck unexpectedly—and on a grand scale—at the very heart of the empire, toppling the twin towers in New York and causing great loss of life. Those acts pushed the whole world still further into a spiral of violence of unforeseeable consequences, which included intensified militarisation imposed on the world by the present government of the United States, in turn with its results in the vicious circle of action and reaction. None the less it was possible to hold a second edition of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in parallel, which was successful on an even wider scale, and the proposal was confirmed in the subsequent editions and in the regional, national and thematic Social Forums that followed.
14. When the project *Por uma avaliação do Projeto das Jornadas Internacionais por uma sociedade superando as dominações* (For an evaluation of the project International Study Days for a Society Overcoming Dominations)—which I talk about in Annex 12—was decentralised, one of the first activities undertaken by the Support Secretariat set up in Brazil in 1982, was to hold a series of seminars on the topic: ‘Why does the left splinter so much?’ (unpublished).
15. Worth mentioning here is the Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, MST), which forms part of the Forum’s Organising Committee. I described that experience in an interview to the magazine *Campagnes Solidaires* [29], of the French *Confederation Paysanne*, in answer to a question about the possibility of organising a specific forum on farming and food issues within the Forum: ‘That is not the Forum’s method. The MST went as far as to experiment with this at the 2002 WSF. It set up a series of activities for its militants, separate from the other Forum activities. When the movement later evaluated this decision, they came to the conclusion that it had been a mistake. Its militants had missed an opportunity to get to know other endeavours, other experiences and even to tell others what they were doing as a movement, in order to build new alliances. In 2003 they mixed with

the other participants. There is nothing to prevent some activities—conferences, seminars, round tables, workshops, a variety of arrangements—from being devoted to farming and food issues. However, they will be open to everyone. They will be Forum activities, scheduled in the programme, and not a specialised Forum.’

16. One clear example of that effort, which has become almost natural among the members of the Brazilian Organising Committee, is the care they take to avoid proceeding in ways that could be seen as disloyal: when they discuss subjects that are sensitive to any member, and that member is not present, they put the discussion off until it can be pursued with the member being present.
17. In India, one book published by Forum participants, *World Social Forum—Challenging Empires*, launched during the Mumbai Forum, raised a doubt about the Charter. It says textually in a note at the end of my article ‘Notes for the debate on the WSF’: ‘The Forum’s Charter of Principles was first formulated by the eight members of the WSF Brazil Organising Committee in April 2001 (ABONG, ATTAC, CBJP, CIVES, CUT, IBASE, CJG and MST). It was then modified and approved by the first meeting of the WSF International Advisory Committee, later renamed the International Council in June 2001 (World Social Forum Organising Committee, June 2001). Whitaker is here referring to the June 2001 version; but since the April 2001 version, authored by the eight Brazilian organisations, has also been widely circulated and translated across the world, different authors in this book in fact variously refer to these different “versions” of “the Charter”. So please carefully note that the version that is being referred to is distinguished by the date. Both versions have been reproduced in this book, for reference.’ The same issue seems to have been addressed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in another book he published, in which he appears to compare these texts with yet another that is said to have circulated in India, and which corresponds to a commentary on the Charter.
18. Drafted in 2001, the *Apelo de Porto Alegre para as próximas mobilizações* (Porto Alegre call for forthcoming action) was proposed basically by leaders of CUT, MST and ATTAC. The subject is addressed in several places in this book.
19. The discovery of this ‘oversight’, along with another in the text of the Information Note that was issued, caused a serious crisis in the Brazilian Organising Committee, which nearly led to its disintegrating and to the Forum’s not enjoying the continuing success it later did.
20. See the critique of this position by Bernard Cassen, in *Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre* [37].
21. See particularly the passage from a text written by two members of the World Social Forum, India Organising Committee, which is reproduced at the end of Chapter 3:1, ‘World Social Forum—a space or a movement?’
22. In an article written for the French magazine *Faim et Développement* [32], I explained the World Social Forum’s ‘network’ logic as: ‘One word at the heart of the new culture of collective action is “network”. One key idea can define what a network is: no one can speak on behalf of a network, unlike a traditional organisation. It is a horizontal structure whose members share a goal or a charter of values. As there is no centre of power in a network, it is not an organisation that determines how its members are to act; instead, how those members act constitutes what the network will do. In this regard, the World Social Forum is a network of networks. This organisational form has much in common with the Internet web. There information is

concentrated in a central computer to which everyone is connected. The information is distributed to a set of computer memories and their users' intelligence, which communicate freely with one another. It is no coincidence that this manner of organising has grown simultaneously with the Internet's explosive growth. They both result from the same logic. The Internet is the pre-eminent tool for extending citizenship to the world level.'

23. The Geneva Pact was a peace plan proposed for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, drawn up over more than three years by members of civil society in the two countries working together and submitted to the two governments.
24. This text was never drafted in full.
25. The nine guidelines adopted can be seen at [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)
26. The number of press professionals accredited grew over the first three Forums: 1,870 in 2001, 3,356 in 2002 and 4,094 in 2003.
27. International Council members with different positions on the Forum's future participated in that round table which I was given the job of coordinating.
28. The publisher presents the book like this: 'In his international best seller *The Situation Is Hopeless, But Not Serious*, Paul Watzlawick showed us how to become unhappiness experts. Now in a new volume he turns to our strivings for ultra-solutions—those final solutions that do away with the problem and just about everything else. (A perfect ultra-solution lies in that old medical joke: "The operation was successful, but the patient died.") Many ultra-solutions are examined and listed in this book: they apply both to marital conflicts and international relations. The rule is simple: the game played with others has to be zero-sum, that is, you can only win if the other guy loses, and vice-versa. So it is impossible for you both to win, and normally both lose. We can all easily find ultra-solutions in our own and others' lives, by reading the newspaper or just listening, but this book takes their mechanism apart piece by piece and puts it within reach of us all.'
29. The list still exists, but is practically inactive. Its organisers are thinking of reviving it, now to centre the debate on the experiences of the local Social Forums.
30. In an interview published in the book *O espírito de Porto Alegre* (The spirit of Porto Alegre) [16], I recalled: 'Inner change is linked, at its origin, with the Christian faith; it brings to mind conversion, changing people inside. It was an idea that Christian militants pursued 50 years ago. When it was realised how urgent it was to change structures, which even determined how people behaved, the idea of inner change—as a single, prime goal from which all the rest would follow—was relegated to secondary importance. But at this Forum it has re-emerged as a condition for changing structures.'
31. Philippe Merlant, *Construction de soi et transformation sociale, Revue de la psychologie de la motivation*, No. 32, December 2001, Paris.
32. '[...] In order to build conditions so that the great mutation that our world needs can be brought about successfully, we must apply ourselves to changing personally, internally, to be able to exercise the power to serve wherever we can' (talk for the Social Weeks of France) [26].
33. As regards solidarity, at a round table on racism, laicism and solidarity at the 2003 European Social Forum [27], I said: 'Indeed, living without being racist and respecting secularity is an attitude that when taken, is taken once and for all, and from which

there can be no turning back, if it is properly anchored inside ourselves. We will have changed, our very being will have changed, making it inadmissible to act as before, even if the marks of racism or un-civic attitudes may surprise us in unexpected situations. Solidarity, meanwhile, is quite different. On the one hand, it is a hundred times more demanding; on the other, there is no limit to the changes it should produce inside us.'

34. 'We have to be aware that the world does not work on a dynamic of change. We are all tied to logics of consumerism, competition ... it is difficult to get away from them. [...] But the way the world is going it is heading for its own destruction. In order for change to occur, the awareness has to dawn that another world is possible. That cannot be decreed. It is a cultural change' (article published in France) [32].



# 4

## *Chapter*

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## Outlook

### 1. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF MUMBAI

The fourth World Social Forum held in Mumbai, India, was a real social and cultural shock for everyone who had been at previous forums or helped organise them. That is what comes across clearly in an interview I gave to *Dr!* magazine [38], just after leaving behind me the human warmth of the Forum:

*Dr!*—Chico... It's all right to call you that, isn't it? Could you please draw up a balance on the World Social Forum—an overview by someone who helped organise them all and took part in them body and soul.

CW—Well, this year was a pity for all those who enjoyed going to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and coming back re-energised to go on fighting for 'another world'; it was a pity not being able to take part in that whole confusion, that happiness, that enormous amount of things happening and being said and discussed about the evils of our time and the possibility of something else centred on the human person and not on money. Since the very first time in 2001, the whole thing has been scary and a revelation that there are so many of us wanting to change the world. That's why, back in 2001, WSF organisers decided not only that they had to continue but also and most importantly that they had to make it happen all over the world.

*Dr!*: Has anything new come out of holding it in India?

CW: I can say without hesitation that the really decisive quality leap happened this year with the main event in the process—the World

Social Forum—moving to India. And that was scary all over again for whoever was lucky enough to be able to get there.

*Dr!:* How many Brazilians took part in Mumbai?

CW: There were about 500 of us Brazilians, which is a good number. At the 2003 Forum in Porto Alegre, only about 100 Indians, if that, were able to pop over to the other side of the world.

*Dr!:* You used the word ‘scary’. Why?

CW: Scary, in the first place, to see the slums and the extreme poverty everywhere. India has a population of over 1 billion. As someone said, it seems as though they’ve given up on putting an end to misery... The Forum was held on the outskirts of Mumbai, which is an enormous city of 16 million. In order to get to the Nesco Ground, which was the Forum venue, you had to take an overcrowded—really packed!—suburban train. And then, whenever possible, you’d get a rickshaw—a motorised tricycle that carries up to three passengers, and is prohibited in the more or less English-style city centre.

*Dr!:* But the Forum itself was a success?

CW: You could say that was another ‘fright’—a real success. More than 100,000 participants. A Forum marked, far more than in Brazil, by grassroots presence. Throughout the four days there was a steady stream of dozens and dozens of large and small demonstrations—protesting, denouncing and voicing demands—marching down the avenues of the space where the Forum was held—a large company’s warehouse area that had been turned into a centre for film production (Bollywood) and conventions. People raised a real dust storm and the sisal sacking on the bare earth floors just couldn’t keep it down.

*Dr!:* Was there a common thrust to those demands or were they spread over several themes?

CW: People used drums and shouted rallying cries for all kinds of struggles. What stood out most were the demonstrations by over 20,000 dalits, India’s caste-less ‘untouchables’, that is, the most downtrodden of the downtrodden, who are more than 170 million strong in India... And there were grassroots dance and theatre performances, one on every corner, all of them politically aware, as could be seen from the translations we got of the Hindi they were spoken in. Among the

enormous warehouses of the former factory and the many dozens of outside workshop and meeting rooms built of bamboo and fabric, there were also several ‘food fairs’ with all kinds of Asian food, and enormous numbers of stands of all kinds—books, manufactured goods, presentations of political programmes and educational or awareness-raising activities. There was the ‘Porto Alegre Memorial’ stand, a meeting point for Brazilians in that vastness. Hard to describe really. But you can imagine the shock of transferring the Forum to another culture, to another history.

*Dr!:* And there were ‘also’ the discussions...

*CW:* Right... While all this was going on in the roadways, the panel discussions, round tables and conferences were also taking place. The people taking part were trying to analyse the themes that had been proposed for discussion—and, incredibly, managing to do so successfully.

I summed up those impressions later in an interview to the French newspaper *Le Monde* [39]:

The challenge was to organise a Forum in a country with a great diversity of cultures and religions and marked by strong political divisions. That challenge has been met. The grassroots mobilisation was stronger and the ideological content more daring than we had imagined. What most surprised me was the ability of those Asian militants to overcome their divisions and organise themselves coherently. Another discovery was the massive presence of dalits, tribal groups, women and children, with all their sufferings. The way is clear for other models of the Forum.

Evaluating the Forum for *Campagnes Solidaires* magazine [29], I reiterated the impact that the social situation in India had produced: ‘Most importantly, holding the WSF in Mumbai enabled all those who took part to see the depths of misery that capitalist domination can lead to.’

However, I also drew attention to another kind of impact—the cultural expressions:

You discover the wealth and potential of an entirely other kind of political expression that is quite different from the intellectual discussions we are used to, and which were the only kind present at previous

forums. In Mumbai, all the streets of the grounds where the Forum was held were taken over by grassroots groups and organisations with their music, dance, games, theatrical performances, their symbols, their demonstrations making demands and airing grievances. The 2005 Forum, which is to be held in Porto Alegre, will certainly never be the same again...

Indeed, the mobilisation primer issued by the Brazilian Organising Committee for WSF 2005 stated:

Popular culture was an unprecedented force at the fourth WSF. Over the six days of the Forum, more than 1,500 artists, poets, playwrights and writers put up their work. More than 150 performances of street theatre were staged. There was also a film festival with around 85 films coming from some 40 countries. In India, the fourth WSF showed the strength of cultural and artistic expressions as other forms of resistance to neo-liberalism, which are as important to mobilise hearts and minds towards 'another possible world' as they are to combat cultural domination.

The 2005 Forum thus set out explicitly—on the registration form for activities—to address the need to incorporate the cultural dimension into the struggle against neo-liberalism. Instead of just proposing the types of activity that had occurred at previous forums in Porto Alegre (workshops, seminars and controversy round tables etc.), it invited other forms of expression, such as plastic arts, interactive activities, audiovisuals, celebrations, festivities, walkabouts, marches and street demonstrations, circus, theatre performances, poetry and narrative, music shows and recordings for the memorial etc. All of which is nothing more than the impact of Mumbai on the World Social Forum process.

## **2. THE 2005 WORLD SOCIAL FORUM**

As I finished writing this book, just under two months before the 2005 World Social Forum was to be held, the preparatory process was running ahead full steam. The major features that would mark the 2005 Forum, where this book was to be released are summarised below.

As already said, the Methodology and Content Commission meeting in Porto Alegre from 13 to 15 November 2004, was attended by many members of the International Council and of the Brazilian Organising Committee Working Groups. Among the things it decided

on definitively were two important methodological and political innovations (applied in 2005):

- all the activities carried out at the 2005 Forum would be the responsibility of the participants themselves as self-organised activities; this made for a more radically participatory Forum, continuing with the design that had resulted in prior consultations on the issues, problems and challenges that the participants felt should be addressed at the Forum, and in the self-organised activities they intended to carry out. That option had been pursued more comprehensively ever since the Mumbai Forum, where the organisers were responsible for only 13 of the 1,182 activities; meaning that the participants themselves would now play the role of ‘facilitators’ at the service of the rest.
- there would be two hours of free time every day in the late afternoon when no activity that might compete with the free use of that time would take place so that the participants could meet in order to do more networking, plan concrete action to be started or continued after the Forum, or simply to evaluate their own participation.

The methodology adopted for 2005 used some other options more fully, such as encouraging inter-linking and planning for action that could continue after the Forum so that the event would be an intense moment of personal inter-relations to reinforce those collective engagements; this is intended to consolidate the kind of unity—with autonomy and many different kinds of action—that really can give us the power necessary to confront globalised neo-liberalism effectively.

Since the proposed methodology was submitted to the April 2004 International Council meeting in Passignano, Italy, the Forum process had been looking for ways to pool activities—always respecting each participant’s freedom to come together with others or not—in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. By the November meeting in Porto Alegre, that concern was more acute and participants who had registered activities were invited to seek opportunities to join others and after consulting the database posted on the WSF website, to reach understandings among themselves. The letter extending that invitation proposed four types of linking:

- Fusion—when two or more activities can gain by becoming one, which is then re-scheduled so as to allow all concerned to benefit.

- Sequencing—when the activities remain as they were registered, but are organised in series with each other so that the participants in each can take part in all the others.
- Dialogue—when the activities remain as scheduled, but the organisers of each agree to send authoritative ‘representatives’ to all the others to provide information and build together.
- Encounter—when the organisers of each activity arrange meetings in the free time set aside each day for dialogue between endeavours and for joint evaluations.

Another important step towards optimising everyone’s participation in the event—which had been attempted unsuccessfully in 2003 and 2004—was taken in preparing for the 2005 Porto Alegre Forum: the closing dates for registering activities were brought forward sufficiently so that the programme could be issued well in advance and people could come to Porto Alegre already knowing which activities they preferred to participate in among the more than 1,000 activities on offer.

The 2005 Forum event also advanced in terms of physical facilities. It tried to avoid dispersion and, at the same time, divided up the larger Forum ‘space’ into sub-spaces named after the issues and challenges to be addressed.<sup>1</sup> It also brought the Forum closer to the city centre so that local people could take part more easily. The International Youth Camp was also better integrated into the Forum venue.

Clear guidelines were also adopted with regard to the environmental impact of various types of pollution, waste reduction and treatment, and appropriate types and uses of building materials. Grassroots and solidarity economy enterprises were incorporated into arrangements to supply goods and services to participants, and both preparatory activities and the Forum event itself used and advocated freeware, which included developing the means for the Forum activities to be followed on the Internet, live, anywhere in the world.

Lastly, a ‘Mural of Proposals for building “Other Worlds”’ was set up—drawing particularly on the alternative media—to give visibility to the endless variety and diversity of the proposals that come out of the Forum, while at the same time respecting the provision in the Charter of Principles that there should be no final document. In 2005, the Mural received 352 proposals. The challenge now is the next World Social Forum and how to foster continuity in participants’ inter-connected, coordinated action from the day the 2005 Forum closes until the 2006 Forum opens.

### 3. FORUMS SPREADING AND TAKING ROOT AROUND THE WORLD

Asked in India about spreading the World Social Forum around the world, I told an interviewer from the French magazine *Nouveaux Regards* [14], that:

There came a point in Brazil when we said to ourselves: ‘the struggle against neo-liberalism has to develop, we cannot stay in Porto Alegre forever.’ It had to go out to other places, to some other country, to prove that it would work there too. Today we are seeing the result in Mumbai: it did work. That is sure proof that we can press ahead.

If the Forum proposal does take root as that expansion occurs, we shall be weaving a fabric of organisations—a real planetary civil society—sufficiently solid to stand up effectively to globalised neo-liberalism. The proposal can be made to take root in two ways: by holding World Social Forums in more and more regions of the world; and by holding more and more local Social Forums, as we shall see below.

#### a) *Setting roots by holding World Social Forums*

In the first place simply organising a World Forum has the beneficial effect of building unity among the organisations who undertake the task. As I told an interviewer for *Mouvements* magazine [17]:

The Indians thanked us for being given the opportunity to enjoy that experience, which they considered historic, of working with one another while respecting diversity. That gave us the certainty that the same had to be done elsewhere on the planet. In Africa, certainly—but why not in the Middle East and even in Eastern Europe? The only condition is that the Forum principles must be respected and that preparation be made without struggles to take power.

That could happen because Social Forums are promoted in ways that are completely different from those used by the organisers of other traditional forums—such as the company responsible for the World Economic Forum in Davos to which the World Social Forum is a counterpoint.

In the case of Davos, the decision to hold regional or national economic forums in one country or another is taken from the top down according to the Forum’s interests, priorities, market studies and funds available to be applied to that end. Meanwhile, Social Forums are held regionally, nationally or locally only where civil society organisations

decide to do so, from the bottom up. In order to actually take place, they depend more than anything on there being a sufficiently solid and democratic social fabric and on there being social movements and organisations engaged in the struggle against neo-liberalism. It is these organisations that will do the fund-raising necessary to hold the Forum, rather than requesting funding from some central source controlled by the World Social Forum organisers. They thus make a quality jump in their inter-relationships and in their own ways of doing things, especially if they realise that they are providing a service to civil society the world over.

However, only a limited number of world encounters can be held among ‘delegates’ from organisations. In a text sent to the organisers of the Mallorca Local Social Forum, to serve as a prologue to a publication in preparation for their third forum, I wrote:

There is no way that the world encounters, or even the continental or national ones, can manage to bring together physically, even once a year, all the people engaged in the various kinds of struggles at each of those levels. Organisations can only send a small number of delegates or representatives to those forums—and these will be privileged over their other members. That kind of limitation is even greater in encounters at the world level. The further someone is from the meeting place, the less likely that he or she can take part.

At the same time, perverse trends can arise, as pointed out by *Messages* magazine [15]: ‘Isn’t there a particular risk of “professional” Social Forum participants emerging and hopping from one continent to another?’ I answered that, ‘True, not many people could get to the large forums; only those who can travel and who can pay to do so will.’ For that reason, in the text sent to the Mallorca organisers, I also noted:

This has adverse effects in the medium-term. One of the risks is that the delegates and representatives are always the same people: the leaders of the participating organisations. Those who network at forums will always have to meet again in order to evaluate and intensify whatever they have embarked on. They could do so at other meetings, but the forums always offer a good occasion. In that way they could become rather like ‘clubs’ of leaders that meet periodically. Meanwhile, the other members of their organisations, who have no opportunity to live the Forum experience, could continue with their old political practices,

divided by mutual prejudices and by competition among organisations for hegemony; that could even prevent proposals made at forums from ever being accepted at the other levels in the organisations.

So here is another perverse trend: the formation, at the forums, of a mass of participants below the members of the 'club' of leaders: the latter speak while the former listen. There is very possibly no way of preventing such hierarchies, just as there is no way of overcoming the limitation on numbers.

The world meetings thus have their limits. However, holding them yields other kinds of results: they mobilise large numbers of people in the places where they are held. This has happened three times in Brazil and once in India, influencing the political struggles underway in those countries or regions.

As I said to *Messages* magazine [15], in India, 'Of the more than 75,000 participants expected, only 10,000 are not Indian. In Brazil, 90 per cent of the participants came from Brazil or neighbouring countries.'

While the organisations of the Forum's host country (or region) always participate on a large scale, the number of people affected is greater still. It increases almost geometrically through those organisations' activities in their own country or region. This is highlighted by the following description in the Brazilian Mobilisation Commission primer for WSF 2005:

The poorest and most excluded sectors of the population were a strong presence at the WSF in India. That participation was no accident, but the result of a vigorous mobilisation process. Each Indian state organised its own forum, and pursued its own discussions. 'The bus-loads of militants that set out to the WSF were only a small portion of the people who by then had discussed the forum in their states,' reports doctor and political activist Amit Sen Gupta, one of the members of the India Organising Committee of the fourth World Social Forum. Of the 70,000 Indians who took part in WSF, 20,000 had already attended local and state events.

When the Forum closed, these people returned to their states for further discussions. 'The greatest challenge after Mumbai is to continue the WSF process in each region of India'. The Indians are sustaining that dynamic in preparation for an India Social Forum to be held towards the end of 2005.

In states where no local forums had taken place, *jatha* caravans of political and cultural activists were organised to spread news of WSF through outlying areas. ‘Newspapers, video and radio are all important. But the best communications media is human presence,’ believes Amit.

I told the e-zine *RETS* [40], in an interview just before the 2004 Forum in Mumbai:

We have seen a lot of mobilisation among the Indian participants. There is the movement of dalits who are organising four marches from all over the country to arrive in Mumbai during the Forum.

In the text sent to Mallorca I said:

To these participants from the host country or its neighbours, the Forum will always play the important role of enabling them to count people, organisations and struggles in other countries and other continents, and to enjoy the experience of mutual learning, inter-change and inter-linking in diversity. That is a very valuable outcome.

In that light, when *Nouveaux Regards* magazine [14], asked me whether ‘even though the Charter of Principles stipulates that the Social Forums should not be a place for decision-making, can the World Social Forum be a facilitator for the social movement in the host country?’ My answer had to be a whole-hearted ‘Yes!’

*b) The more Social Forums, the firmer the roots*

The endeavour to root the process by way of local Social Forums also gives the social grassroots the opportunity—autonomously and therefore more lastingly, independent of the political will of ‘leaders’—to experience the ‘political culture’ proposed by the Forum.

In fact, after the second World Social Forum, the number of undertakings calling themselves Local Social Forums multiplied rapidly, not just at the local level, but nationally too. That resulted from the encouragement given by the Brazilian Organising Committee in the Information Note issued after the first Porto Alegre Forum (see Chapter 1:3, ‘Onward, necessarily to the world level’) and by the International Council when it suggested that thematic forums should also be organised. Some of the organisations on the Council—ATTAC, in France, for instance—went as far as to encourage their own followers to call such forums.<sup>2</sup> In an expanding movement that continues to this day, there is news every day of more forums being organised.

However, there is also information of one or more forums failing to abide by the Charter of Principles, especially with regard to the requirement that they be ‘open spaces’. Not all those interested in taking part in these forums managed—even when they discovered that such forums were being organised—to break through the wall that isolated the organisers, who were then accused of being sectarian or manipulative. In such cases, it was clear that specific groups or political parties had set out to ‘take over’ this new means for mobilisation that had appeared, before the others did so.

In other cases, groups that had formed to set up the forums started calling themselves ‘forums’, disregarding the semantic distinction of calling just the events forums and themselves the ‘organisers’. As a result, these organisers’ spokespeople or representatives began to speak on behalf of ‘their’ forums—which also breached the Charter of Principles. This happened, for example, when the organisers of different forums met to exchange experiences and to liaison with each other. Most of the participants in those meetings introduced themselves as the ‘Social Forum’ of somewhere or the other, as if they represented not the organising committee but a new organisation that had come into being, along the lines of the old organisational systems, of which they were the—naturally self-styled—representatives. That tendency was even observed at International Council meetings, where national forums were presented as if they were organisations, claiming the right to have representatives on the Council. However, whenever such situations arose, they were corrected by the other Council members.

Many of those forums ended with ‘final declarations’, in an open contradiction of the fundamental principle of the Charter that rejects such a practice. Others were organised in keeping with the tradition of holding forums, meetings, assemblies and so on with programmes set exclusively by their organisers, rather like a series of seminars, with no provision made for ‘self-organised’ activities. In certain cases—like the European Social Forum in Florence—this was not done explicitly, but when venues were being reserved, by giving less attention to the self-organised activities, which were considered ‘secondary’. In assigning venues and times for activities, for example, greater importance was given to those where prominent political leaders would be present. Whatever support had to be given to self-organised activities by the participants the exercise was regarded simply as the price to be paid for the ideas of those who had organised the World Social Forum.<sup>3</sup>

In an article for the book *FSE 2003* [6], I remarked that:

It is necessary for these local forums to respect the World Social Forum's Charter of Principles in its entirety. It really is the secret of the Forum's success, its trump card in moving towards the new political culture we are trying to build. If these forums turn into little local organisations with leaders and with things to say as forums, they will end up destroying themselves.

The local forums have enormous potential, however. In that respect, I completed my suggestions in the text for Mallorca as follows:

It is by way of them (local forums) that the opportunity to experience the Forum dynamics can be extended to more people because at the local level the distances to be overcome in getting people together are shorter. Increasing numbers of local forums open up the possibility of more people and organisations 'learning' from the new—horizontal, plural and autonomous—ways of engaging in political action that the World Social Forum proposes.

They have another potential that is directly connected with the process approach increasingly being worked on for organising World Social Forums. That process goes far beyond putting on one Forum after another or increasing the number of regional and national forums. The intention is that the inter-connections fostered by the Social Forums should start to take shape before each event and not be severed afterwards.

As an occasion for the inter-personal encounters that give human content to social networks, the forums figure as more intense moments in mounting inter-linked organisations, as frameworks for a progression. More networks, and more permanent ones, can be brought into being, even independently of the proceedings of the Forum events.

Now, at the local level, it is evidently easier to build permanent networks linking their participants. The events can jump-start joint endeavours and contacts that will continue of their own accord. The people and organisations are already closer to one another; they can see each other more often and more quickly. It's even possible to set up permanent common spaces for information and for launching joint undertakings—the organisers of some local forums are already doing this. Such spaces—always respecting diversity, plurality and autonomy—make it easier to foster continuity in taking joint action, exchanging

experiences and providing mutual aid and support. The Forum events thus serve to consolidate existing alliances and enable new battlefronts to be opened up.

This is an avenue that can really lead to the construction of an inter-connected civil society, by helping to weave a thick social fabric from the bottom up. It is possible to imagine the strength that planetary civil society could gain if, in each country, there were an increasing number of local Social Forums—connected with the national, regional and world forums in terms of subject matter and proposals for action.

The same perspective led me to make the following suggestion for the Brazilian Mobilisation Committee primer for WSF 2005:

The way to root the World Social Forum process, which is one of the tasks that can be undertaken by the pro-WSF Committees, is to organise local Social Forums in all the towns (or neighbourhoods of towns) where it is possible. Mobilising for WSF is important by virtue of the new experience that this participation provides—but it is absolutely indispensable that the number of local Social Forums increases so that more and more people can enjoy that experience.

It is an experience that in fact corresponds to a new way of engaging in political action at the local level and in relationships with other levels.

The organising committee of a local Social Forum is thus not the ‘owner’ of the Forum. By setting up the Forum, it simply provides a service to the people and organisations of its town or neighbourhood. In order to ensure that it is ‘non-directive’ it is as well to adopt the same methodology as the World Social Forum, so as to make the ‘self-organised activities’ the most important part.

The composition of the committee itself should be as diversified and plural as possible in terms of its members’ political positions, type and area of activity so that its internal workings afford the same experience of respect for diversity and plurality as it will have to ensure in the Forum it is organising.

In this regard, it will be useful also to adopt the consensus decision rule used by the organisers of the World Social Forum. It is also good to remember that the local Social Forums are not deliberative. Therefore, they do not adopt final documents or declarations.

The local Social Forums can have a power of summons just like the World Social Forum and can restore faith in the utopia for far more people than those able to travel to a larger Forum.

In a talk in the town of Sabadel, Catalonia [41], I said:

WSF, which started from the bottom up, on a world scale—but based on the day-to-day struggles of societies—is now starting to become a concrete reality at the local scale, in the local Social Forums, through which experimentation with new ways of doing things, based on respect for diversity and on horizontal relations, can be made to take root in society itself.

In the 2004 *Agenda Latino-Americana* I wrote: ‘We are all invited to spread this network of hope throughout the world by organising local Social Forums everywhere with the World Social Forum’s Charter of Principles in hand.’

**4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:  
AFTER 2005, WILL THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM  
BE HELD IN PORTO ALEGRE AGAIN?**

As the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers’ Party, PT) lost the 2004 mayoral elections in Porto Alegre after governing there for 16 years, the question that arose in Brazil and elsewhere was: would the World Social Forum no longer be held in that city? Such a decision would obviously run counter to its organisers’ whole discourse: the Forum is a civil society initiative for civil society, and thus independent of governments and parties.

However, that question had to be answered clearly, because certain developments in the last few days before those elections quickly raised doubts.

Opinion polls indicated the possibility that the PT candidate to the city government, now in the second round of voting, might lose the election—which in fact happened. The state government had been passed on to another party two years earlier. Some members of the Brazilian Organising Committee then felt, practically on the eve of the election, that they should come out in favour of the PT candidate. After insufficient discussion, they drafted a note for that purpose, which was to be signed by whoever wanted to and issued in a personal capacity or by their organisations. The proposed text, which signalled the possibility of the Forum’s leaving Porto Alegre if the PT lost the mayoralship was circulated among the Committee members, but still there was not much discussion, because it had to be a quick decision. The note was then issued.

However, as it was signed by people who also described themselves as members of the Forum Organising Committee, the pronouncement lent itself to ambiguities.

In Porto Alegre and throughout Brazil, the press hostile to both the Forum and the PT candidate immediately exploited that declaration because in practice it negated the Forum's claim to be independent of political parties. Other PT governments already elected in other towns had even offered to host the 2005 Forum... Immediately after the election—and not before, to avert the risk of a further fallout from the misunderstanding—the Council Secretariat and the Organising Committee issued an official note of clarification to dispel all doubts.

That episode, which naturally caused disagreement within the Secretariat, was useful for re-discussing the way decisions were being taken. Indeed, that declaration had been issued in line with the old ways of conducting political procedures: quick decisions at the end of a meeting, and *fait accompli*. The consensus decision-making rule—there was certainly no consensus on making that statement—then served the political struggle: the power of veto was used in deciding how to respond to the situation that had been created. Mutual trust suffered, but we managed to get over the episode thanks to the previous five years of cumulative collective effort (see Chapters 1:4, 'The difficult consensus rule'; and 3:5, 'Building unity among the organisers').

The note issued read as follows:

*'Explanation note: WSF 2005 will take place in Porto Alegre* The World Social Forum (WSF) International Council Secretariat and the fifth edition Organising Committee have reassured: the next meeting of the people who struggle for a new world—and practice this construction—will take place in Porto Alegre, from January 26 to 31 2005. Independence is a feature that WSF has been able to consolidate, and it is also one of the reasons why it is successful. After only four years since its first edition in Porto Alegre—the Social Forums are already a political innovation which have spread throughout the world. Besides the international meetings, there are continental, thematic, national, regional and local Forums. Hundreds of thousands of people are attracted to these events, precisely because there is no political instrumentalisation within them. Multiple campaigns, struggles, projects and dreams of a new possible society are shared at these events—and none of them is more important than the other. From 2005 on, a new

methodology will encourage convergences and common actions even more, but the bond will always be voluntary. This new horizon to political action—which reassures the right of each society to build its future—is in contrast to the weariness of traditional institutions, which are seen more and more as not very democratic, submitted to financial markets and impervious to the citizens' opinions.

The accomplishment of three World Social Forums in Porto Alegre became possible through the fact that the city became a concrete reference for the new world. In decades, the social struggles set up a society that is critical, organised, aware of its rights and willing to conquer them. Besides, WSF was warmly welcome by the population and enjoyed the enthusiasm and support of the town's City Hall and state government.

The election of a different government does not erase this tradition of struggles, nor changes the relationship between the World Social Forum and Porto Alegre. We hope that the ones who were elected maintain their commitments. When Porto Alegre was chosen to receive WSF 2005, almost two years ago, the International Council reassured their fraternal relationship with the capital of Rio Grande do Sul State, where WSF was born. The place where forthcoming editions will take place will also be decided—always without any interference from political parties or government—by the International Council, which will meet next January in Porto Alegre. One of its permanent aims is to turn WSF into a worldwide event and it has already been decided that the meeting in 2007 will take place in an African country. In less than three months, the great world meeting of alternatives will be together again, along the Guaíba River.

*São Paulo, 3 November 2004  
WSF International Office  
Brazilian Organising Committee*

## **5. THE TEMPTATION OF A FINAL DOCUMENT**

Earlier in the book I have explained the Forum's refusal to issue a final document as per its Charter of Principles. Nonetheless, given the importance of this choice, it is worth dwelling on the issue and offering some examples of the attempts made to circumvent one of the most important provisions of the Charter.

In fact, the whole logic of the Forum would collapse if its encounters end with documents or declarations in the name of its participants.

This is what makes the World Social Forum different from any other meeting, assembly or even forum that is held. The organisers of such gatherings generally regard a conclusion, a final summing up, as an absolutely indispensable end product of the activity they have arranged, for the good reason that it is one way of communicating more broadly what was discussed.

The no-final-document principle is also the one that most intrigues the media. For those out to undermine the Forum in the eyes of public opinion, the absence of a final document is used as an argument to show that it does not lead to anything, is of no use, is completely ineffectual. After the various editions of the Forum, more than a few newspaper headlines said: 'Forum ends without a final document', as if that was a sign that it had failed or that its participants were so divided that they could not even arrive at any overall agreement. That kind of perplexity in the media—or the slanted presentation of this basic rule of the Forum—also stems from the fact that they are unable to identify a 'leader' to be interviewed to say on behalf of the Forum what 'the' Forum intends.

Moreover, it is the same perplexity that the dominant system experiences when it is challenged and is unable to make out who is who, which heads have to roll in order for the resistance and opposition to end. When the powers-that-be are pressured, it is far easier for them to meet with 'representatives' of whoever is opposing their domination. As that system functions like a pyramid, part of its logic is to discuss divergences with the headstones of the divergent pyramids. This makes it possible to arrive at 'agreements' which reduce the pressure, each side giving ground, in order for the domination to continue—provided of course that those 'represented' on either side do not question the decisions taken at the summits of their pyramids. 'Guerrilla tactics'—extended to social struggles—are unsettling because they rest on the 'many-headed' principle. This confounds the dominant powers, which are used to dealing with a single commander, whose arrest or elimination should be enough to disperse the troops.

Also—as already noted—refusal to issue a final document is the guideline of the Charter of Principles that most upsets those people who advocate turning the Forum into a movement. How can a gathering on the scale of the Forum end without a final call, without guidelines to be followed by all who took part? How can the enormous number of people who attended be allowed to go home without being told what kind of action they should

continue to take, without being given a direction, or a rallying cry on what they ought to be doing? Meanwhile, why resist the media's insistence and abstain from saying that we are strong and that we feel strong? Why not blazon our plans for mobilising to combat neo-liberalism and domination by capital, and all that was discussed, criticised, denounced and proposed at the Forum as alternatives to them?

Those in fact were the origins and motivations for the 'assembly of social movements', which issued its first 'call to action' at the end of the first Forum in Porto Alegre (see Chapter 3:6, 'Charter of Principles—doubts and issues') and has been re-issuing 'calls' at each of the Forum's world or regional editions.<sup>4</sup> In line with the traditional practice at large and small gatherings of militants, some leaders of major organisations present at the Forum considered it fundamental to issue a final call to crown the Forum's enormous success. At that time there was no Charter of Principles, which later came to bar that possibility. What finally prevailed, however, were the recommendations of the organisers, who had proposed holding that first Forum without its having any deliberative role.<sup>5</sup>

The Charter of Principles does not, in fact, bar 'final documents'—in the plural—from being issued. That is, it encourages all participants in the Forum to propose alternatives, concrete action and new initiatives that result from the mutual arrangements built at the Forum. It even goes as far as to require that the Forum organisers publicise these proposals as widely as possible. Thus, instead of 'a' final document, the Forum's final product, long awaited by the media, is a number of final documents. Their variety and scope express far better than any single document, which would necessarily be reductive and simplistic, what the Forum was and what is intended to be done—not by 'the' Forum, but by its participants.

The concern among some organisations to see the Forum end with a single final document was evident at the Mumbai Forum. The members of the 'assembly of social movements' had drafted a call for worldwide action against the Iraq war on the first anniversary of the North American invasion and managed to have it read at the Forum's closing session. As a result of that initiative—which was reported by a major news agency—the WSF International Council meeting held in the days that followed devoted considerable effort to discussing the nature of these closing sessions. It was becoming necessary to prevent a specific proposal gaining prominence at these sessions, to the detriment of all the others—one sure way to bring the logic of the struggle for hegemony into the Forum, with all the disaggregation that results from it. It was

also becoming necessary to reassert that none of the organisations present in the Forum was entitled, in breach of the Charter of Principles, to take on functions that no one had granted it—as, for instance, the ‘authorised decision-making body in the WSF’ mentioned in the article that was published.

What is important in the account of this episode is that it highlights a twisted mechanism in communication with the press: journalists less well informed about the nature of the Forum give ear to versions that undermine its proposals and contribute to its changing its very nature and ceasing to play its role. From the outset, the article’s headline attributed non-existent characteristics to WSF 2004—‘*Iraque: o FSM convoca para uma manifestação no dia 20 de março, no mundo inteiro*’ (Iraq: The WSF calls for worldwide demonstrations on 20 March); that is, it was the Forum as a body, or that body’s direction, that was setting down guidelines for its ‘militants’. Three paragraphs were significant:

The assembly of social movements, the decision-making body of the World Social Forum (WSF), put out a call this Wednesday during the closing ceremony of the Mumbai Forum for demonstrations ‘in all countries’ on 20 March, the anniversary of the outbreak of war in Iraq.

‘The assembly decided to answer the call from American pacifists and to organise major demonstrations on 20 March all over the world,’ declared Vittorio Agnoletto, responsible for the Genoa Forum (Italy) and member of the WSF International Council. [...]

The Assembly of social movements is the authorised decision-making body of WSF, which does not draft any final declaration.

In fact, the World Social Forum operates on a different principle. It is the principle of networks based on the co-responsibility, autonomy and freedom of their members. It is a principle consistent with the structure of the radically democratic society we want. It is also the most effective means of combating domination: networks are uncontrollable; their members appear and reappear everywhere.

## **6. HISTORY OF THE WSF INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL— SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND FUNCTION**

The history of the Council is a history of endless questing for identity and function within the WSF process. The search is far from over. Its members very often come away from the meetings dissatisfied. The

various stages in the Council's history have been marked by greater or lesser difficulties,<sup>7</sup> but it has increasingly firm status as a body at the service of the process as a whole. The non-directiveness, horizontality, democracy and acceptance of diversity which are proper to the Forum process demand a permanent effort to review practices and methods. Many Council members' political history has been lived within a culture of party politics, of which the struggle for hegemony forms part. It is no easy task to go beyond the mutual mistrust and rivalries created by that culture to a climate of effective cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

Difficulties of this kind have been experienced—and still are today (see the information on holding Forums in Porto Alegre, in Chapter 4:3)—by the Brazilian Organising Committee over five years of uninterrupted work (see Chapter 3:5, 'Building unity among the organisers'). The Committee comprises representatives from only eight organisations and practically the same 12 or 15 people, who meet regularly and work together to carry out many of the Committee's tasks.<sup>9</sup> You can well imagine how such rearrangements are experienced on the International Council, with over 100 people, who only meet a few times a year and whose experiences may be of a different kind of dynamic in their home organisations. Every now and again, at Council meetings, one member or the other rebukes the rest: 'Doing things that way, we're hardly likely to build a new world'.

One of the most demanding operating rules is that decisions are to be taken by consensus. Adopted by the Council on the basis of the Brazilian Organising Committee's experience (see Chapter 1:4, 'The difficult consensus rule'), it was accepted almost for the lack of an acceptable alternative.<sup>10</sup> As a part of the way in which things are done in the Forum, however, reaching a consensus has proved to be the best way of making appropriate decisions. Reaching a consensus very often involves lengthy discussions, which do not always lead to a conclusion. The Council has gone through many actual situations of this kind; for instance, when it decided at its meeting in January 2003 that the 2004 World Social Forum would be held in India. These constitute experiences in relationships that go beyond what is usually considered the most democratic rule: where the majority will, as expressed by voting, prevails. For this very reason, the possibility of deciding by vote is brought up again and again.

The Council also experiences difficulties arising from the recurrent tendency to turn it into a steering body of a world movement against neo-liberalism. Time and time again, the proposal to elect a committee

to steer or coordinate its work has been brought before Council meetings. The main argument is always that a smaller committee can meet more quickly and reach decisions more easily. Its members, however, would soon tend to become coordinators of the Forum, contrary to one of the Charter's basic principles: the refusal to have leaders, spokespeople or representatives. As the discussion has never led to a consensual agreement, it is permanently postponed. This, however, is one strong tentacle from the old world that persists in invading the World Social Forum space.

The World Social Forum's International Council was set up with no precise rules of representation, and its composition is skewed both in terms of countries and regions and of fields of political action. Aware of this and of the need to expand the process all over the world and to all sectors, its members are seeking to expand it little by little. That expansion, however, cannot be limitless, because that would make it a lot more difficult to meet and to decide satisfactorily. It was therefore decided that only international organisations would be able to join as new members, but even that criterion has proved problematic. After two years during which applications to join the Council remained suspended, it decided at a meeting held in April 2004 in Passignano, Italy, to admit new members.<sup>11</sup> The question of expanding it—the methods and criteria—is still being discussed.

To these difficulties are added those arising from the working of the meetings themselves—given the large number of Council members—and from the different sensitivities among them. At the Barcelona meeting,<sup>12</sup> the Council decided to set up some working groups on specific subjects, among which was a group to prepare the procedural rules for Council meetings.<sup>13</sup> That meeting also decided that the Brazilian Organising Committee would begin to function as the Secretariat to the World Social Forum.

The working group on internal rules drew up a first draft, which was discussed at the following meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. On the basis of the suggestions made at that meeting, the group revised the draft and even conducted an Internet consultation, which was, however, inconclusive. No decision was reached either at the next meeting in Florence, or at the one in Porto Alegre on the days preceding the 2003 World Social Forum. The subject entered the agenda for the meeting to be held six months later in Miami,<sup>14</sup> with all the Council members intending firmly to bring that process to a conclusion.

At that meeting, however, the whole discussion took a new direction. The Council adopted a proposal by the Internal Rules Working Group to reduce its regulations to the indispensable minimum, so as to avoid straight jacketing and bureaucratising the Council's workings. It was felt that any rigidity in a body of such special importance to expanding and rooting the process would be counter-productive, given that the Council itself is an experiment in permanent invention and renovation.

However, the working group's draft that was adopted there included one innovation: all Council members should be grouped into six commissions—each member could participate in more than one—that would address the various issues raised in the work the Council was to do.<sup>15</sup> Those working arrangements have proven far more effective, making it unnecessary to call a large number of extraordinary Council meetings. Its various commissions—which are far larger than the working groups set up in Barcelona—meet, as necessary and whenever possible, on the issues assigned to them.

Some of them are still seeking ways to work and consolidate, while others are intensely active—especially the Methodology and Content and Themes groups, which joined hands to prepare for the 2004 and 2005 Forums. Many Council members who are not on these commissions are still interested in attending their meetings—which are always open to all—as occurred in Porto Alegre in a meeting called to fine-tune even more closely the preparations for WSF 2005.<sup>16</sup> More than 80 people took part, including members of the Council and of the Brazilian Organising Committee's working groups.

This is the history of the International Council.

## 7. DAVOS—PORTO ALEGRE

Now, one emblematic moment in the activities of the “big players” to show their endeavours was the World Economic Forum, a meeting that has been held every year for more than 30 years at a luxury ski resort in Davos, Switzerland. That meeting is the initiative of a large successful events agency, which offered to set up a framework where the world's “major league” could meet more informally, without constituting a world inter-governmental organisation, less ponderous than meetings of the United Nations or other official bodies, a free space which could also be used to advantage to do good business. As the costs were high, that company charged a sizeable registration fee from people wanting to hear the guest personalities speak. In short, it was a grand event and

a business opportunity, which led to other opportunities and the possibility of expanding and improving the capital's domination of the world by way of understandings among those who control capital, with the added advantage of giving prestige to whoever attended the meeting.

Davos also attracted a large number of journalists whom it afforded the chance to interview people that it sometimes took them months of trying to meet. With all of that, being completely different from the G-7 meetings where the governments of the wealthy countries meet to take joint decisions, the World Economic Forum took on the nature of a summit of world capitalism, as if that was where the world's future was decided. Despite being just a free space, the media presentation was: "now look at what the owners of the world are deciding for us". The telling detail was that non-governmental organisations and social movements were also always invited, among other things to legitimate the gathering and allow its organisers to say: "Look, we also listen to what the masses have to say."

All this led a Brazilian to the idea of holding a similar event, but with people whose concern was to centre decisions about the world on the human person and not on the needs of capital, that is, a World Social Forum. This would be directed to formulating proposals and should bring together all those participating in the process of demonstrations against domination by capital—today called neo-liberalism. It would be a meeting similar in nature to Davos, that is, non-deliberative, a gathering of people interested in discussing the world with an alternative view. What would the world be like if it was not dominated by capital, by financial capital, and by that system of great hegemonic powers?

This passage is from a talk I gave at the University of Brasília in 2002 [42], describing where the idea of setting up the World Social Forum had come from in greater detail than in my article 'World Social Forum origins and aims (Annex 2).

In 2002, the Brazilian magazine *Família Cristã* [43], asked me: 'President Alejandro Toledo of Peru, who took part in the Economic Forum, declared that next year there should be a dialogue between the two Forums. Do you think that is possible?' I replied:

They are two different undertakings with different aims. We can't be deciding the world's future here while they do so over there, and let's see if we can come to a common agreement, who is going to give ground on

one side and who on the other. Our role is not deliberative. The Forum's Organising Committee is just a facilitator; it does not lead or direct the process. Our Charter of Principles even stipulates that no one can speak on behalf of the Forum. One or the other of the organisations that participate in our Forum can debate with organisations that participate in the other Forum, but there do not exist two bodies, two world summits, one social and the other economic, that are going to meet up. That is unthinkable.

Also in 2002, in an article for *Faim et Développement* magazine [32], I said:

The organisers of the Davos Forum very often try to lead us to have a relationship with them where the Social Forum would enter into negotiations. On the one hand, they are trying to renew their legitimacy, and on the other it would be a way to turn our initiative to their advantage. Neither the Economic Forum nor the Social Forum has legitimacy to negotiate.

Once again, in 2004, the Internet publication *Los Verdes de Andalucía* [22], put the question to me: 'What is the (WSF's) link with Davos?' I answered:

There is no link. A number of times they have tried to set up a dialogue. But it is impossible. They hold their meeting; we hold ours. They try to maintain the single right-thinking in the world, according to which everything is solved by the market; we try to tell the world that is not how things are, that theirs is a wrong turning. We shall see who wins over the hearts and minds.

Everyone remembers the Porto Alegre–Davos debate that took place by teleconference on 28 January 2001, during the first Forum. From the outset, the organisers of that debate faced one difficulty: who was going to represent either side? On the Davos side, the information that reached us was that there would be no 'representatives' of that Forum, but rather participants who were willing to go to an Evangelical church, which had offered its premises for a teleconference that some journalists had taken the initiative of setting up. On the Porto Alegre side, it was the organisers of the debate, jointly with those journalists, who chose the people who would take part in the debate, according to the criteria that they considered best and with no interference from the

Forum's Organising Committee—which would be attended by just under 100 privileged souls, in a room at the Catholic University where the Forum was being held.

At that time the Charter of Principles did not exist. It would have prevented anyone from debating with Davos on behalf of the Forum. But the experience led to such 'debates' never happening again, despite their organisers' entreaties.

During the first Forum an indirect dialogue also took place. The French newspaper *Libération* printed a double article on two facing pages describing the day of a participant—Jean-Marie Messier (J2M, as he was called), CEO of the multinational Vivendi—in Davos, and the day of an organiser—me—in Porto Alegre.<sup>17</sup> The article described how J2M in Davos between the Friday when he arrived from Paris in a small jet and the Tuesday when he left for New York, had given a talk and made several good business deals.<sup>18</sup> From the description of my day it could be learnt how we organisers rushed around solving problems, surprised by the enormous influx of participants at that first Forum...

*Libération* repeated an operation of the same kind during the Mumbai Forum, interviewing me in India and Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman of the Economic Forum, in Davos.<sup>19</sup> This time, however, the journalists put a series of questions to the two of us, and our answers were published side by side.

One of the questions, of course, was about the possibility of a dialogue between the two Forums. My answer was a direct 'No', for the same reasons as I had given in the other interviews mentioned earlier: 'The issue that might arise is whether to hold conversations with the people who are going to Davos, but not with the organisers of that event, which is just business.' Schwab, for his part, judiciously said that: 'The issue was not so much to know whether a dialogue should be institutionalised between the two Forums, but rather to set up true dialogue among the various sectors of society,' given that no one, no matter how powerful, could meet the challenges of our world single-handed.

The fact is that there are many initiatives seeking to foster such dialogues. However, by the very nature of the two Forums, they are unlikely to succeed in bringing Porto Alegre to dialogue with Davos.

## **8. ALL IN GOOD TIME**

Question: Today, the ideas you propose have become more and more popular. Does that prove that a change is really happening?

Answer: Who doesn't want a different world? Who isn't afraid of the wave of terrorism that has triggered the response from a certain number of governments to terrorist threats which are intensifying as an effect of that response? Who could agree with the system of targeted assassinations scheduled by certain governments? If people come to realise that another world is possible, necessary and urgent, then we are on the road to change. But that road is a long one.

Question: What does the Forum see as the greatest danger lying in wait for us in the next few years?

Answer: The fear that immobilises, the lack of hope that a new world is possible.

Question: If you had to send a message of hope, what message would you send?

Answer: Above all, keep up your hope and join in wherever you can take action, at your own level and with whatever means are available to you. Remember to link what you are doing as much as you can with others and try to bring more and more people to want to engage in the struggle for change' (interview in the French magazine *Clark* [4]).

While I was in India taking part in the fourth World Social Forum, the São Paulo magazine *Dr!* [38], asked me: 'What most encourages you about an event like this?' I answered: 'I think its characteristic cheerfulness. That's a sign that hope really has not died. And that confirms the French poet Peguy, who said: 'Hope, which amazes even God, is a little girl with the air of being nothing at all, but who is immortal.'

## NOTES

1. The eleven 'thematic terrains' were baptised as follows:
  - Assuring and defending the earth and people's common goods—as alternative to commodification and transnational control
  - Arts and creation: weaving and building people's resistance cultures
  - Communication: counter-hegemonic practices, rights and alternatives
  - Defending diversity, plurality and identities
  - Human rights and dignity for a just and egalitarian world
  - Sovereign economies for and of the people—against neo-liberal capitalism
  - Ethics, cosmovisions and spiritualities—resistances and challenges for a new world
  - Social struggles and democratic alternatives—against neo-liberal domination
  - Peace, demilitarisation and struggle against war, free trade and debt

- Autonomous thought, re-appropriation and socialisation of knowledge and technologies
- Towards construction of international democratic order and people's integration

They were cross-cut by five 'transversal themes':

- Social emancipation and political dimensions of struggles
- Struggle against patriarchal capitalism
- Struggle against racism and other types of exclusion based on ancestry
- Gender
- Diversities

2. ATTAC even put out a publication with the title *Forums Sociaux Locaux: Mode d'Emploi*.
3. The tendency to set up pyramids of power and influence within forums even led one national forum to elect one of its participants as its 'President'...
4. Bernard Cassen's book, *Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre*, gives the full text of these various calls.
5. See the article 'World Social Forum—origins and objectives', in Annex 2.
6. At the Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador, from 25 to 30 July 2004, I took part in a panel debate on the Forum's diversity. One of the people present reported that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples was discussing its 'final document', which was now 60 pages long in its efforts to contemplate all the variety of its participants' situations and aspirations.
7. One of these difficulties has to do with the doubts regularly raised about the Brazilian Organising Committee's 'real intentions' when it prepares Council meetings. The prevailing assumption is that this Committee—today the WSF Secretariat—wants to retain power over the process. Misunderstandings are caused, which are only surmounted because the Secretariat is seen by many Council members as the only body really able to ensure continuity in giving concrete form to the organisers' original insights.
8. On such changes, see the account of the experience of a workshop titled 'Getting over logics of rivalry and power' at the 2003 World Social Forum (Chapter 3:9, 'Towards new ways of doing things'). See also Chapter 3:5, 'Building unity among the organisers'.
9. These difficulties naturally tended to reappear as the number of members of the Brazilian Committee grew in preparing for the 2005 Forum. Given the enormous scale of the task of organising the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, the Committee was expanded to take in 22 organisations. The 14 new Committee members are Brazilian organisations that form part of international organisations with a seat on the Forum's International Council.
10. Consensus decision-making is entirely different from the habitual rule of deciding by vote. In the latter situation, the ability to make alliances or marshal voters, as well as familiarity with procedural rules and speed in applying them, come to mean that decisions may be made that would be unacceptable on a more careful analysis of the issues. Meanwhile, when decisions are made by consensus a single participant can block the whole discussion by using the power of veto, and those with most strength do tend to use that power. However, for such power to be used without detriment to continuing discussions there must be transparency and a willingness to accept decisions, although disagreeing with them, if they can be considered better from an overall point of view.

100 TOWARDS A NEW POLITICS

11. Today it comprises 131 organisations.
12. The Council met in Barcelona from 28 to 30 April 2002.
13. That meeting set up three working groups: Communication, Internal rules and criteria for participation in the IC, and Methodology and Themes.
14. The Council met in Bangkok from 13 to 15 August 2002; in Florence on 11 and 12 November 2002; the sixth Council meeting, held in Porto Alegre, took place on 21 and 22 January 2003; and the Miami meeting was held from 23 to 26 June 2003.
15. The Council Commissions set up at its Miami meeting were: Strategy, Content, Methodology, Expansion, Communication and Finance.
16. In Porto Alegre, the Methodology and Content and Themes Commissions met from 13 to 15 November 2004.
17. The articles in *Libération* were published on 1 February 2001.
18. By a quirk of fate, J2M, who later came to be known as J4M (*Jean-Marie Messier Maître du Monde*—Jean Marie Messier, Lord of the World...), was brought down resoundingly from his pedestal in 2003 for mismanaging the businesses he headed.
19. The interviews by *Libération* newspaper were published on 21 January 2004.

# *Annexures*



# 1

## *Annexe*

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### **Notes for a Debate on the World Social Forum**

These Notes written in March 2003 centre on the discussion, 'World Social Forum: a space or a movement?' This text was circulated widely, particularly among the organisers of the Forum and among the members of the WSF International Council, and was published in several countries.<sup>1</sup> The issue it addresses was even made the subject of a seminar organised by the Finnish Network Institute for Global Democratisation (NIGD), at the Mumbai Forum in 2004.<sup>2</sup> Because of the importance of the subjects it deals with, it is presented first among the articles included as annexes to this book—the rest appear in chronological order as they were published. Most of the issues it addresses are revisited in the body of this book. It considers the main doubts hanging over the Forum's future.<sup>3</sup>

The success of the World Social Forum 2003 in Porto Alegre and its process of globalisation throughout 2002 brought up many questions about its continuity. Many valuations have been written, pointing to different directions, and new proposals have been put forward for the organisation of the 2003, 2004 and 2005 events. In fact, the Forum faces a positive crisis, one of growth that demands a deeper look at some of the issues remarked in its Charter of Principles. To avoid the risk of destroying its potentialities, it is imperative that some ambiguities are overcome, before the process moves toward irretrievably crystallised orientations. A timely occasion for this could be the next meeting of the WSF International Council—better prepared and longer than the previous ones—expected in June 2003.

The present text intends to contribute to this debate, approaching three themes that have become fundamental for the continuity of the Forum process:

- The option between a Forum space and a Forum movement;
- The relative importance in Forum events of the activities organised by the participants and of the activities scheduled by the organising committees, and the nature of these two activities;
- The role of the Committees which organise the Forum events.

The first of these questions will be the most conclusive once the adopted option generates different answers for the others. A fourth issue, that should be addressed, is how the Forum should relate itself with political parties. However, in the following notes I consider only the first three themes.

#### **FORUM: SPACE OR MOVEMENT?**

Whether the Forum is to be considered as a space or as a movement has become a basic and preliminary option in this stage of the process. To avoid an answer or to not express it clearly will be the best way to create difficulties.

The Forum's Charter of Principles defines it emphatically as a space. Nevertheless, not everybody thinks and acts as if it was really only a space, or at least as if it should always remain as a space.

Many consider it a space that has something of a movement. To others, it's 'still' only a space. That means, it can and should become an enormous movement, or a 'movement of movements', as some journalists describe it. The resounding success of the manifestations of 15 February against war across the globe—leads the most enthusiastic to consider that this feat was also a result of the Forum, making them even deem it a sheer product of the Forum—encourages still more the desire that the Forum, like all movements, takes up a mobilisation function.

To begin with, movements and spaces are completely different things. Without oversimplifying in a Manichean way, either they are one thing or the other. Nevertheless, one does not exclude the other, that is, they can co-exist. Nor are they opposites, which means that they do not neutralise each other, but rather, they may even be counterparts. But you can't be both things at the same time, not even be a bit of each as this would end up impairing one or the other. Movements and spaces may be

seeking the same general objectives. But each one works in its own way, aiming at different specific objectives.

The actual discussion then turns out to be: would transforming the World Social Forum into a movement, now—or if not now, later as the process advances—be a good strategy to achieve the objective that aggregates all participants, that is, the overcoming of neo-liberalism and the construction of ‘another possible world’? Or, inversely, would it be helpful for us, in order to attain this objective, to be able to count—now and along the development of the process—on spaces like those that are opened by the World Social Forum?

As far as I am concerned, there is no doubt that it is fundamental to ensure at all costs the continuity of the Forum as a space and not yield to the temptation of transforming it now—or even later—into a movement. If we maintain it as a space, it will neither prevent nor hinder the formation and development of several movements. But if we opt for transforming it into a movement, it will inescapably fail to be a space, and all the potentialities inherent to spaces will then be lost.

Furthermore, if we do it, we will be—without any help from those we are fighting against—throwing away a powerful instrument of struggle that we were able to create drawing on the most important political discovery: the power of free horizontal articulation, which explains the success in Porto Alegre, as well as in Seattle and of the 15 February manifestations against the war. And we have to bear in mind that if horizontal social articulation still has so much to contribute for our fight, it will also be necessary in the very process of construction of the world we want.

This conviction is based on the analysis of the advantages of the current character of the Forum as a space as compared to a contingent condition of the Forum as a movement.

### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MOVEMENT AND A SPACE?**

A movement congregates people—its militants, as the militants of a party—who decide to organise themselves to accomplish certain objectives collectively. Its formation and existence entails the definition of strategies to reach these objectives, the formulation of action programmes and the distribution of responsibilities among its members—including those concerning the direction of the movement. The one who assumes this function will lead the militants of the movement, getting them—through authoritarianism or democratic methods, according to

the choice made by the founders of the movement—to be liable for their commitment in the collective action. Its organisational structure is necessarily pyramidal, however democratic the internal process of decision-making and the way used to choose those who will occupy the different levels of management might be. On the other hand, its efficacy will depend on the explicitness and precision of its specific objectives, and therefore, of its own delimitation, in time and space.

A space has no leaders. It is only a place, basically horizontal, just like the earth's surface, despite admitting ups and downs. Its like a square without an owner—if the square has an owner other than collectively it fails to be a square and becomes a private territory. A square is generally an open space that can be visited by all those who find any kind of interest in using it. Its purpose is solely being a square. The more it lasts as a square the better it is for those who avail themselves of what it offers to the realisation of their respective objectives.

On the other hand, even when a square contains trees and small hills, it is always a socially horizontal space. The one who climbs the trees or the hills cannot intend, from high above, to control, either entirely or even partially, the actions of those inside the square. Being considered ridiculous by the others on the square is the least the climber should expect. Should he become insistent or inconvenient, he will end up talking to himself, for the visitors will leave the square—or even come back with 'public authorities' who will make him leave or stop preaching from above, restoring the peace and tranquillity that is typical of public squares.

#### **THE FORUM AS A SPACE ABLE TO INCUBATE MOVEMENTS**

The Forum's Charter of Principles strongly opposes the assignment of any kind of direction or leadership inside it: nobody can speak on behalf of the Forum—there is no sense in speaking on behalf of a space or on behalf of its participants. Everyone—people and organisations—maintain their right to express themselves and act during the Forum and after it according to their convictions, either embracing or not positions or proposals introduced by other participants, but never on behalf of the Forum or the entirety of its participants.

As the squares, the Forum is an open space, as its Charter of Principles also specifies. But it is not a neutral space like public squares. The Forum opens from time to time in different parts of the world—in the events where it takes place—with one specific objective: to allow as

many people, organisations and movements as possible that oppose neo-liberalism to get together freely, listen to each other, learn from the experiences and struggles of others, discuss proposals of action, to become linked in new nets and organisations aiming at overcoming the present process of globalisation dominated by large international corporations and by financial interests. Thus, it is a space created to serve a common objective of all those who converge to the Forum, functioning horizontally as a public square, without leaders or pyramids of power in its interior. All those who come to the Forum are willing to accept these conditions—for this reason, in order to join this ‘square’, one must agree with its Charter of Principles.

In fact the Forum works as a ‘factory of ideas’, or as an incubator from which as many new initiatives as possible aiming at the construction of another world we all consider feasible, necessary and urgent, are expected to emerge. This means that we can expect the birth of many movements, big or small, more or less combative, each one with its specific objectives, to perform their own roles in the same struggle whose development is the primary aim of the square.

As a matter of fact, the biggest potentiality of the Forum space is precisely this: to create movements that amplify the struggle. Conversely, when a movement generates new movements, this happens unwillingly, against the grain, as a result of internal divisions. And that is what would occur if the Forum became a movement.

The objectives of these new initiatives, in their turn, do not have to be all clear and precise, differently from what occurs in the movements. Some are still in a process of generation waiting to be hatched in the incubator, demanding time to mature.

On the other hand, the Forum allows for the exertion of more or less fervour in the common struggle, depending on the phase each one finds oneself engaged in the pursuit, together with all humanity for another world. Conversely, in a movement there is a natural mutual expectation between the participants.

#### **THE ADVANTAGES OF NOT HAVING A ‘FINAL DOCUMENT’**

The Forum’s Charter of Principles reinforces this perspective even more strongly when it deals with the question of final documents. Even if they succeeded in not being oversimplifying or narrow, as is usually the case with final documents, it so happens that the Forum does not have any final documents as a Forum. It is not a matter of

non-commitment to the fight and to the mobilisation needed to face neo-liberalism, as the ones most concerned in transforming the Forum into a movement might interpret it. The fact is that a square does not make 'declarations'. It is clear that those inside it can do this. The participants of the World Social Forum can come up with whatever final declarations they wish—and these are most welcome. But they will never be declarations of the Forum as a Forum. As a common space to all, it does not 'speak'. Or rather, it 'speaks' a lot through its own existence. As more and more people and organisations get together to find ways to overcome neo-liberalism, this is in itself an expressive political fact. It is needless for somebody to speak on behalf of the Forum.

Each and every document or declaration proposed in it will in this way be a manifestation of those—and solely of those—subscribing to it freely, without pressures or controls for the positions adopted. That is why the Forum's Charter sets forth that declarations and proposals cannot be voted or acclaimed by the participants of the Forum as manifestations of the views of all the 'visitors' of the 'square'. In fact, this would lead many to leave the Forum space, for not accepting or not agreeing with leaders who intend to conduct them from the top of ridiculous hills and trees.

This option adopted in the Forum was, by the way, easily grasped by a large number of participants in its last edition in Porto Alegre, who contributed to the 'panel' with 'proposals for action adopted during the 2003 Forum'. In addition to the fact that this 'panel' enabled everyone to express himself or herself, the final proposals and declarations brought—or sent later—clearly depict the richness and the diversity of the engagement of the participants. The proposals can be found on the Forum's web page, but it was not possible this year to show everything that its participants decided to do because the 'panel', as an innovation introduced in this edition, was poorly publicised.

Nevertheless, its present dissemination through the Internet—indicating how to contact the authors of the proposals—opens other perspectives: through the new contacts and relationships now made possible, it will allow the enlargement of new articulations around the proposals during the Forum. As if the Forum's square had become permanently open, outliving in time and space, lasting longer than the limited five-day event of Porto Alegre. The contacts may be multiplied and lead to more concrete actions, fostered by the unlimited new possibilities opened by

the Internet. The same can happen with the 'panel of proposals' set up in others events.

But the forum space still has other advantages.

### **THE DIVERSITY**

As an open space, the Forum has the possibility of ensuring respect for diversity which would not happen if it were a movement. The principle of respecting diversity, adopted by the WSF Charter, has, in fact, a deeper importance: its grounded on the conviction that one of the fundamental characteristics of the other world—or as we also say the 'other possible worlds'—we intend to build must be respect for diversity.

As a result of this principle, the Forum also allows—without falling in the total neutrality of public squares—each one to maintain his/her own freedom to choose the sector or the level at which to act so as to transform this into reality. This action can either be wide and comprehensive or restricted; it might intend to interfere both in the deeper causes of the problems the world faces, and in the superficial effects of these problems. The vast range of themes discussed during the Forum and the objectives sought in it can thus be very wide, such as is the range of changes required for the construction of a new world. Nobody in the Forum has the power or the right to state that this or that action or proposal is more important than the others, neither should he have the power or the right to give or to demand a bigger visibility to his own proposals, 'usurping' the space that belongs to everybody to suit his own objectives.

This is, in fact, an issue that demands a more careful reflection, in view of what is being witnessed in the 'marches' and street manifestations which tend to characterise the conclusion of the forums. The banners should be the banners of all, as a final visible expression of its diversity and of the variety of proposals sheltered by it or born from it. To privilege this or that struggle, to rank first in the march or in the appointment of a contingent of public speakers in the final acts of the marches, contradicts the principles of respect to diversity and conveys a vision of a Forum movement instead of a Forum space. But this is another question that too needs to be discussed.

All these features of the Forum certainly account for its great acceptance and appeal and the success of its events: its participants feel respected for their options, rhythms and level of engagement. Some may come to the Forum as militants of a specific movement but a majority do

not do it as an obligation or in obedience to the orders of their principals. They come to the Forum driven by their belief that it is important to come, to exchange experiences, to learn and to join others, keeping the freedom that they had before and will continue to have during and after their participation in the events. They know that they will not be given orders nor will they have to follow words of command, that they will not have to render an account of what they have done or not done, that they won't have to give proof of fidelity and discipline, nor will they be expelled if they don't do it. This is contrary to what would have happened to them had they come to participate in any meeting of an organised movement.

#### **THE JOY AND MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY**

I would go as far as to affirm that it is this character of the Forum that explains the great joy that prevails in this 'square', like an enormous fair—a real party with spaces even for manifestations and 'performances' of different types. Nobody is distressed because nobody has to fight to see his or her own proposals and ideas prevail over those of the others. Nor is one worried about having to defend oneself from others trying to control, impose orientations or rules of behaviour—still less of political behaviour, as it occurs in groups and 'delegations' that have to get together to evaluate, decide and undertake tasks as happens in good and disciplined parties or movements. Such meetings are even possible but never obligatory for those who are not militants of this or that movement. Those who want to take advantage of the opportunity to do so, also have freedom for that, provided that they limit themselves to gathering their own militants with these objectives in mind.

It would in fact be a pity if this joy of the 'square' was lost—as it would tend to be if it wasn't a 'square' anymore. It's a joy—the same joy that we would like to always see in the 'other possible world'—that ends up by taking hold of and invigorating everybody, inspired as it is by another finding of the Forum, while destroying the divisions that segregated the struggles that the different movements fostered: the fact that we are many in the same fight. In that way, in the open space provided to all by the Forum, the militants of these different movements meet up with and recognise each other: the ones fighting for women's rights, for the rights of urban and rural workers, for the environment, for children, the ones who seek new economic domestic relations, or at the level of international organisations the ones who work

for democratic participation in governments or for the enhancement of the spiritual dimension in the human being etc., in the great diversity of the existing ‘movements’.

Such ‘militants’ of so many struggles—many of them long being severed due to different ideological and political options—find in the Forum an unprecedented opportunity to know each other and, if possible, to get together, overthrowing the division to which they were driven by dominant parties. This meeting with ‘old friends’—if one might put it this way—is initially for many a surprise, followed by joy, when they realise that they are in fact united.

Supposing that the Forum becomes a ‘movement of movements’, none of these movements would be able to open this space and succeed in getting all the others to accept its invitation without conditions. The reunion would be curbed by the need to start belonging to another structure intended to unify with all the rules established to make it possible—agreed to by all. And then, inside it the competition would again emerge and with it the division, as a result of the fight for space and direction, and also for defining the objectives of the new movement.

One last outcome of the character of the Forum space is the feeling of mutual responsibility that permeates the realisation of its events. The fact that it is a ‘square without an owner’ promotes this fairly easily, more than it happens in movements where the fostering of this feeling is sought. In the Forum nobody can go against anybody, nor is willing to supervise each other’s commitments. Even the errors of the organisers—in general a lot, considering the dimension that the events have taken—are accepted and corrected by the initiatives and creativity of the participants. In the WSF 2003 edition in Porto Alegre a serious and involuntary mistake—that forced the organisers to make a great effort to try and minimise its effects—could have destroyed the entire event: the programmes for the workshops were published only on the second day. Nevertheless, the participants found ways to make up for this lapse on their own, and there were even initiatives from ‘outside’—as the ‘salvage’ publication of the programme on the basis of information got from the Internet in the evening prior to the beginning of the workshop.

### **RISKS THAT WE FACE AT PRESENT**

To maintain WSF as a space is then, maybe, the best way to guarantee its biggest asset, which must be preserved at any cost. Therefore, without over exaggeration, we could go so far as to say that those who want

to transform it into a movement will end up, if they succeed, by working against our common cause, whether they are aware or not of what they are doing, whether they are movements or political parties and however important, strategically urgent and legitimate their objectives might be. They will be effectively acting against themselves and against all of us. They will be hindering and suffocating their own source of life—stemming from those articulations and initiatives born in the Forum—or at least destroying an enormous instrument that is available to them to expand and to enlarge their presence in the struggle we are all engaged in.

Initiatives taken by a certain number of movements—self-nominated ‘social movements’—seem, however, to point in this direction. Justifiably concerned with the need of popular mobilisation to fight neo-liberalism, they seek to absorb the Forum inside their own mobilising dynamics to serve their own objectives.

Such movements know that although they are convening important organisations they cannot collect the participants for each event. But even so they consider that their own final document could be presented and understood as a ‘final document’ of the Forum—once it does not have its own ‘final document’. One initiative in this sense—that was born in the incubator square of the 2001 Forum has already given rise to tensions and misunderstandings after the Forum. Recently the ‘coordination’ of this movement has gone even further: as members of the organisation committees of the events, they propose to include in the last day of the Forum schedule their own final meeting, that is normally held at the end of the Forum. This meeting, unavoidably partial, appears—at least to the media—as the conclusive meeting of the Forum as a whole. If this orientation is adopted, it will create new tensions: each one will think it necessary to bring to this meeting the results of his own activity, to ensure that these results will be implemented by those who would ‘coordinate’ its effective realisation, as in a good and organised movement. Focusing attention at the end of the Forum to the meeting they organise—and that will never be joined by all the Forum participants—this meeting will, in fact, ignore or disrespect the other proposals of action advanced. Or it will create the need of ‘representations’ that will transform the Forum to the usual pyramid, without the joys of the horizontal ‘square’.

In fact, in my opinion a great challenge emerges for the continuity of the Forum process, and for the fulfilment of its role as an ‘incubator’ for more and more movements and initiatives: to multiply such ‘spaces’

worldwide—genuinely open and free, without drawing attention only to specific proposals. We must hope that nobody, however inadvertently, contributes towards driving the Forum to a closing process until it disappears as an open space.

However, it is all a matter of choice. People and organisations who are preparing events this year or over the next years, within the process of the World Social Forum, and the members of its present International Council or of the enlarged Council that will get together in June, may consider that they should adopt an orientation of the type proposed by the so-called ‘social movements’. Nobody can prevent this decision. It is an option. Each of the participants of the Forum process will then decide about the continuity of his/her own participation, for one should bear in mind that the Forum is not yet a movement and there are no rules to belong to it or to respect majority decisions even when they are taken in a way considered democratic. What we cannot do is fail to discuss this question clearly and frankly so that we can be fully aware of the consequences of such decisions.

#### **SELF-ORGANISED ACTIVITIES VERSUS PROGRAMME OF THE ORGANISERS**

This discussion is so crucial because besides the pressure of participants to transform WSF into a movement, the organisers of events themselves will tend to adopt this option if the present method of organising it is maintained. The option between WSF space and WSF movement will necessarily rebound in this organisation.

In a Forum space the self-organised activities would have priority, if the event organisers are clear that it works with more clarity as a space. However, we verify that the part of the events programmed by the organisers is over-valued, at the expense of meetings and seminars programmed by the participants themselves. After this way of organising events was invented in the 2001 Porto Alegre Forum, these activities, the core of a Forum space, are treated almost negligently. They are almost looked down on, like secondary, less important activities holding low prestige, as though they were a load that the organisers are forced to carry.

In fact, the choices of the themes and lecturers at the conferences and panels have always taken most of the organisers’ time in all the forums already held. This also occurred with the International Council: the meetings in Bangkok and Florence devoted a large part of their working programme to this type of decision, to prepare the Porto Alegre

Forum. Long meetings beyond the Council's schedule have become necessary, and even a special meeting of the new working group created for this—bringing together the 'coordinators of the main themes'—with all the costs that such meetings entail was held in Brazil between the meetings in Bangkok and Florence. Actually, the themes and the lecturers turn out to be the 'showcase' of the Forum, or the public and visible demonstration of what it deals with and what is discussed in it, and this must be carefully planned in order to keep its positions and proposals clear. As it occurs with the Davos Forum, which does not have self-organised activities and has to choose carefully, in each circumstance, the main theme of its events.

Meanwhile, the preparation of that part of WSF events programmed by its participants—which besides its themes, is a hallmark of WSF—follows a purely administrative dynamic and is nearly bureaucratic: a deadline is established for the enrolment of seminars and workshops, and at the end of this term those which cannot be accepted are analysed—based on the Charter of Principles—in a way which is rather insufficient, given the short time that the organisers have to undertake this exercise. There follows the distribution, also administrative, of dates and places allocated for these activities, and the printing of a 'catalogue' with the name of each activity and of its proponents, the date and the place it is going to be held—almost always, by the way, issued along with the traditional corrections, that not all participants receive, of last minute changes.

On the other hand, since the number of these activities is large, it is possible for only some fortunate ones to take place in the central areas of the event, the rest being distributed in the best possible way in all available spaces—sometimes in different parts of cities which are difficult to access. Adding to these difficulties, the catalogue of the workshops and seminars is distributed at the time of registration of the participants on the first day of the event, along with their identification cards—or even later, as unfortunately happened in Porto Alegre in 2003.

What follows from this is that the participants in the workshops and seminars tend to be the organisers and those they had invited, or those who were able to rapidly identify the activities that interested them.

The situation gets even worse when the organisers of the event manage to bring renowned persons to that part of the event that they organise, and when these conferences with celebrated people overlap with the workshops and seminars, as occurred in Porto Alegre 2003: the big conferences attracting most of the participants, leaving the self-organised

activities to those who really insist on participating in them. In this perspective the function of the big conferences and panels in the event would have to be re-examined.

Several precautions could be taken to avoid all this. For example, the deadline for the enrolment of workshops and seminars might be fixed long before the event—at least two months in advance for the big events. This would make it possible to disseminate the proposals via the Internet ahead of time, allowing inter-links to be established prior to the workshops being held, a distribution of places and spaces that facilitate these inter-links and better preparation of the participants themselves, allowing them to come to the Forum knowing which activities they would like to join.

A second but equally important precaution would concern the distribution of places for self-organised activities: these should be held in the main space of the event, in the main 'square', with better infrastructure, easy access and good divisions. And they should not suffer from events oriented towards all the participants being held at the same time—as occurred in Porto Alegre in 2003, giving enough reasons to those who said that the big 'stars' usurped the Forum.

Without any doubt the priority given to self-organised activities would be much more conducive to accomplishing the objectives of WSF, formulated in its Charter of Principles and indicated in the beginning of this text: to allow as many people, organisations and movements that are opposed to neo-liberalism as possible to get together freely, listen to each other, learn from the experiences and the struggles of others, discuss proposals of action, become linked in new nets and organisations aiming at overcoming the present process of globalisation dominated by large international corporations and financial interests. Because it is in the self-organised workshops and seminars that this can occur, and not in the traditional context of large meetings and congresses where the people listen passively to what respectable people have to say and may by chance be lucky enough to have the opportunity of formulating questions.

#### **ORGANISATION COMMITTEES: FACILITATORS OR DIRECTION OF A MOVEMENT?**

The discussion about the option of being a space or a movement is also important because transforming the Forum into a movement can have negative effects on the continuity of the process as it opens the possibility of disputes of power that can erode or even destroy it from inside. As the Charter of Principles establishes that WSF is not a space

for disputing power, having —until now—the character of a horizontal and open space, this has prevented the occurrence of such disputes effectively in its events. But their preparation is not immune to it.

When it is regarded as a movement—in this case demanding a ‘political’ direction—it becomes strategic for the political forces that participate in it to integrate their Organisation Committees, with a view to influencing decisions. Tensions then arise between those who are already inside it and have practically taken ‘possession’ of it, and those who feel that they are ‘excluded’, or simply want to get in and participate in that ‘direction’.

There are also those who deem it necessary to bring that dispute even to the Brazilian Organisation Committee—currently the Secretariat of the Forum process—and to its International Council. They even say that the present composition of the Brazilian Committee is not representative, because it does not take into account the proportional participation of all the forces or political tendencies that should be in the direction of the Forum process. They also maintain that the International Council should be ‘conducted’ by some persons, or reduced to a group representing the others.

These proposals would be justified if the Forum was a movement; they are not appropriate for a Forum space—to a ‘square’- that does not admit a representing ‘political direction’. It demands, more than anything, people and institutions willing to perform the task of organising the use of the square without interfering in the contents discussed in it and even less in the freedom that should be granted to all the participants. That is to say, it depends on people and organisations willing to devote their time and resources—as an executive body—to promote the gathering and the articulation of all people engaged in the struggle for ‘another world’.

It would seem desirable that the composition of the Organisation Committees of the forums’ spaces had a diversity ensuring respect for diversity in the events. But it won’t be necessary to count on proportional diversity and importance of the organisations and movements that will participate in these events, as these organisations and movements will not come to the Forum to receive orders. Still more important than the diversity in the committees is the credibility of the people and organisations composing it. They need to invite all the others without leaving any doubt about the real interest of this invitation. Or without rendering those invited afraid of the possibility of being used by those who invite

them to carry out their own real objectives—as it might happen when political parties decide to assume ‘generously’ the support of the process.

In this perspective the concept that is better adapted to the Organisation Committees and also to the International Council, within the option of the Forum space, is that of a ‘facilitator’. Facilitators do not command. What they do is make it possible for the existing or future movements to progress in their struggles. In order to create incubators of movements and engagements and to build ‘squares’ and ‘factories of ideas’, they don’t need confrontations amongst themselves, discussing alternatives about how to change the world, still less do they have to try and impose ideas and proposals on each other. What they need is to be concerned with the common perspective that they adopt, in making each event organised by them accomplish the objectives of the Forum. What they need is to choose and operate, considering the political picture of each time, the best alternatives of organising the time and the space that will be made available and will be used by those who should and wish to come to the ‘square’ to discuss alternatives, advance proposals of action and, get together to fulfil them.

Naturally other levels of organisation for valuations and propositions for the Forum process, besides the Organisation Committees of the events—such as enlarged committees, councils and assemblies—can amplify the effect of the process, should they manage to incorporate an even larger variety and representation of movements engaged in the construction of the ‘other world’. But, in an option of Forum space, those types of organisations—as it occurs with the Organisation Committees—ought not to intend to direct those movements and organisations, but only to endorse and support the creation of more and more Forum spaces.

Such perspective of work is more difficult to adopt once it is not as ‘heroic’ as the exercise of political leadership, provided by the option of Forum movement. Its adoption would perhaps lead to a decreased interest in participating in the organisation of events. Sparing the efforts and resources to amplify bonds, links and articulations during the event would be more crucial.

But if at the present moment it is useful and necessary that the barriers between different types and areas of engagement be brought down; that the articulations of the struggle against neo-liberalism are spread all over the world and get amplified, stronger and more solid; that more movements, nets and initiatives of struggle are nurtured; that the debate

on the proposals and ways to overcome the domination of capital are deepened; if this is the moment we are living in, we can be sure that the task of multiplying Forum spaces is inestimable, irreplaceable and highly commendable in our common engagement.

17 March 2003

### NOTES

1. Posted on the website of ATTAC-France ([www.france.attac.org](http://www.france.attac.org)), in full and abridged forms; in *Revista de Fomento Social* of the *Institución Universitaria da Companhia de Jesus de Córdoba* (E TEA), Spain, No. 233, vol. 59, January/March 2004; in the book *Challenging Empires*, by Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, Peter Waterman (orgs.), The Viveka Foundation, January 2004; and in its German translation, published by Karldietz Verlag, Berlin, October 2004. It was also recently published in Italian by the organisation Transform (Pratiche costituenti, 2005—[www.transform.it](http://www.transform.it)).
2. I took part in this seminar as one of the speakers, along with a number of intellectuals and activists who had been thinking about WSF, including Aníbal Quijano, Boaventura de Souza Santos, Immanuel Wallerstein, Jai Sen, Meena Menon and Virginia Vargas.
3. Another article—‘The three challenges now facing the World Social Forum’—which was written a little before this one and completes it by raising other considerations, is presented as Annex 9.

## 2

### *Annexe*

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## World Social Forum

### Origins and Aims\*

The article transcribed here was one of the first published on the Forum in Brazil. It was written in late 2000 at the request of the director of the newspaper *Correio da Cidadania*, Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, of São Paulo, a former PT Congressman, who needed a text to clarify for his readers what the World Social Forum actually was. While protests against triumphalist neo-liberalism were spreading in Europe and the United States, Brazil was experiencing an ebb in social and political mobilisation and the Forum proposal might even have seemed unrealistic.

Early in 1998, the proposal for a Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) was made public. It was to be signed by the world's wealthiest countries and then 'proposed' to—though in practice imposed on—the rest of the countries in the world. The agreement had been discussed in secret in OECD, the intention being for it to become a kind of World Constitution for Capital, which would give capital all the rights and almost no duties—especially in third world countries where the 'investments' would be made. The French newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique* published a first exposé prepared in the United States by the Public Citizens movement led by Ralph Nader, in an article by Lori Wallach, a lawyer with the movement. The outcry at the absurdities contained in the agreement led to the emergence of a social movement in protest, causing France to withdraw from the

negotiations in late 1998 and finally preventing the agreement from being signed.

One of the organisations to spur this mobilisation was ATTAC—at first the Association for a Tobin Tax for the Aid of Citizens, and now the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens—that was beginning to take shape in France at that time, also following a proposal in this direction by *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Today the association has some 20,000 supporters all over France and has produced ATTACs in other countries round the world including in Brazil. The association is working to put into effect Economics Nobel laureate James Tobin's proposal for a tax on speculative capital movements as a way of controlling their present absolute freedom to circulate worldwide, with the consequences we all know so well.

From the interactions that these events helped to trigger everywhere among those who refuse to accept the scenario of a world wholly controlled by the interests of capital, a number of different forms of opposition to this type of globalisation began to organise. Those that gained most fame by virtue of media repercussions were the protests in Seattle against WTO, in Washington against IMF and the World Bank and, more recently, those in Prague, which led the government representatives gathered there to cut short their meeting one day ahead of schedule.

Now, for a good 20 years, the owners of the world have been meeting in a Forum they call the World Economic Forum, which they hold in Davos, a small, luxury ski resort in Switzerland. Once a year—in addition to the regional meetings that it has also started organising—this group (that today is a major corporation) currently gathers together all those able to pay 20,000 dollars to hear and talk to the leading thinkers at the service of capital, as well as to hear even guest critics of globalisation, invited to lend legitimacy to the Forum. Davos—which attracts correspondents from all the world's major newspapers, including systematically our friend Clovis Rossi<sup>1</sup>—is where the theory of world domination by capital, within the parameters of neo-liberalism, is constructed and steadily put into practice.

In the light of all this that was going on, a few Brazilians decided that it would be possible to launch a new stage of resistance to this school of thought which today prevails all over the world. Over and beyond the demonstrations and mass protests, though, it seemed possible to move on and to offer specific proposals, to seek concrete responses to the challenges of building 'another world', one where the

economy would serve people, and not the other way round. Economists and other academics opposed to neo-liberalism were already holding what they called anti-Davos meetings in Europe. Now though, the intention was to go further than that. The idea was, with the participation of all the organisations that were already networking in the mass protests, to arrange another kind of meeting on a world scale—the World Social Forum—directed at social concerns. So as to give a symbolic dimension to the start of this new period, the meeting would take place on the same days as the powerful of the world were to meet in Davos.

Exactly who had this great idea? Our friend Oded Grajew. I don't know if he discussed it with anyone else beforehand, but he put it to me when we met in France in February this year. Together, we decided to take it to Bernard Cassen, director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, who is also the president of ATTAC in France, to see how well the idea would be received outside Brazil.

Cassen was enthusiastic and made the proposal that the Forum should be held in Brazil. He felt it had to be in the third world because that would also have a symbolic effect—and Brazil was among the countries in a better position to host a Forum like this. Hosting it in Porto Alegre, capital of a state that is steadily becoming known all over the world for its democratic experiences and efforts against neo-liberalism was also his idea. Cassen then threw out a counter-challenge: if we were able to organise the Forum, we would have the support not only of his newspaper, but also of the organisations around the world that are positioning themselves against domination by capital.

Once back in Brazil, we started finding out what organisations were willing to accept this challenge and take on this huge task. On 28 February, there was a meeting in Sao Paulo of delegates from eight organisations that have today signed a 'Cooperation Agreement' to hold the World Social Forum, the first edition of which will be held in Porto Alegre from January 25 to 30 2001: Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (ABONG); Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC); Brazilian Justice & Peace Commission (CBJP); Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES); Central Trade Union Federation (CUT); Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IBASE); Centre for Global Justice (CJG) and; Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST).

In March these organisations sent a delegation to Porto Alegre to consult Olivio Dutra and Raul Pont on the state and municipal governments' willingness to host the Forum on the understanding that the event would be promoted not by these governments, but by civil society organisations that embraced the proposal. Once the governor and mayor had given their consent, work was started as quickly as possible to organise and actually realise this new world meeting. This included inviting other civil society organisations to set up a Brazilian Committee in Support of the Forum.

At Cassen's suggestion, a delegation from the organisations travelled to Geneva in late June where a large part of the organisations linking up around the world in demonstrations against neo-liberalism would be meeting in an alternative 'summit' parallel to the UN's 'Copenhagen + 5' Summit. Room was made for us to present our proposal, which was very well received. Miguel Rossetto, Deputy Governor of Rio Grande do Sul State, also travelled to Geneva to confirm that the state would host the Forum. On that very occasion, an International Committee was set up in support of the Forum.

Since then, we have been working against the clock to ensure attendance by participants from all over the world, with quotas set for each continent and each type of activity. The programme drawn up provides for two kinds of dynamics: morning panels—four running simultaneously on all four days, with four participants each chosen from among leading names in the fight against the One Truth; and, in the early afternoon, workshops coordinated by the participants themselves to exchange experiences and for discussions, and in the late afternoon, meetings for networking. Also planned are sessions for testimonies of people involved in different kinds of struggles, and an extensive parallel programme in Porto Alegre city for all those unable to participate directly in the Forum, which is open only to people appointed and registered by social organisations.

The Forum is not deliberative in nature and time will not be wasted in discussing the commas in a final document. It will be the beginning of a process of thinking together at the world level on the four thematic areas dealt with in the morning panels: production of wealth and social reproduction; access to wealth and sustainability; empowering civil society and the public realm; and political power and ethics in the new society. For each of these thematic areas, questions were formulated to which we have to find answers and, for each question, there is a series of issues we have to consider.

The intention is, by thinking together also on a 'globalised' basis, to make room—in greater depth each year—for the search for alternatives to the dominant model. In fact, World Social Forum 2001 will be only the first step, but an entirely new step, which is increasingly finding an echo the world-over. Our hope is that this echo really will secure the beginning of a new period in the struggle against human submission to the interests of capital.

### **THE BROADER CONTEXT**

Here I transcribe a part of a talk that I gave at the University of Brasilia on 24 April 2002, at the close of a course in Human Rights and Citizenship, and which was later published in a book together with the other texts of the course.<sup>2</sup> It may provide useful information on the world situation at the time when the proposal for the World Social Forum emerged.

The present phase of globalisation—with one hegemonic power that seems to have lost touch with any frame of reference for how it imposes its will on the world—is marked by technological advances, particularly in the fields of informatics and transport. Currently, a final product can be produced as parts around the world and then assembled wherever it is wanted; that is, produced where raw material and costs are the lowest and assembled wherever there is a consumer market and the assembly costs are the lowest. This kind of procedure has been made possible by how quickly, easily and cheaply goods can be moved from one place to another. At the same time, information technology has brought enormous speed to the transmission of information and decisions, enabling a CEO's wishes to be made known in some distant corner of the world with the same speed as that CEO can find out what is happening in that distant corner.

This is even allowing money—that strange merchandise which, from being a tool for facilitating exchange, has come to be a merchandise in itself, with people earning money from money itself and speculating on its value—to dominate economic exchange the world over. Thus it is that the value circulating today in money, in money operations to accumulate more money—that is, seeking returns, earning interest—is several times the value of the real merchandise circulating. Money has been completely divorced from what it should represent, what is actually produced in goods and services.

What now characterises globalisation is that it is commanded by the interests of financial capital, that is impersonal capital with no relationship with human people, which brings down economies and countries in its comings and goings around the world. Attempts are made here and there to control it, but in fact it continues free to wreak its havoc.

#### NOTES

- \* Published in *Correio da Cidadania*—2 to 9 December, 2000, No. 222.
- 1. A well-known Brazilian journalist and political editor of *Folha de S.Paulo*, a leading newspaper with one of the largest circulations in Brazil.
- 2. *Educando para os Direitos Humanos—pautas pedagógicas para a Cidadania na Universidade*. In: Sousa Jr., José (coord.) Porto Alegre, Síntese, 2004, pp. 127-134.

### 3

#### *Annexe*

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## **World Social Forum**

### **Balance and Outlook**

This article was written just after the first World Social Forum ended in 2001, at the second request by the director of *Correio da Cidadania*, who had asked me to write an article before the first World Social Forum was held.

The World Social Forum in Porto Alegre was certainly an enormous success far exceeding all expectations, and the prospects are that a powerful new barrier to world domination by neo-liberalism is in the making. It is now clear that ‘the end of history’ is an illusion and that there is no place for any single ‘right thinking.’ Civil society has globalised in its struggle against the cruel, perverse logic of capital accumulation.

It is fundamentally important to draw up a balance of this historic occurrence. Why did thousands of people flock to Porto Alegre from more than 100 countries around the world? The organisers forecast 2,500, but 4,000 delegates came, along with 6,000 other people who joined them in the workshops, plus nearly as many spread over the events, meetings and demonstrations—accompanied, photographed and interviewed by around 2,000 journalists from all over the world. Where did so much energy come from that vibrated through all the activities at the Forum? What was the reason for that contagious enthusiasm that everyone went home with after six days of intensive shared activity?

The lessons to be drawn are essential for maintaining the drive of this new kind of struggle that has come to maturity: resistance to

globalisation at the service of money is now networked and coordinated at the world level, and alternatives are being formulated for building another, people-centred world.

The first reason for this success is that the call went out at the right time. At the world level, the moment was ripe for a quality jump in the demonstrations that over the last three years have been contesting the decision both of multinationals and of the governments, IMFs, WTOs and World Banks that serve them. On the same days as the lords of the world were meeting in Davos, we vied for media attention in order to protest, but also and more importantly, to discuss how to go about building a new world on the basis of the alternative things that are already being done. For their part, the Brazilians present signalled en masse that the presumptuous discourse disqualifying the opposition—which is so to the liking of FHC<sup>1</sup>—is tiring, and it is now imperative to react forcefully to our country's submission to the interests of international capital.

Serious debates were ensured by one pre-condition for taking part: delegates to the Forum had to be registered by the organisations and movements in which they were active. As a result, Porto Alegre drew representatives of organisations already engaged in various kinds of struggles. Public interest was so great, however, that the workshops had to be opened up to individually registered participants, who paid a nominal fee. The large events were open for everyone to participate.

Another reason for the Forum's success is its format. The spread of subject-matter covered what needed thinking about to build a people-centred world. For each thematic direction in that spread, questions were formulated signalling that we do not want just to replace one 'right thinking' with another ready-made 'single truth', but rather to launch a diversified, plural search process. Panel debates in these subject areas were held every morning among people from different countries and continents who are thinking and acting in the endeavour to build a new world. During the afternoons, the process was inverted: the participants decided what they wanted to discuss, and proposed workshops that they themselves organised. The rooms of the more than 400 workshops were packed. In the late afternoons, testimonies of significant personal experiences were heard, also in over-crowded rooms. At night, the shows could only be in the open air, to round off the day's intensive work in a party atmosphere.

The organisers had opted in advance that the Forum would not have a final document. The Forum as such has no deliberative attributions,

nor rallying cries. In workshops proposed by the participants themselves, on the basis of whatever exchanges of experiences and new inter-linking arose there, they would deliberate on what they were going to do next. To reduce these decisions to a single summary document would be to impoverish them. Practice has shown that it is indispensable that the proposals discussed at the workshops be kept intact in all their extreme wealth, multiplicity and diversity. The World Social Forum's final document, which will be circulated via the Internet, has thus become this set of proposals, guidelines, programmes and commitments taken up by each and every one of the representatives of some 1,000 participating organisations, making for even stronger links and actions by the extensive network of all those who are growing more and more democratically united in this common struggle.

And what now? The even years will be multi-centred, with a set of inter-connected world forums taking place simultaneously in different countries on the same dates as Davos. In odd years, there will be one single World Forum. Neo-liberalism should look out: an overwhelming wave was thrown up in Porto Alegre to counter its domination and show that 'another world is possible'.

#### **NOTE**

1. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then President of the Republic of Brazil.

## 4

### *Annexe*

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## **World Social Forum**

### **Meaning and Outlook\***

This article was written at about the same time as the previous one, ‘World Social Forum: balance and outlook’—but is a little more detailed; it is an evaluation of the Forum, also made just after the first edition and presented at the bishops meeting in a session of the Episcopal Pastoral Commission of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference, on 21 February 2001. I made that presentation as executive secretary to the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission, which I represented on the World Social Forum Organising Committee. The text was then published in the magazine *puc Viva*.

**A**ny evaluation of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre—whose Organising Committee included a representative of the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission—has to consider one thing: it has taken on proportions sufficient to stand as a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum, which was being held on the same dates in Davos, Switzerland. All the media that covered Davos, in Brazil and elsewhere, had to give space to Porto Alegre. Even the organisers of the World Economic Forum mentioned the World Social Forum in their speeches. The *Forum News Daily* which is published by the Economic Forum on the days that it is held, sent a correspondent to Porto Alegre to report on what was happening at the Social Forum. A teleconference lasting over an hour, which was mentioned on many of the world’s TV channels, brought participants from the two Forums face to face.

However, those who had the chance to take part in the Porto Alegre gathering will evaluate it completely differently from those who followed the proceedings from a distance. To the former, it was an enormous success, an event suffused by a contagious enthusiasm; the latter, generally speaking, came nowhere near being touched by that enthusiasm. That is what you discover when you describe the experience of being at the World Social Forum to those who were not there.

That itself is already part of the evaluation, and it poses a challenge: how can all the energy that surfaced there be made to reach many more people than were present in Porto Alegre in late January 2001? The media was unable or unwilling to show it, preferring to simplify the contents and perspectives of the encounter, or sticking to peripheral descriptions of the appearances or the most sensational facts. If the media was unable to show that something new was happening, then the people responsible for the Forum have to discover where they failed to convince it about them. If the media was unwilling to show it, even though it could not avoid talking about the Forum, it was because the World Social Forum has become a danger to the system that dominates us.

It was no coincidence that Brazilian magazines with the largest circulation published photos of the United States flag being burnt, as if it was the Forum opening ceremony—when in fact it took place one or two days before the Forum, at a protest by bank workers in Rio Grande do Sul State. Nor was it any surprise that the media tried to reduce the Forum's closing ceremony to episodes connected with the actions of José Bové, whose expulsion from Brazil was requested, sparking even more intense press sensationalism. Predictably, they attempted to portray the Forum as an initiative by Brazil's Workers' Party (PT) at the national, or even the Rio Grande do Sul State, level, so as to scare the less well-informed. This blockade and the distorted information that was circulated in Brazil and around the world shows that the masters of Brazil, allied to the masters of the world, were worried. Quantitatively, the event far exceeded the organisers' expectations: they had forecast a maximum of 2,500 participants, but more than 4,000 delegates came from over 1,000 organisations in 100 countries. Also present were around 500 members of parliaments and mayors from around Brazil and other countries, as well as some of Brazil's state governors. They were joined by another 6,000 people in the workshops, while as many were spread over the events, meetings and

demonstrations that took place in Porto Alegre—accompanied, photographed and interviewed by more than 1,000 journalists from all over the world.

This flood—which swelled steadily as the Forum date approached and its proposals became more widely known—can be explained as: the call had come at the right time. At the world level, it was time for a quality jump in the protests that over the last three years have been contesting decisions by multinationals and by the governments, IMF, WTO and the World Bank at their service. On the same days when the masters of the world were meeting in Davos, we got space in the international press to protest, but also and more importantly, to discuss how to go about building a new world on the basis of the alternative things that are already being done. The presence of Brazilians en masse signalled that the presumptuous discourse disqualifying the opposition—of which our present government is so fond—is tiring, and it is now imperative to react forcefully to our country's submission to the interests of international capital.

Qualitatively one can say that from Porto Alegre onwards the future of humankind is no longer defined by any single 'right thinking', whose pretension it is to decree the 'end of history'. The World Social Forum has set in motion a process of thinking about what another world would be like if it were centred on human needs and not on the logic of money. That other world is possible, and in order to build it a lot is being learnt from humanity's past—and sometimes painful—experiments in ensuring that the process of producing and distributing wealth is led by 'social'—or, as the French prefer, 'societal'—concerns. In fact, the very notion of 'wealth' was questioned in Porto Alegre, opening up the scope for new endeavours.

That kind of more searching question—along with many others that arose in Porto Alegre—was made possible by the way the participants worked together in the mornings. The Forum's organisers put together a wide-ranging thematic agenda with four main directions, ranging from the way humankind produces wealth and how access to that wealth is to be assured for all without the risk of discontinuities, through to the role of civil society and the public domain in social organisation, political power and ethics in how that power is exercised. For each direction, four issues were posed—all situated in the current realities of a world that is ever more integrated by the process of globalisation. Those issues were proposed, along with many

sub-items, to guest speakers coming from all over the world and chosen from among people with a history of activism or scholarship on those issues.

Correspondingly, four plenaries were held every day with those guest speakers and about (or more than) 1,000 participants; they were not intended to offer definitive interpretations or rallying cries, but whatever answers the speakers felt they could give to the questions that had been put to them. The lesson learnt from the experience of that part of the Forum is that we still have—and may always have—many more questions than answers about the concrete ways that societies can overcome challenges to civilisation and that we need to look and to go on looking for the answers, while no one should set themselves up as the bearers of definitive truths.

As part of that dynamic of guest speakers, the Forum also brought moments of great emotion, when people with particularly significant life experiences or thinking were offered the opportunity to tell their stories. Some of those testimonies drew even more participants than would fit in the rooms, even leading to situations that were difficult to handle materially.

Another great lesson from humanity's learning process, which reflected intensely at the Forum, was the need to respect democratically the plurality and diversity of aspirations, aims and dreams that move people. Porto Alegre showed that it is necessary and possible to live that diversity. The afternoons at the Forum were devoted to workshops on subjects proposed by the participants themselves: more than 400 workshops overflowed from all the available spaces in Porto Alegre's Catholic University, and the surplus had to be directed to rooms at Rio Grande do Sul Federal University. Each organisation did things in its own way, inviting its own speakers, planning follow-on activities, structuring new networks, making commitments and issuing whatever declarations and calls its own participants agreed to.

That open space of the World Social Forum was richer and more promising—more so than the morning conferences—by virtue of the exchange of experiences and the new inter-relations that would enable the groups and organisations taking part in the workshops to continue with their action for change. It was a lesson, on the one hand, in really respecting diversity and, on the other, in bringing to fruition the wealth that grows out of that respect when each person is made the subject of his/her own life choices and when democracy really is considered an

essential condition that must, transparently, regulate relations among people.

A third lesson was expressed in the decision not to end the Forum with a final document designed to summarise everything said and discussed there and channelling that content into a certain number of statements that would give its participants a single direction. That would constitute a new single 'right thinking' in place of the one that is being contested. When the organisers began to prepare the experiences, their recommendation was not to present a final document. Holding the Forum has confirmed the soundness of that recommendation. It would be difficult anyway to construct a document of that type given the diversity, multiplicity and richness of the analyses and proposals for action that came out of the 400-plus workshops. More than that, however, it would be fundamentally impoverishing, in addition to contradicting the option of giving everyone a say and leaving everyone with the right to take his/her own decisions about what to do. In fact, the Forum's final document was the set of documents drawn up by its participants, who will find there, as they are made available to them on the Internet or in specific publications, the tools with which to continue their action.

Meanwhile, the Forum only accepted registrations from people representing a group, movement or organisation. All the people who went to Porto Alegre were already engaged in some kind of action for change with a view to overcoming neo-liberal hegemony. For the Forum to set itself up to direct that multi-faceted human movement, nurtured and reinforced by what was experienced and discussed at the Forum, would not just be pretentious, but a handicap in increasing its strength.

The enthusiasm and energy that flowed through the Forum resulted naturally from factors like those described above. Its participants seemed to be waking from a long and paralysing drowsiness and coming to themselves in happiness and in hope. That was why the enthusiasm spread to all of them. It dawned on them that a powerful new barrier was being built to the neo-liberal domination of the world. Civil society was globalising in the struggle against the cruel, perverse logic of capital accumulation, and in doing so was gaining a strength it had never had before. The combination that was emerging brought a coordinated, world-wide network of resistance to globalisation at the service of money, together with proposals for alternative ways to build another, people-centred world. It was a truly historic occurrence. As Inácio Ramonet said with foresight in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, one month

before the World Social Forum took place, ‘the 21<sup>st</sup> century starts in Porto Alegre’.

None of this was sufficiently realised by those who followed the Forum at a distance. Very few people in Brazil—and still fewer in other places—were touched by the fresh air blowing from Porto Alegre. Although there were numerous delegations, especially from nearby countries or from Europe, many of the countries present had just a few or only one or two representatives. The task now before us is, therefore, to make it known as widely as possible what went on in Porto Alegre and what the World Social Forum meant. This is already happening among us—I have taken part in several meetings of this kind in the two weeks since the Forum—and we are receiving news of meetings and events being organised in other countries for this purpose. That effort will have to be intensified, relying on the always enthusiastic testimonies of those who were in Porto Alegre. However, it will be also be necessary to give continuity to the Forum.

The option taken by the Forum’s organisers, and presented in Porto Alegre at the closing session, was to boost this anti-neo-liberal wave, which is developing the proposal for a new world and spreading it around the world. It was decided to try to hold Forums like the one in Porto Alegre in different countries around the world, so that the wave can spread in each of them and attract an increasing number of people from those countries and their neighbours to this hope-inspiring struggle, as occurred in Porto Alegre with Brazil and its neighbours.

And what now? The even years will be multi-centred, with a set of inter-connected world forums taking place simultaneously in different countries on the same dates as Davos. In odd years, there will be one single World Forum. Neo-liberalism should look out: an overwhelming wave was thrown up in Porto Alegre to counter its domination and show that ‘another world is possible’.

## NOTES

- \* Published in *puc Viva*, No. 12, April-June, 2001

## 5

### *Annexe*

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## Lessons From Porto Alegre\*

In the programme *Roda Viva*, produced by the public broadcasting system *TV Culture*, in São Paulo, which was recorded after the World Social Forum 2002, Boaventura de Souza Santos was asked if the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*—PT) had manipulated the Forum in its own interest. The Portuguese sociologist, who was an important celebrity in that meeting, answered saying that the PT is too small for that. In an interview given to the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* on the same occasion, Tarso Genro, mayor of Porto Alegre, declared that all left-wing parties of the world, united, would not be able to call together something like the World Social Forum.

Even if we only consider the numbers, the Forum was an unquestionable success. Boaventura and Genro's statements are based on such verifications, but they also refer to the reasons for the success of the Forum.

Figures increased spectacularly from the first to the second meeting of the World Social Forum. The participants, for example, went up from 20,000 in 2001 to 50,000 in 2002. About 35,000 listeners from Porto Alegre, other places in Brazil and also from the bordering countries, came along, many having to endure long bus trips, just to see and hear in person the people they admire and to enjoy the energising atmosphere of this huge worldwide meeting.

But this increase is even more meaningful if we consider the increase in the number of delegates, that is to say, the number of people registered in the Forum as representatives of entities and movements of civil society: they went up from 4,000 in 2001 to 15,000 in

2002, representing 4,909 organisations from 131 countries. In fact, what attracted so many delegates were the innovative characteristics of the Forum: its pluralistic and non-directive character which unifies while respecting diversity; its openness to all those who want to participate—except representatives of governments, political parties and military organisations; and the fact of being an initiative of civil society for civil society that created a new meeting place—the first and may be the only one of this kind at a worldwide level—without the control of any governments, movements, parties or national or international institutions which dispute political power.

In fact, for those delegates the Forum was really what its organizers intended it to be: a horizontal space in which they could freely put forward their proposals and struggles—without considering any of these issues to be more important than the others and without anyone imposing their ideas or their pace on the others—to exchange experiences, to learn and to develop themselves through knowing about the struggles, hopes and proposals of others, to deepen their analysis about the issues that arise in their fields of action, to articulate themselves at the national level and especially at the worldwide level. That is to say, to gain effectiveness and to move forward in their work of social transformation. There would not be so much interest in participating in this event if it were only about taking orders, or having each one's options controlled, or being pushed to disciplined action and mobilisation, or having to approve statements and motions or collective positions—which does not imply the lack of commitment to action. This is why the organisers of the Forum wrote in its Charter of Principles that the Forum should not take positions as the Forum itself, that no one should speak on behalf of the Forum and that in none of its meetings should time be invested in discussing and passing 'final documents'.

This Charter explicitly states that the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre does not have a deliberative character. The same happens with the World Economic Forum, in Davos, to which the Forum of Porto Alegre is proposed as an alternative (and it is to highlight this aspect that it is held on the same days). To all participants, those days simply represent a stronger and more intensive opportunity to deepen their commitments and articulations, on a worldwide level, within an effort which already existed and will continue to exist after the Forum. It is obvious that behind this similarity there exists a huge difference: the participants in

Davos aim to maintain and increase the domination of capital—which they control—over human beings of the whole world, as well as the expansion of their private business. The Porto Alegre participants, feeding on the increasing protests that come up everywhere against a globalisation dictated to by the interests of that capital, want to move forward in their proposals to build another world, centred on human beings and respectful of nature, a world which is not only seen as possible but also necessary and urgent and which, in fact, they are already building in their practical actions..

This difference in objectives and contents lead to a difference in method, too: the main activity developed in Davos consists of conferences and debates on previously defined issues, to which the organisers invite great intellectual representatives of the neo-liberal ‘unique-monolithic thought’, the most powerful nations’ political leaders and great multi-national owners or executives. In the Porto Alegre Forum an important space is also given to conferences and debates, as well as to testimonies of people with significant experiences or reflections. In order to do that, Porto Alegre, like Davos, invites people who have already reflected or are acting in domains relevant to the issues being discussed—though in 2002, the Porto Alegre conferences have been conducted not by isolated people but by great world nets. But the most enriching activity in the World Social Forum is the one related to the workshops and seminars freely proposed and organised by the participants themselves: 400 in 2001 and 750 in 2002. In fact, it is the joyful people’s movement around these workshops and seminars that creates the atmosphere of enthusiasm of the World Social Forum in the corridors and gardens where the Forum is held, with a variety of sounds and colours, good spirited protests and presentations of proposals and actions, as well as unexpected performances and events—exactly the opposite of what happens in the well-bred gray of Davos. Obviously, these organising options of the World Social Forum are not carried out without misunderstandings, pressures, deviations and even attempts at manipulation of the Forum as a whole. Its large scale induces greed and its horizontal character puts in an uncomfortable position those who are in a hurry to see changes taking place and who were also brought up within the traditional paradigms of political action. .

Most journalists, for example—and this appeared in the coverage they gave to the Forum—used as they are to interviewing leaders and *gurus* or to highlight struggles for power, do not understand why there

is no 'final document' or 'concrete proposals' of the Forum. They do not ask for the same in Davos, but they want it in Porto Alegre. They find it hard to understand that the World Social Forum is not a summit, but one of the bases of a social movement that, in order to develop itself, cannot have summits or bosses. A 'final synthesis' after five days of work, with 15,000 or 50,000 people, would necessarily mean an impoverishment and could only be approved through some kind of manipulation; and everybody leaves the Forum happier than if they had had to fight to include at least one line of their proposals in the final document. .

In fact, there are hundreds of concrete proposals in the Forum, and even specific mobilisations, like the one this year against FTAA. Or even new reflections, such as the one that came up this year about the inner change of those who are fighting to change the world. This issue, which was dealt with in several workshops and seminars, was the object of a conference that attracted more than 2,000 people. But none of those proposals or reflections is an expression of the Forum as such. They are under the responsibility of those who presented or adopted them. All those who decide to support them will do so as groups or individuals responsible for their decisions. .

Naturally, there are other tensions that come up even among those who organise the Forum or those who come to help. For instance, there are those who would prefer the Forum's International Advisory Council to become a new world direction of the struggle against neo-liberalism, controlling and guiding that process. The perspectives of continuity assumed by the organisers seem to aim in another direction, with the consolidation of the method oriented by the Forum's Charter of Principles. It is more and more accepted that the Forum is a process and not an event or a new international organisation directed by the leaders of a substitutive 'unique-monolithic thought', which would be fatal to the Forum itself. It is also necessary, for example, to see to it that the conferences does not end up with guiding syntheses, voted by their respective audiences, or that they do not prevail over the workshops. At the same time, the decisions taken by the organisers so far aim at enabling the power of attraction of the Forum to generate the same mobilisation it has created in Brazil in other parts of the world. The 2003 Forum will probably start with some ten regional or thematic forums in the different geo-political areas of the world between September and December 2002, before a new World Forum, to take place once again in Porto

Alegre. In September 2003 it would start in the same way, with the possibility of finishing it with a world meeting in India in 2004. .

In fact, the biggest challenge for the organisers of the World Social Forum does not consist in defining new and better contents that could lead to even more concrete proposals, but to guarantee the continuity of the form the Forum was given—a case in which the means determine the aim to be reached. The contents will naturally arise from the process thus launched, within mankind's struggle towards another world, and they will necessarily lead to the different editions of the Forum, with matters common to all and with the specific issues of each region of the world where it will take place. What is most important is to ensure that that new paradigm of the political transforming action, created by the World Social Forum, is not absorbed by the 'old models'.

21 February 2002

#### NOTES

- \* pequena introdução a traduzir

## 6

### *Annexe*

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## **World Social Forum 2003, Another Step Forward\***

Written in December 2002, this article talks about the expectations raised for the third Forum, which were realised, confirming still further the insights of the World Social Forum's organisers. The forecast of 100,000 participants at the 2003 Forum was met and surpassed. The article also announces the implementation—even though only in the course of 2002—of the proposal made in the Explanation Note issued at the end of the 2001 Forum to hold smaller forums in other countries in order to take the process to the world level. It also points to the likelihood of the 2004 Forum being held in India, and the 2005 Forum in Brazil once again, as in fact happened.

The third edition of the World Social Forum is from 23 to 28 January 2003 in Porto Alegre. The number of workshops and delegates registered continues to grow proportionately—more than doubling from the first to the second, and from the second to the third—and this year the number of participants could reach 100,000. That could be called a resounding success. Even more so considering that the process of taking the Forum worldwide—a fundamental concern of its organisers in view of the 'globalisation' of domination by capital—has led to 'social forums' being held in Buenos Aires, Argentina (on IMF policies), in Belém do Pará (Pan-Amazon Forum), in Ramallah, Palestine (on conflicts and peace), in Hyderabad, India (Asian Forum), in Morocco and Ethiopia, in Africa, in Florence, Italy (European in scope, it drew 60,000 participants)—while many others are being organised around the world in 2003.

It is proper to ask: why is it being so successful?

There may be at least two reasons for this. Firstly, the time is right: the Forum was proposed at a moment when protests were growing against the rules imposed by hegemonic neo-liberalism on the world, and it was time to move on from 'anti-globalisation' protests to seek an 'alternative globalisation'—the 'other possible world' of the rallying cry the Forum has adopted. Secondly, it is different in concept from international meetings, congresses, assemblies and conferences. It is just an open space where diversity is a value that is respected totally, where all those who are struggling in one way or another for a new world—from experiences at the social grassroots levels through to those who are working to change international institutions—can exchange their experiences, learn from one another, break out of their possible isolation or through the barriers that separate sectoral actions, to network at the national and planetary level; and all this with no intention of being the 'summit' of anything or running the risk of certain 'leaders' suddenly emerging to impose 'final documents' to be voted or acclaimed, rallying cries or 'unified' marching orders, which would be nothing more than attempts to impose a new one-track 'right thinking'.

Thus, while the Forum attracted those who thought it was time to start saying what we want, it also assured everyone that their options and their timings would be respected.

Interest in taking part in this great world festivity—because the Forum is typically cheerful—can thus only increase more and more. To tell the truth, there are an awful lot of more people out there changing the world at their own level. Those people and those groups are now discovering that at the Forum by freely proposing workshops or taking part in workshops organised by others, they can develop their proposals still further and absorb all the information and all the energy that is concentrated in the five days that the Forum lasts. For these reasons, more and more movements and NGOs of all kinds are deciding to come to the Forum to showcase the work they do, to discuss it and to network with others who are doing similar work or to gain support from other sectors working for change. Those workshops actually come to be the real wealth of the Forum. There will be 1,700 of them in 2003, running parallel with the conferences and the panel debates programmed by the Forum organisers—to which the international networks bring leading figures from around the world to speak—but they will be given the same importance in how activities are programmed overall.

The Forum therefore represents a new—horizontal, networked—way of taking action for change more broadly and in greater depth. As it is different from the traditional form of political action, it is not always well accepted or understood. The media, for example, is always anxious to say who the leaders of the Forum are and what is now going to be ‘done’ as a result of the Forum—not realising that all those who are there are simply going to ‘go on doing’ what they already do, but with greater strength and by being better inter-linked.

Horizontal networked action is also not always understood by political parties, who are fearful of losing their monopoly on political representation and action or concerned—with the best of intentions—that the proposals advanced at the Forum should be turned into public policy, that is, into government action, which it is their natural purpose to secure. Little by little, however, even they are discovering that they stand to gain much greater strength and legitimacy if, rather than attempting to ‘direct’ this enormous social movement, they try to listen to it attentively and then look for ways to incorporate what they have heard into their action programmes. Still more so if they accept that the world will never be changed from the top down alone, but rather and more importantly from the bottom up, by co-responsible citizens conscious of what needs to change.

The plan is to hold the 2004 World Social Forum in India in order to start a process in which other regions of the world can experience the social mobilisation that a Forum fosters wherever it is held. In 2005, it may perhaps return to Brazil and then be held on another continent, and so on successively so that its energy can spread the world over—a process that is in itself a new world in the making. Meanwhile, we will continue to participate, each in his or her own way, in Porto Alegre or wherever we are, in breathing this great breath of hope that the Forum exhales.

13 December 2002

## NOTES

- \* Published in Família Cristã magazine, December 2002

## 7

### *Annexe*

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## What is New in the World Social Forum's Approach to Political Action?\*

The changes in how to take political action that are proposed by the Forum's way of doing things affect both the behaviour and attitudes of the people engaged in such action and the very understanding of what political action is. Is it reserved just for 'professional' politicians and political party members? Or is it all human action that affects people's conditions of life, whether at the local, national or international level?

The way these questions are answered makes up what can be called the 'political culture'. That is the theme of the article reproduced here, which was written for the bilingual edition of IBASE's magazine prepared for the 2003 World Social Forum.

The WSF consolidates a new way of political action to attain greater transformational efficacy that has been tried out for some decades in several countries. This consolidation is still underway. In fact, we still run the risk of suffering setbacks. It all hinges on the solution given to some current tensions in the Forum process. The *new* requires changes on the part of the main actors on the political scene, parties and human beings, but the *old* is still hegemonic in minds and practices.

For a long time, the expression *political action* has been understood as the activity of people who are *professionally* dedicated to politics on a full-time basis, and are even remunerated by society. Two crises led to the need to broaden this understanding: the crisis of representative systems,

as the functional model for democracies; and the crisis of political parties, through which people elect their representatives. The first crisis was provoked by an increasing gap between representatives and those they represent, which affected the credibility of the former. The crisis of the parties is a consequence of *turning inwards* and fighting for power combined with electoral disputes.

Loss of dialogue with society and internal power struggles had the same effect on other representative structures—not considered as political structures—such as workers' unions.

The resulting political inefficiency led to the creation in several sectors of society, from bottom to top, of other forms of politically motivated action. These new forms bypassed parties, unions and the electoral system to choose representatives. These new forms of political action came to be known as *civic movements*: struggling for demands, ecology and human rights etc. Popular movements in poor countries, and highly conjunctural and independent mobilisations of workers or students in rich nations are clear examples of these new forms of political action.

These initiatives have also taken on new organisational characteristics. Descending directly from the May 1968 movements in France, they refused blind obedience to political slogans, party discipline and charismatic bosses—in sum, authoritarianism of whatever kind. When these demonstrations filled the streets, it was the result of a lot of people becoming aware of the interest and responsibility of each one in the proposed struggles—unlike mobilisations manipulated by the right or the left. Their leaders did not show any interest in later becoming part of party or union political power structures. Pyramidal structures were replaced by collective coordinating bodies and by linkages that spread as networks. In turn, grassroots movements in the third world were stimulated by new political actors. This was the case in Brazil with the Catholic Church and its Christian Base Communities that were independent of party structures which at that time were submitted to repression.

In this process, people became aware that political action is not limited to the activities of a professional political cadre or party activists. It became evident that all human action has a political component, as it has an impact on other people's lives. Even the absence of political activity is a form of political participation. It corresponds to an acceptance of top down decisions or of things as they are. People began to perceive the need and possibility of thinking and acting as citizens—affiliated to a

party or not, member of a union or not—without receiving any pay for this. They realised they could and should participate in political decisions that shape the lives of all people.

This consciousness among the citizens is far from reaching the majority, but is attaining a worldwide dimension, in so far as intense globalisation of information and communication, as well as international transportation facilities, make it possible to have direct knowledge of injustice throughout the world. The resulting solidarity always expands the number of people willing to participate—within their countries or internationally—in those new forms of civic political action.

WSF was proposed in the context of this dynamic, when civic movements opposing hegemonic neo-liberal options were expanded and their networks multiplied. The Forum was part of the political positions of those movements against an economic model that turns everything into commodities, subjecting the political process to the market and increasing inequalities within and between countries. The broad acceptance of the Forum's proposal showed that it was time to consolidate and organise civil society's autonomous political action in relation to parties as an alternative to party action. At the same time, the Forum enabled a new political actor—*planetary civil society*—with the dimension and world articulation that the currently hegemonic liberal system has.

When they wrote the Charter of Principles, after the first successful WSE, its founders remained true to the horizontal organisation that originated the Forum—they refused to transform it into a world command centre for the struggle against neo-liberalism. They consolidated WSF as a broad open area for mutual recognition. This space involves respect for diversity and each one's rhythm and enables interactions between hitherto isolated initiatives by interweaving their strengths and richness. It opens new diversified planetary fronts of struggle, seeking through each one's practice, an effective transformation of the world towards an economic and political system that would favour human beings.

Consolidation of this kind of political action also led to other advances: it went from mass protests (the Seattle demonstrations are their greatest symbol, resulting from a networking process) to a massive process of building alternatives based on what is already being done throughout the world to change it.

This perspective had an impact on the Forum organisation— a Forum increasingly seen as a process—through two complementary dynamics: programmes of debates and networking proposed by its

organisers, and programmes freely proposed by participants. For the former, WSF organisers rely on the International Council, which also has no claim to be a command centre, but stimulates the participation of an increasing number of networks and movements, defining themes and panellists for the world gatherings. In doing so, the Council reacts as best as it can to corporatist pressures and struggles for space. In the programme proposed by participants, we have seen the number of workshops and seminars organised by them double at every new WSF. In these activities, alternatives at all levels are discussed and people learn from them. These alternatives range from people's daily lives to the search for new international structures. In this process, horizontal networking is consolidated.

What are the tensions that are creating risks for these advances? Tensions will increase as the Forum process achieves more success and reaches more regions in the world. They come from political parties and from human conduct.

In May 1968 this type of political action already worried parties and unions who were afraid of losing the monopoly over political representation. In the Forum process, unions have come to realise that it is better to invest in associating with the social movements, rather than combatting them as competitors for society's *representation*. Thus, unions have become partners in networking and mobilisations. However, parties still intend to lead the civic movement. They wish to rehabilitate *politics* through making social movements partisan.

This concern might be valid from the perspective of transformational efficiency, as parties exist to assume political power, to implement society's aspirations. However, party organisations do not seem to realise that the richness of the Forum process and its attraction derives precisely from the absence of leading bodies, the fact that nobody speaks in the name of WSF and that it does not end up in slogans. Actually, the media has also great difficulty in understanding this novelty.

Instead of trying to transform Forum participants into party activists or attempting to use them to reach their objectives—that would end up stifling the initiative—parties would do better by listening attentively to what the so-called civil society says and does, incorporating into their programmes and actions the desires and experiences from multiple experiences that WSF has made visible on a world scale. The Forum's Charter of Principles opens the possibility for any politician with a *popular mandate* to participate in its gatherings.

This would also help to understand that real changes in society do not depend only on government's top down decisions or actions. Those changes should above all depend on what citizens think and do when convinced of their need. If not, they will stand on feet of clay.

Another risk faced by the Forum is related to the need to change the practices and behaviour of human beings in order to really build 'another world'. This issue is related to party internal disputes. Tackling this theme would require another article, but the topic is the order of the day. Those interested in this discussion can participate in WSP's workshops on 'How to Get Rid of Rivalry and Power Logics: a Challenge for the World Social Forum', promoted by individuals and organisations who have been trying to understand—in France already for some time—the relation between personal and collective change.

In any case, if we are not able to overcome these two risks, the Forum could wither and even die. If that happens it would mean that the Forum came into being before its time. That would be bad for humankind. Let's try to make sure that this does not happen.

#### **NOTES**

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## 8

### *Annexe*

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## **Citizens Uprising Against the Established Order**

The following transcribed text is from a talk the author gave at the 2003 World Social Forum as one of the panel members debating ‘Political power, civil society and democracy’ (Thematic area 4). It presents the historical experiences that were the source of the insights of the Forum’s organisers.<sup>1</sup>

‘Citizens rising against the established order’, brings to mind various kinds of mass protests against the powers-that-be, with people taking to the streets to pressurise those who are repressing or oppressing them until they are brought down. There are, however, different kinds of uprisings and uprisings against different kinds of power.

Generally, there is an uprising when we reach the limit of what impositions we will accept from those who hold power of some kind: from parents to governments, from control by social institutions to imperialism. We may even rise up against the very instruments available to us for rising up, such as our parties or trade unions.

The longing expressed by any uprising is always for less authoritarianism, more democracy, more participation in decision-making and more respect for those who suffer the consequences of whatever decisions are taken. We rise up when we come to feel that the impositions are unbearable, that we have to react. Discontent turns to indignation—and when we overcome the feeling of powerlessness, when we get up and decide to change the people who give the orders, we are already taking

the next step which is an uprising. It is doing something concrete to find a solution to what has become unacceptable.

When they are called into question, those who dominate always look for ways to go on imposing their will: giving up rings so as not to lose fingers, manipulating information, persuading, co-opting or even using arms and other forms of violence. Indignation may subside as people get used to what was making them indignant and resign themselves to the situation that they were finding unacceptable—especially when they react in isolation from one another.

But when the powers-that-be refuse to give ground in any way and people in their indignation begin to react by joining others and organising their reaction, the process can lead to the overthrow of power, which is normally replaced by whoever the people consider will exercise that power acceptably or legitimately. That is called a revolution and it can happen in a household, an institution, in a country, or internationally—as it may be beginning to happen in the present process that is contesting neo-liberalism in the world.

Resistance to the unacceptable and opposition to power can be radical to differing degrees and involve different kinds of activities: from intellectual protests by way of writings or speeches to street protests with mass demonstrations—as occurred in Argentina against De la Rúa; from so-called civil disobedience—the refusal to abide by rules and norms of collective living—to concrete violent action to replace whoever controls power—as has occurred in many revolutions. The uprising can also seek to achieve its purposes by democratic means using available legal instruments. Brazil can perhaps provide two examples of this kind: the overthrow of Collor and the election of Lula. It all depends on the degree of indignation and of the willingness to rise, on the awareness among the indignant as to what it is really possible to do to achieve the desired ends and of the consequences that the various forms of uprising can have.

The method used can be decisive for the uprising's really being successful. Often it only results in one tyranny being replaced by another, one dominant power by another, until once again an unacceptable situation is created. The use of violence—in armed revolutions, for example—ends up obliging those who take power to maintain the same authoritarianism as those they have replaced—if not out of habit acquired in the struggle, then at least to defend themselves from the reaction of those they have overthrown. At other times, indignation can lead to a desire simply to destroy what is being imposed, without proposing

or constructing alternatives. In such a case, a power vacuum may be created, soon to be occupied by still worse authoritarianism.

That is the range of possibilities within which it is proper to situate the World Social Forum that brought us together here in Porto Alegre as one of the expressions of the citizens' uprising against neo-liberalism that is growing in the world today. Its contribution to this process is to seek, and give material form to more effective methods of producing change that can lead to more lasting results. It invites us not to mimic the competitive ways of the dominant powers that we are contesting. It proposes that we enter into ourselves, personally and in our organisations, to change our behaviour and our organisational structures, as well as our relations with others and the relations among our organisations, because the 'other possible world' will only really be possible and really be the other world if change runs deep in this way.

This experimentation that took shape in the World Social Forum did not happen by chance. The ideas that gave rise to it went through the minds of a lot of people around the world from our Paulo Freire to Rogers with his non-directiveness, from Illich and Marcuse to the European anarchists and libertarians, and many others. They were given concrete form more widely in the late 1960s, when indignation and revolt against various kinds of authoritarianism at almost the same time in various countries around the world (in Brazil it was against dictatorship), brought large numbers of young people out onto the streets with yearnings that could be summarised by the phrase coined in May 1968 in France: 'It is forbidden to forbid.'

In the following decade, these events led to the discovery that it was possible to organise politically differently from the ways that had been used until then—and to gain far greater effectiveness. That is, to go from a pyramidal organisation—which is vertical and based on discipline and on obedience to orders from above—to a networked organisation—which is horizontal and based on co-responsibility. In the 1970s, networks began to spring up in even larger numbers around the world. One experiment of this kind at the international level—the 'International Study Days for a Society Overcoming Domination'—was sponsored from 1976 to 1978 by the Catholic Church in Brazil, which had been influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire and liberation theology. The Study Day office in France inter-communicated horizontally among thousands of efforts to resist different types of oppression in over 100 countries around the world. Today that kind of free, horizontal

inter-communication planet-wide is practically run-of-the-mill thanks to the Internet.

In the 1980s and 1990s, new experimentation in the same direction arose as a result of two crises in left-wing political action: in representative systems as models for the working of democracies and in political parties, through which people elect their representatives.

The first of these crises grew out of a widening gap between represented and representatives, which undermined the latter's credibility. The crisis in political parties resulted from their tendency to close in on themselves in internal power struggles that accompanied electoral disputes. This loss of dialogue with society and internal struggles for power also had the same adverse effects on other structures of representation which were not directly political, such as workers' trade unions.

There then emerged, from the bottom up and in various sectors of society, activities with similar political aims but not involving parties or unions or electoral systems for choosing representatives. In the wealthy countries they became known as 'civic movements'—which aired grievances, voiced demands, advocated for ecological and human rights causes and mobilised workers or students occasionally and independently—or, in the poor countries, as 'grassroots movements'. These are ways of taking action that in fact constitute an uprising against the instruments of political action available to us, which are found ineffective for producing real social change.

Refusing to blindly obey the rallying cries or party discipline, to depend on charismatic leaders or authoritarianism of various kinds, these movements' demonstrations filled the streets as a result—unlike the demonstrations manipulated from the left or the right—of a dawning awareness, in growing numbers of people that the struggles being proposed were in their interest and were the responsibility of each and every one of them. Their leaders did not go on to join the party political or trade union power structures. Pyramidal command structures were supplanted by collegiate coordinating functions or by inter-connections that spread out in networks.

As part of this process there was a growing awareness that political action cannot be reduced to the activity of professional political workers or party activists. It also became clear that all human action—even omission—has a political component in that it affects others people's lives. People began to see that it was necessary and possible to think and act like citizens and as citizens, whether or not they were members of a party or

trade union, without needing to be paid for it given that all of us can and should be involved in the political decisions that shape all our lives. Even if that civic awareness is still a long way from reaching the great majorities, it is taking on a world dimension as the intense globalisation of information and communication and the ease of international travel and transport make it possible to learn first hand about situations of injustice that exist around the world, stimulating sentiments of solidarity.

The World Social Forum emerged at a point in this process when social mobilisation against hegemonic neo-liberal options was expanding and its networks multiplying. Identifying itself clearly with the insurgent attitude of this mobilisation, the Forum also took the step which was already being tried out by grassroots and civic movements: it turned its back on the dominant political culture of action commanded from the top down. It thus refused to be turned into a space for power struggles or into a place for exerting some pretentious world leadership of the struggle against neo-liberalism. It organised as a horizontal event with no final directives or purportedly unifying commands—the same, incidentally, had already happened with the greatest anti-neo-liberal protest till then in Seattle, which had resulted from a networked process of organisation. The Forum thus organised as a great open space for mutual recognition, which respected everyone's diversity, autonomy and different timings, and which through the strength and wealth of this intermingling enables activities who were earlier closed off from one another to inter-penetrate, opening up diversified new planetary fronts for the struggle seeking to bring real change in the world by each and every one of us taking practical action towards a people-centred economic and political system.

That proposal was clearly accepted. What is significant is how almost 'naturally' the Forum process is expanding, how an increasing number of social forums, underpinned by its Charter of Principles, are being held around the world. That welcome—even in instances where certain requirements of the Charter have been less readily assimilated—shows that it was time for 'civic action' not directed from above, but the diversified political action of civil society autonomous of parties, to be consolidated as an alternative to political parties. At the same time, it heralds a new political actor: 'planetary civil society', which can gain the same world dimension and inter-relations as the neo-liberal system it is rising against.

That welcome, however, is also demonstrated by the increasing number of participants in Forum encounters, but especially by the number of

workshops registered which has doubled at each of the Porto Alegre Forums, reaching 1,700 in 2003. These are organised freely by participants, in compliance with the Charter of Principles, and take place simultaneously with the conferences and debates proposed by the Forum organisers on subjects that they choose in advance, as in traditionally-organised events, even though the way decisions on speakers and subjects are taken may be democratic and participatory, and even though we manage to prevent that decision-making from becoming a locus of power disputes. The greatest innovation of these events, however, resides in the workshops where participants discuss and learn about alternatives at all levels, from people's daily lives to efforts to develop new international structures and horizontal inter-relations grow ever more compactly without any interference by those responsible for the Forum.

While the uprising against the neo-liberal system is gaining more followers, that method of the Forum—expressing an uprising against the dominant political culture of vertical relations—is not yet consolidated. The new way of doing politics proposed by the Forum is still in the process of being accepted and consolidated among the left-wing—even though in business circles horizontal organisation has been discovered and used for a long time, within certain limits of course.

In May 1968 in France parties and trade unions were worried by the uprising to end their domination of political action and fearful of losing their monopoly on representation. In the present Forum process all over the world, trade unions are realising that it is better to associate with social movements instead of combating them as competitors in 'representing' society. They thus integrate as partners in networking and mobilisation. Outside Brazil, however, there are still parties that entertain the possibility of controlling and possibly taking over the civic movement.

These parties need to 'rehabilitate politics' and attempt to do so by 'party politicising' social movements, seemingly unaware that the real changes in society do not depend on what governments decide and do from the top down. If such changes are not to have feet of clay, they will have to depend more than anything on what citizens do and think what they are convinced is necessary. Such parties would be better advised to listen attentively and respectfully to what the so-called civil society says and does at the forums and to seek to incorporate the yearnings and experiences of the multiplicity of initiatives that are thus gaining world visibility into their programmes.

These—let’s call them negative—party strategies add to pressures from militants of the struggle against neo-liberalism, inside and outside Brazil, for the process to have a ‘steering function’. The way such a function is to be set up is itself faulted in that it endeavours to use the same undemocratic methods our uprising is against. On the one hand, it tries to ‘take’ the Forum’s organisational structures—its committees and councils, whose already difficult, laborious function is just to provide the service of setting up an autonomous political space and offering it to civil society. On the other hand, as the Charter of Principles precludes ‘final documents’, attempts are made to bring them in, in ambiguous manners, by giving great visibility in the closing sessions to proposals and positions by the powerful organisations that take part, as if they corresponded to a consensus of all the delegates.

The parties and militants behind these procedures really do not see the wealth that can come out of the Forum’s horizontal process if civil society is assured full autonomy within it, nor do they see that its attraction arises precisely from its not having a ‘steering body’ nor anyone who speaks on its behalf, that it does not end with rallying cries—an innovation that the media too finds enormously difficult to grasp. What is more serious is that such parties and militants also do not see that—contrary to their own aims—they can destroy and eventually kill from the inside this enormous process of political mobilisation set in motion by the World Social Forum.

We thus still run the risk of losing ground, depending on how this kind of tension is resolved, that is, we still run the risk that our way of rising up—against the neo-liberal system and against authoritarian structures of political organisation—will be engulfed by instruments of political action that are necessary, but have already shown their limitations. The ‘new world’ demands changes among the main actors at this stage—political parties and the people who make them work—but the ‘old world’ still holds sway in heads, hearts and ways of doing. If we have to backtrack, it will be because the time has not yet come for this step forward. That is bad for humankind, but let’s try and not let it happen.

18 December 2002

#### NOTE

1. In this text I refer to the experience of the ‘International Study Days for a Society Overcoming Dominations’, which is the subject of Annex 12, ‘For an evaluation of the International Study Days project: why should it continue?’

## 9

### *Annexe*

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## **The Three Challenges Now Facing the World Social Forum**

Of all the debates sparked by the World Social Forum process, the most recurrent is over its future. As it expands, the immediate question is: where are we going? The article ‘Notes for the debate about the World Social Forum’ (Annex 1) was an attempt to identify a distinction that is essential in thinking about the Forum’s future: is it a space or a movement? This article, written just before that one, complements those remarks and raises other more specific questions.

*T*he World Social Forum is now firmly understood to be a process in which the events organised with the name ‘Forum’ are moments of concentrated activity which make the process more visible to those who are not yet participating in it and which build frames of reference for those who do form a part of it.

The specifics of that process and the role it is designed to play in the overall field of anti-neo-liberal action being taken around the world are ensured by compliance with rules contained in the WSF Charter of Principles, a consolidated expression of the guidelines that account for the success of the first Forum held in 2001 in Porto Alegre, which expresses the basic options taken by those who set the process in motion.

However, as this is a process there are always new questions coming up which pose the need to set new rules—always consistent with the Charter of Principles—or to make the existing rules clearer and more precise.

This article is intended to contribute to the debate on these questions, and to propose some answers to them: firstly, how the WSF process relates to the initiatives arising out of it; secondly, how it relates to the dynamics of party political activities; and thirdly, the structure for organising WSF events.

The three questions addressed here have a common source: among all those who join in the WSF, its success and intense spread at the world level are causing a greater and more urgent desire for effectiveness. Many of them, however, feel that this result can only be attained by ‘directing’ the contents addressed at the forums, by structuring them pyramidically and by controlling the process based on traditional organisational models, supported by existing structures for political action and the methods of mobilisation that have been used to date.

Now, this kind of response to these issues could change the very nature and character of the WSF process, with the additional risk—in my opinion—of imploding it. Such issues thus demand careful discussion and redoubled attention in order to prevent inappropriate responses from destroying the WSF.

### **1. HOW THE WSF PROCESS RELATES TO INITIATIVES ARISING OUT OF IT**

The WSF Charter of Principles does not formulate any concrete plan of action stating explicitly all the specific goals of the struggle that the evolving conjuncture demands for neo-liberalism to be effectively surpassed and the ‘other possible world’ built. All it proposes is a working method, a way of organising the search for alternatives towards those goals, building on the concrete challenges of the current situation.

Basically, this method sets up spaces for horizontal inter-communication, both at WSF events and in the inter-relations that follow them, by breaking down the barriers that separate civil society movements and organisations, so that by joining together they can gain strength in their endeavours. Any new movement or network that arises in this process cannot but be welcomed and supported by all those who are aware of the power of neo-liberalism still dominating the world.

Now, one of the great innovations of the WSF method is that it really does enable more and more new inter-relations to emerge at the local, regional, national and, especially, planetary levels among movements and organisations with their respective action plans. Another is that it tries—by way of the rule of absolute respect for the right to diversity and the concrete realities of that diversity—to try to prevent competition and

power disputes from arising in those inter-relations and leading to fratricidal confrontations.

The number of participants is increasing in the spaces at each WSF event held and these events are taking place in greater numbers around the world—permitting more new inter-relationships to emerge and existing ones to be strengthened. All of that could be truncated, however, if the people responsible for such inter-relations endeavour to present their ideas and proposals for action as being those of all the participants in the WSF events, or as if WSF could be reduced to them.

Indeed, for that process of multiplication not to be interrupted and for more and more civil society movements and organisations to feel comfortable participating in it, no new network or movement thus created, however strong and representative, can present itself as the point of convergence of all the debates that take place at the forums. Nor can it allow its own interpretations, strategy choices, platforms or proposals to appear as if they had been adopted by all the participants in the event.

The Charter of Principles characterises the Forum as an open space always respectful of diversity, with no one authorised to speak on its behalf. Disrespecting that rule of the Charter serves only to confuse those who are beginning to come into contact with WSF because it will appear to them to be just one more instrument for spreading specific ideas and options. In fact it would deter new participants who disagree with those options or are unwilling to be directed—or manipulated—by such movements and networks as do accept them.

In order not to create unnecessary, destructive tensions in relations between the organisers of the events and the leaderships of any new movements or networks that grow out of the WSF process, it is fundamentally important that such relations be framed by an agreement to assume co-responsibility: the organisers of the events must ensure that the proposals of these new movements and networks—all of them—are given the greatest possible exposure, while the movements and networks must themselves endeavour to prevent all and any ambiguity.

Lobbying for privileged exposure in WSF spaces and communication or—using the old opportunist approach—taking advantage of any loopholes that appear to turn their proposals into a ‘final document’ of the event can only create unnecessary tensions that prejudice not only the Forum process, but also agreeing to any proposals presented in this way.

Special attention must be given in this regard to initiatives such as the coordinated endeavours that are being called ‘social movements’. There was an initial misunderstanding with such a grouping after the first WSF. By virtue of the prominence it gained on the WSF website, its ‘call to action’ was understood by many as coming from the WSF itself. That endeavour continued and the grouping consolidated—and can only be welcomed as a new force in the world struggle. But at each new event in the WSF process the same ambiguity surfaces again. Given that Forum events cannot have ‘final documents’, there is even a tendency for such ‘social movements and organisations’ to position themselves in such a way as to fill this purported lacuna and give a ‘direction’—which comes to be seen as set by the WSF as such—to the mobilisation necessary for the struggle against neo-liberalism.

It will be a pity if such tendencies prevail engulfing the Forum as an open space and turning it into a directed movement. In addition to disrespecting other coordinated endeavours and proposals for action that have arisen in the WSF—which, being on a smaller-scale, will not have gained the same visibility—such tendencies will contribute decisively to imploding the Forum process. In order to avoid this, it is urgent to clarify the situation on a co-responsible approach. That could even include setting up spaces, at the end of forums, where all the proposals and joint endeavours arising in them could be given full exposure, with no privileges or hegemonies.

It is also worth adding here that the concern with encouraging mobilisation, once each event is over, is completely valid. The possibility of action after the Forum does not rest on ‘final documents’ to steer participants’ struggles and actions, however, but on the format of how people participate in these events.

Thus, at least at the Porto Alegre forums, the participants are not isolated individuals in search of engagement or marching orders—although the space of the events is also open to people in that situation. Rather, people register with the forums as ‘delegates’ from existing movements and organisations, which are assumed to be already engaged in action before the Forum and will continue doing so after it. Thus what the WSF is affording these ‘delegates’ is the opportunity to learn about other ongoing action in their own and in other fields of activity, to learn from one another, to exchange experiences and make new alliances, and to join in furthering whatever new proposals that arise at the Forum that they feel they should support. In other words, they leave the Forum wiser

and better connected, not to start taking action, but to continue their action.

This characteristic of the format for participation in WSF—as a free space with no direction or command and a wide diversity of participants—is perhaps what most distinguishes it from the assemblies or meetings of movements or organisations that pursue their own specific struggles.

## **2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WSF PROCESS AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

Concerned that what is discussed and proposed at WSF events should not be just empty words but have concrete consequences in surmounting neo-liberalism, many argue that there is a need for political parties to take part as such in these events because it is up to them to win political power and make it possible to put such proposals into practice.

There is nothing in the Charter of Principles to prevent politicians mandated by majority vote from participating in Forum activities in a personal capacity. What it does preclude is participation by political parties as such, organising conferences or workshops, sending delegations or expressing themselves as parties.

That guideline responds firstly to a concern with assuring that the Forum remains a space for organisations, groups and movements of ‘civil society’, understood in its most restrictive sense—which until now had no organised space in which to express itself and coordinate its endeavours.

Secondly, it is intended to prevent the dynamics of competition and the struggle for power—proper to the very existence of political parties, to the forms their activities take and the ways they function and pursue their aims in practice—from penetrating into the Forum space and causing it to become an arena where politics is disputed and hegemonies are imposed.

Lastly, it is more or less evident that if a given party manages to impose its hegemony within the Forum and control it, that will almost immediately alienate all those who are not supporters of that party, and it will become a Forum that, even though it may remain open in theory, will be closed in practice.

Of course, it is tempting for parties to make the Forum space their instrument, because it has shown the ability to attract an increasing number of people and organisations to political struggle. But it would be far more useful to them in achieving their own ends not to try to control

it, but rather to ensure that these horizontal, civil society spaces continue as autonomous entities. Their militants, members and leaders, with or without a popular mandate, can perfectly well participate in the events without wanting to steer them towards party positions. The best use that they can make of such spaces is respectfully to take in all the ideas and proposals that can be incorporated into their programmes and action plans. That will be a legitimate way of relating to the grassroots of organised society, which will naturally have an impact on broadening their own base.

Just like any new networks and movements that grow out of the Forum, any parties that endeavour to use it instrumentally will be a force with even more power to destroy the process.

Thus, here too there should be an agreement for co-responsibility between parties and the organisers of events in order to avoid tensions and enable the Forum spaces to expand more and more.

### **3. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE EVENTS**

The way the forums are actually organised since the first Forum was held in Porto Alegre, entails developing two parallel dynamics: conferences and panel debates are programmed by the organisers of the event, while workshops and seminars are programmed freely by the 'delegates' registered with the Forum event.

It has been said very often that the greatest wealth of the Forum stems from these workshops and seminars where the diversity and scope of the struggles for 'another world' comes to light. Note what has been happening in Porto Alegre: the 400 workshops at the 2001 Forum became 800 in 2002 and 1,700 in 2003. Note also that there is an ever stronger perception among those who join in the Forum process that it is at the workshops that they will manage to grow in terms of evaluating their own endeavours and building the relationships and alliances that will make their activities more effective.

In practice, however, far more attention has been given to the part programmed by the organisers than to the workshops. Long meetings are held in order to choose subjects and speakers. Disputes arise among networks and organisations. The WSF International Council has devoted most of its time and efforts to making these choices—not without creating tensions—which moreover refer only to the Porto Alegre forums.

It could even be said that by eliminating the final document from its structure we have managed to prevent the Forum from being destroyed

by power disputes. Meanwhile, however, we have created a space for the same disputes in how we organise the themes and conferences, which are gaining the status of a 'showcase' for the Forum—instead of giving greater visibility to the wealth and multiplicity of the workshops and the innovations that they bring to the construction of the 'other world'. In that way, we have turned the decisions on subject-matter into a covert, indirect way of making final documents. They are prior to the Forum in a way, because they reflect what the organisers—and they alone—feel is important to discuss.

Experience is showing, both in the world forums and in the regional and thematic forums, that this process also leads to other kinds of tension—between those who are included and those who are excluded by the choice of subject-matter and speakers, this being considered the most important part of the forums. The organisers, who in fact are doing no more than to provide the service of making it possible for the open spaces of the forums to exist, are being seen as 'owning' those spaces, and are even accused of imposing their—very often just operational—decisions undemocratically. To be part of the decision-making organising group has also become a bone of contention, under pressure from all those who feel the Forum does not address the subject-matter that they consider most important.

Another harmful trend is taking shape in the regional forums: at the venues where the forums are held, 'premier facilities' are being assigned to the conferences and panel debates, while the workshops are distributed over whatever space is left, which includes for example, placing them at locations distant from the most visible area of the Forum, which makes it harder for anyone interested to access them and to take part in the other Forum activities. One further detail is that even that allocation is often changed at the last moment, jeopardising participation even more.

The issue is how, in organising and programming the events, to restore balance in importance and visibility between these two dynamics, and even how to give the greater overall importance to the dynamic of the workshops and seminars, as pre-eminently the space where diversity is respected and inter-relationships grow.

One possibility that could be considered is to make the conferences exclusively a way of communicating the Forum process in the city where it is held to all those who do not take part in it directly, that is, who make up that part of society that still needs to 'wake up' to the problems of

globalisation under the domination of neo-liberalism and imperialism. In this approach, it would be less important to ensure that certain positions are asserted in the conferences, and more important to identify—under the responsibility of the local organisers—what messages and information should be put across to that large audience, and who is in a position to do so effectively.

The organisers of WSF 2003 are now introducing innovations designed to give greater visibility to the contents discussed in the workshops and seminars. Perhaps the greatest innovation will be introduced in forthcoming forums: the closing date for proposing workshops and seminars is to be brought forward considerably. The deadline is currently set at almost the day before the Forum opens, leaving the organisers little beyond the thankless task of distributing activities more or less randomly over the space and time available.

It has now undoubtedly become a trademark of the forums that workshops and seminars can be freely organised. Everyone who has been taking part in them now knows that it can be done. No harm would thus be done by setting a closing date that would allow the organisers to programme those workshops and seminars better with regard to their venues and dates, and also with regard to whatever coordination and inter-relations among them can be facilitated.

That guideline would have an added advantage: if the listing of workshops and seminars could be made public in good time, it would avert what is being considered one of the Forum's greatest deficiencies by those who liken it to a big party with no commitment: participants would no longer be 'taken aback', on arrival at the Forum by the vast number of activities on offer and the impossible task of finding the time and place that really interests them. Instead, movements and organisations could prepare their delegates' participation and be able to distribute them in a planned fashion across the various seminars, conferences, panel debates and workshops, where they can put forward their proposals, gather information and network with other movements and organisations. Among other things, that would make it possible to evaluate all that has been achieved by participating in the event after the Forum.

12 January 2003

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**Everything Continued in Mumbai\***

This article comments on Bernard Cassen's book *It all started in Porto Alegre*<sup>1</sup> and some points of another of his texts, *Rethinking the social forums*, published on 12 January 2004 in *Libération* newspaper. This transcription of the article includes a previously unpublished footnote relating to a discussion on the 'paternity' of the World Social Forum, which crops up now and again. In this presentation of the article, the note is included as a contribution to consolidating historical truths.

Bernard Cassen chose to risk writing his book in the first person, which is doubtless rather disconcerting and may prompt resistance to an attentive reading of his cogent thoughts on the meaning of the World Social Forum (WSF). That aside considerable benefit can be drawn from this irreplaceable testimony as to what discussions are needed and what tensions were experienced.

His analyses of how the WSF process relates to the advancing struggle against neo-liberalism, to political parties and politicians or to its Charter of Principles make the nature of WSF perfectly clear: 'It is a space and a process, and definitely not an entity', and it has created 'a historical crossroads'. I will limit my comments to two issues he addresses in his book, the second revisited in his new article.

The first is a danger, which has to be averted and which, after the Mumbai Forum, is more clearly present. Attempts are being made—contrary to the WSF's Charter of Principles, spirit and method—to give a 'political direction in the guise of a vanguard under the name Assembly of the Social Movements' (which, as Cassen remarks, should

call itself an ‘assembly of [some] social movements’ and not an ‘assembly of the social movements’). This assembly arose out of WSF 2001, and would have every right (even duty) to exist—one of WSF’s aims is to foster coordinated joint endeavours—were its intention not to invert the whole logic of the Forum. The assembly staged its boldest coup, however, at the Mumbai Forum: having convinced the Indian organisers that this was the tradition at all the forums, its representatives took the microphone at the closing ceremony in order to present their ‘call’, thereby reducing all the wealth and diversity of the Forum to a single proposal. We may all agree with that proposal, but that does not necessarily mean that it is the Forum’s sole outcome, nor even that it is the first priority. That ploy entitled *Agence France-Presse* to state, in its news item on that closing session, that this ‘assembly’ was the decision-making body of the ‘World Social Forums’ and therefore ‘the organ authorised to take decisions in the Forum, which itself has never issued a final declaration.’

Fortunately, this episode led the WSF International Council to decide, the very next day, to make a detailed examination of all the closing sessions of past forums, so as to define clearly the aims, form and function of such sessions and forestall further similar surprises. The organisers of forums have, however, been left with the task of explaining the true nature of the Forum again and again to many new adherents.

The other issue to be considered is Cassen’s concern, voiced in his book, over the ‘political output (prospects) of the Forums’, which has been a recurrent theme since the success of the first Forum. Cassen expresses this concern: ‘The issue of action to arrive at another possible world continues intact, and it fuels legitimate frustrations.’

Here too, the International Council took a decision in Mumbai. On this subject, both the book and the article leave a certain ambiguity. Ultimately, this is the same demand made by the ‘assembly of social movements’ (which Cassen himself criticises), which would like everything to converge to a few rallying cries under its direction. The same demand is voiced by many journalists, who are used to having final documents put into their hands when meetings end. In his article, Cassen writes: ‘All of us find it enormously difficult to explain what has “come out of” a Forum.’ On the contrary, many of us answer, with no problem, that the forums do not have ‘a’ final document, but hundreds of them, resulting from the multiplicity of new commitments—to action, it bears repeating—that are made there.

In this regard, one of the ideas that Cassen stresses both in his book and his article may sow even more confusion: the attempt to formulate a 'Porto Alegre Consensus' in opposition to the 'Washington Consensus'. The aim would be to draw up a dozen strategic goals to be achieved by the action of all involved. Paradoxically, however, if such an idea were put into practice—just like the idea of defining convergent or even priority themes, which came up during preparation for Mumbai, but with a view to the 2005 Forum—would come perilously close to constituting the final document that everyone claims not to want. Moreover, one of the networks participating in the Mumbai Forum has just issued its '30 proposals to make another world possible'. Should these 30 proposals be merged with the ten or 15 of the 'Porto Alegre Consensus'? And who would undertake that task without setting themselves up as a steering body of the WSF? That would certainly draw an: 'At last!' from many who seem to want a direction. And what is to be done with all the other proposals for action not included in these two lists, and whose authors consider them no less strategic for overcoming neo-liberalism? Respect for diversity is a condition not just for entering the forums, but also for leaving them without any homogenisation—and thus impoverishment—taking place.

Of course, everyone is entitled to produce summaries, convergences and priorities. The 'good' ones will be followed by whoever agrees with them. What no one has the right to do is to impose them on others or to speak on behalf of everyone else. What is more, I discussed this with Cassen in Mumbai and he agreed with me that it would be more appropriate to call his proposal a 'consensus for another world'. The much more media-friendly name 'Porto Alegre Consensus' would delight some journalists, who would certainly say: finally they have given in and produced a final document. That would be sure to lead to misunderstandings and divisions among the forums' participants.

In fact, many in Mumbai insisted on the need to arrive at concrete proposals for action, to go beyond so-called 'intellectual' discussions and debates, beyond the 'festive' gathering, which to good militants suggests a lack of commitment, and even beyond the numerous demonstrations that had taken to the streets of the Forum space in Mumbai to voice their demands. Certainly, the 'WSF method' has to be constantly improved. Moreover, the 'method' is a growing concern: at WSF 2004, a plenary session and a large seminar were devoted to innovation in the WSF as such, representing a major advance on this topic compared with 2003, where it was discussed at only one, relatively small workshop.

As for the need for concrete proposals, this is a problem of how the process is understood. With each Forum, things change for the participants; they go away knowing more, more aware and inter-related with others in the same actions that they were taking before the Forum and will go on taking afterwards. In addition, new initiatives always come into being at the forums—these are the hundreds of final documents. What we have not yet managed to do—raising anxieties among observers concerned with the results of the process—is to give these greater visibility.

What is certain is that the forums offer, as yet under-explored, opportunities for advancing in this direction—but always following the football trainer's golden rule: 'don't change a winning team'. As spaces, the forums play an indispensable role: they really do make it possible for the participating organisations, in all their diversity, to pool forces in new actions with much broader scope than simply continuing with their struggles. World Social Forums can be the starting point for planet-wide action, just as neo-liberal domination is planet-wide; also, at the regional, national and local forums joint action can be built on a regional, national or local scale. That is the more specific contribution of the forums as 'open spaces': to bring greater breadth and depth to the struggle against neo-liberalism. How then can those dynamics be facilitated so that such types of actions become a goal to be attained during the forums themselves?

That question led Oded Grajew, who had already invented the World Social Forum, to submit a new idea to the International Council to be explored with a view to WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre: the Forum programme could be organised into a sequence of three sections. The first two days would be devoted, as they always have been, to workshops and seminars, with facilitation to try to make these as self-organised as possible. The second section, during the third day, would be for participants to meet and work to pool forces with a view to concrete joint endeavours, whether or not on the basis of the discussions in the first two days. The third and fourth days would be for preparing action plans resulting from such understandings.

With that formula, in combination with other guidelines being discussed by the International Council (such as bringing forward the closing dates for registering self-organised activities and proposals for pursuing joint endeavours on specific subjects and also having the aims of the self-organised activities made explicit at the time of registration),

the organisers of forums will perhaps manage to respond creatively to the need expressed by Cassen in his article to rethink the social forums.

**THE UNPUBLISHED FOOTNOTE SAID:**

‘We each have our own truth’, Pirandello would say. Bernard Cassen’s description of his meeting—brainstorming at rue Claude Bernard—with Oded Grajew and me (the pair of us later becoming members of the Brazilian Organising Committee of the World Social Forum) is not shared by us—the ‘two *compadres*’ as Bernard amiably calls us.

Oded had the idea of organising a World Social Forum on exactly the same dates as the Davos Forum, and with that name, so that it would be identified as an alternative to Davos. He also had the expectation that the Social Forum would make proposals towards a different world, instead of simply protesting against neo-liberalism. We then went to talk to Bernard Cassen—with our wives, as Oded likes to specify—in order to see if such an initiative could count on support from the *Le Monde Diplomatique* newspaper, of which Bernard was, and still is, director; and also the bonding of the networks involved in demonstrations that had taken place in Seattle, and in which ATTAC—of which Bernard was president—had taken part.

Now, while it is correct that Bernard insisted the gathering should be in Brazil and suggested the city of Porto Alegre, he seems to be claiming in his book the sole authorship of the idea of the Forum, which is described as being born there in his little office, and Oded and I as going to see him with the far pettier goal of ‘sinking Davos’.

In order to learn the history of the World Social Forum, other testimonies like ours have to be heard, including an article I wrote presenting the origins and aims of WSF, published in December 2000, which can be found on the World Social Forum website.

**NOTE**

- \* Full text of the article published in the *Tribune d’Idées* section of *Politis* magazine, 11 March 2004
- 1 *Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre... Mille forums sociaux!* Mille et Une Nuits, October 2003.

# 11

## *Annexe*

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### **The World Social Forum**

#### **Where Does it Stand and Where is it Going?<sup>1</sup>**

This text was published in the 2005/2006 Yearbook of the London School of Economics. Written after the 2005 World Social Forum, it provides current information on that Forum which was held after the publication of this book's first edition in Portuguese. At the request of the Yearbook's organisers, the article gives special attention to an initiative taken at that Forum which has sparked some controversy: the launch, during the Forum, of what has been called the 'Manifesto of Porto Alegre'. In the Yearbook this article was published along with another two, by Boaventura de Souza Santos, one of the signatories to the 'Manifesto' and Bernard Cassen, one of its organisers.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Where does the World Social Forum ([www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)) process stand today? After the success of the 2005 event, which drew 150,000 participants to Porto Alegre, many of those engaged in organising forums are worried. Where is this process heading? What is the WSF actually intending to achieve? How effective is it in promoting necessary political changes? Is it running out of steam? Is it not at risk of causing a great deal of frustration—with all the accompanying ill effects—by announcing that 'another world is possible' and thus raising expectations that are difficult to meet given the resurgence of wars and terrorism and the increasingly visible likelihood of irreversible ecological disasters?

Indeed, it is becoming increasingly necessary and urgent to analyse the Forum itself in greater depth. For that very reason, at its meeting in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in late March 2005, the WSF International Council decided to set aside a day and a half at its June 2005 meeting in Barcelona to consider all that was happening in the world today, to assess the ground gained or lost towards the 'other possible world' and to examine in depth the Forum's role in that overall context.

### **SOME THOUGHTS ON THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM**

A collective effort to think about the role and the nature of the Forum began in October 2002, when an e-mail discussion list titled 'WSF Itself' was formed. This was proposed by Brazilian and French participants who, after the success of the second Forum, foresaw the likelihood of growth and felt the need to clarify the meaning of the whole endeavour. At the 2003 Forum that discussion list gave rise to a workshop on proposed innovations in the form and principles underlying its organisation. In 2004, at the Mumbai WSF two significant events took place: a seminar on the subject 'Forum: open space?' and a plenary on the future of WSF. Mumbai also saw the release of an anthology of essays on the World Social Forum as a challenge to the Empires (Sen et al., 2004). Also in 2005, a number of activities addressed this issue from various perspectives and at least two books discussing the Forum were published (de Souza Santos, 2005; Whitaker, 2005).

However, underlying thinking and discussions about the nature of the Forum and its position in the array of forces present in the world today there linger thought-provoking questions stemming from an assertion that shapes the way the forums are organised: in order for the struggle against triumphalist turn-of-the-century neo-liberalism to be effective, it must go beyond the paradigms of political action that prevailed throughout the twentieth century. That really is a bold assertion. Is such a paradigm change really necessary? If so, is the present method of organising the forums the best way to bring about that change?

### **HORIZONTAL NETWORKED ORGANISATION**

The method adopted to date is indeed designed to permit both Forum organisers and participants to experiment practically with a new way of organising and acting politically. From the outset, the organisers of forums have referred to themselves as 'facilitators', never as 'coordinators', far less as 'leaders'. Such vocabulary is extremely important because it

reflects the pursuit of a new political culture marked by horizontal relations among actors in place of the vertical ones that have predominated to date both in capitalist authoritarianism and western bureaucratic culture and in the actions of their left-wing adversaries.

The argument is that such horizontal relations, with actors organised into networks, are actually much more efficient than vertical and pyramidal relations, as they make it possible to build a collective power, sharing responsibility and therefore becoming stronger. Networks function on the logic that action is taken not because someone issues an order or directive but because people believe it is necessary and take it upon themselves as active subjects. In any case, in pyramidal organisations directives do not always filter down, and managers do not always know what is happening among those they manage, which tends to set up a barrier between them. In addition, as power is concentrated at different levels within the pyramid, struggles emerge for control of that power which, instead of uniting those involved, divides and so weakens them.

In fact, experimentation of this kind—which is essentially participatory in nature—is not new. It reinstates the teachings of a tradition of social struggle worldwide against authoritarianism of various kinds, starting with the mobilisations of 1968. In the decades that followed, networks were proposed and consolidated as a different organisational structure in many political undertakings that innovated ways of waging political struggles. For instance, some invented a collegiate structure of direction. The landmark event in this process took place at the end of the twentieth century during the 1999 World Trade Organisation (WTO) conference in Seattle—and thus well before the first World Social Forum. These protests were of such proportions and so effective in blocking the anti-democratic measures planned for the occasion by WTO that they surprised even those who—in their enormous diversity of immediate aims—had thrown themselves into the effort.

#### **THE FORUM'S CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES**

Immediately following the success of the first Forum, its organisers drafted a Charter of Principles (WSE, 2001), explicitly adopting horizontal relationships. Believing that these relationships were the key to the success of the first Forum, the organisers wanted to ensure that such experimentation would continue and be extended to other events held at the world or the regional level. The Charter embodies a set of guidelines

completely at variance with current political practices, such as not drawing up final documents at the forums, guaranteeing that participants would be completely at liberty to organise their own activities at these events,<sup>2</sup> pledging that the organisers would not direct such activities or any collaboration among them and not designating spokespeople or representatives of the Forum.

The basic conception of the Forum, as expressed in the Charter, is that it is an open space designed to facilitate an inter-change of concrete experiences and an ongoing process of increasing links among participants. With this in mind, the organisers included in the Charter certain rules—here they really are rules and not the usual empty rhetoric—such as respect for diversity and the pledge to seek effective democracy in both the preparation and the functioning of the events, with the intention of surmounting the barriers and prejudices that today divide the various types of organisations and sectors that believe that ‘another world is possible’. Respecting diversity is in fact a core principle of WSF, and not only in relation to the organisation of events. It is grounded in the conviction that it is one of the fundamental characteristics of the other world—or, as we say, of the ‘other possible worlds’—that we intend to build.

Then, after the third World Social Forum, the Charter leveraged another strikingly effective episode in worldwide mobilisation, based on the same logic of networked organisation that had proved so successful in Seattle. On 15 February 2003 protests brought 15 million people onto the streets, in a great number of countries, to demonstrate for peace and against the invasion of Iraq. The proposal to hold these demonstrations was presented and discussed during the forums in November 2002 (in Florence, the first European Social Forum) and January 2003 (WSF in Porto Alegre). Under its Charter of Principles, however, the Forum is not an organisation but a ‘space’; it has no leaders and cannot call for demonstrations from the top down. The 15 February protests were thus convened by the multiple networks that participated in the Forum or that then started working together, drawing freely—as had happened in Seattle—on an extremely powerful tool for horizontal communication, namely, the Internet. The calls that went out for the 2003 demonstrations far exceeded whatever ability the Forum itself may have had to mobilise for action. However, it probably was decisive to the process that the Forum made an open meeting space available, under the terms of its Charter, for proposals to be presented and discussed, and for the planning and coordination necessary to carry them out.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the success of these demonstrations, some would have preferred to mobilise through a call from the Forum as a way of introducing and reinforcing the forums as a new political actor, with its own initiatives. This points to an important, and perhaps the main, question about the nature of the Forum that is continuously debated: is it a space or a movement? How we answer this question will determine the organisation and process of the forums, as well as their future. I have discussed previously, in an article that appears in several publications, why the 'space' conception is preferable to that of a movement, and how some were trying to imbue the Forum with the characteristics of a movement.

### **HOW DOES A SPACE DIFFER FROM A MOVEMENT?<sup>3</sup>**

A movement and a space are completely different things. Without Manichaeistic simplifications, we can't be both things. One doesn't exclude the other, which means they can co-exist. They are also not opposites, which means that they do not neutralise each other, and can even be complementary. But you can't be both things at the same time, not even be a part of each. A movement and a space can have the same general objectives, but each does so in its own way, aiming for specific objectives.

A movement assembles people. Its militants, like the militants of a party, decide to organise themselves to accomplish certain aims collectively. Its formation and existence require that, to attain these objectives, strategies must be defined, action programmes formulated and responsibilities distributed among the movement's members, including those concerning the direction of the movement. Whoever assumes this function will lead the militants of the movement, getting each of them—with authoritarian or democratic methods, according to the choice made by the founders—to perform a part of the collective action. A movement's structure is necessarily pyramidal, even when the internal processes for reaching decisions and choosing decision-makers at the different levels are very democratic. But its effectiveness depends on how explicit and precise its specific objectives are, and thus on how delimited they are in time and place.

A space, by contrast, has no leaders. It is just a place, basically horizontal, like the earth's surface, although undulating. Like a square, it has no owner—if the square has an owner other than those who use it, it becomes private territory. Squares are generally open spaces that can be visited by all

those with any kind of interest in using them. They have no other function than the function of squares, offering a specific kind of service to those who frequent them. The longer they last as squares the better it is for those who make use of them to achieve their respective aims.

Even when a square contains trees and small hills, it is a socially horizontal space. Whoever climbs the trees or the hills cannot aspire, from high up, to command, either entirely or partially, those who are in the square. The least that can happen to climbers is to be considered ridiculous by the others in the square. If they become too insistent and troublesome, speaking for nobody, the visitors leave the square—or even come back with ‘public authorities’ empowered to stop them, and return peace and tranquillity to the public square.

Like a square, the Forum is an open space, as specified in its Charter of Principles. But unlike a public square it is not a neutral space. The Forum opens up from time to time in different parts of the world with one key objective: to allow as many people, organisations and movements as possible that oppose neo-liberalism to get together freely, listen to each other, to learn from the experiences and struggles of others, to discuss proposals for action and to become linked to new networks and organisations that aim to challenge the present process of globalisation dominated by large international corporations and financial interests. Thus, it is a space created to serve the common aim of all those who converge on the Forum, and it functions horizontally like a public square, without leaders or pyramids of power. All those who come to the Forum accept this, and participants are therefore required to agree to abide by its Charter of Principles.

In fact, the Forum works as an ‘ideas factory’ or an incubator, whereby it is hoped that many new initiatives will emerge for constructing another world, one that we all consider possible, necessary and urgent. It is thus to be expected that a plethora of movements will emerge—large or small, combative or quiescent—each with its own aims and strategies in the same struggle, the struggle the square stands for. Another advantage of the ‘Forum space’, or a ‘square with no owner’, is that it creates a feeling of mutual responsibility more readily than a movement.

### **THE SLOW PACE OF CULTURAL CHANGE**

This conception of the Forum as a space, not a movement, is based on the assumption that it is not the Forum that can change the world but the social movements and organisations engaged in that struggle.

But the new avenues that the Forum is designed to open up to become effective in the struggle to surpass neo-liberalism raise two related problems. First, paradigm change, like all cultural change, is necessarily slow, especially in view of the fact that throughout the twentieth century the left was shaped and trained according to paradigms deriving from the need for vanguards to conduct the struggle—exactly what is being called into question at the Forum. Second, new paradigms require that countless practices, concepts and values be revised, along with the very concepts of democracy and representation. To complicate things still further, they also entail changes within ourselves, in our personal behaviour and attitudes. It may thus be a long time before the effects of this whole process can be seen in terms of concrete political results.

That difficulty is compounded by our anguish about the intensity and speed with which the world situation is deteriorating, which demands urgent action. Not to mention that with every passing day more and more people die for lack of food, medicines or basic sanitation, while the incessant quest for profit at any price continues to dominate economic activities in countries rich and poor. The dialectic of action and reaction set up by the present government of the United States in its war on terrorism is, in turn, driving insecurity worldwide. To make the situation even more serious, the same government—as if its threatened ‘preventive wars’ were not enough—is ringing China with military bases, signalling in that way the new enemy it intends to confront to maintain US hegemony. In addition, accepted and completely feasible measures to address the ecological risks facing humankind are being adopted at an extremely slow rate, and social irresponsibility on the part of business and government continues to prevail over efforts to control the harmful environmental effects of many systems of economic production and activity. In short, the prospects we face are little short of terrifying.

How then can the gradual, bottom up reconstruction of paradigms of political action be effective? Why reject the action of mainstream powerful political forces or even charismatic leaders that could lead humankind towards other horizons?

This debate heightens existing tensions among the Forum’s participants and organisers. Shaped as we have been by theories and practices based on vertical conceptions of the exercise of power, of militant disciplines, of politics as the struggle for hegemony, we do not always manage to divest ourselves of them—‘to learn to unlearn’ (Whitaker, 2005)—or to go on to adopt the proposals for horizontal, non-directive freedom

that is the shared experience of the Forum. Realising the Forum's power to mobilise, many are unable to resist the temptation to turn it as quickly as possible into an extremely powerful new instrument, a kind of 'movement of movements', finally capable of confronting and overthrowing the capitalist monster—and not without entertaining the idea of putting themselves forward to lead it.

But, as I have indicated before, if the Forum does become a 'movement of movements', none of these movements would be in a position to open up this space and marshal all the others to accept its invitation without conditions. Meeting with others would be restricted by the need to build another structure to unify—with all the rules necessary to make that possible—within which competition would again arise, and with it division, as a result of the fight to win space, to set directions, and to define the objectives of the new movement.

### **THE SAVIOURS**

One very concrete example of the temptation to turn WSF into a movement was an initiative launched at the 2005 Forum by a group of personalities, among them two Nobel Laureates. As intellectuals enjoying worldwide recognition, they publicised a manifesto in which they presented 12 themes of the struggle that, in their opinion, all the Forum's participants could agree on: the 'Porto Alegre Consensus', in contrast to the 'Washington Consensus'. In practice, it amounted to a new 'right thinking', mimicking the 'one truth' of those who command imperial domination. They successfully invited much of the international press present in Porto Alegre to the launch of the manifesto, which was, however, presented with the proviso that it was not a 'final document' of the Forum: otherwise it would have run counter to the Forum's Charter of Principles. Nonetheless, the intention to draw up a conclusive, consensual synthesis, the stature of its signatories and the solemnity with which it was presented necessarily left a certain ambiguity in the air.

Of course, the manifesto did not have the effect that its sponsors may have desired. It did not become a single banner hoisted collectively by the Forum's 150,000 participants. Very few of them—besides the journalists—attended the launch, which was held outside the Forum territory, in the press room of the most important hotel in town. Most participants found out about the manifesto the following day in the newspapers. As they had not been even remotely consulted on the contents of the 12 items, there was no lack of criticism of their incompleteness and of the

formulation and presentation of the manifesto as a top down initiative, calling into question the very nature of WSF.

When questioned by journalists about the nature of this initiative, the Forum's organisers had no choice but to point out that it was simply one of the 352 proposals for action presented at the Forum. They took the opportunity to emphasise that the Forum's Charter of Principles ruled out any 'final' document, which would necessarily be so reductionist and impoverished as to end up winning active support from no one; rather, instead of any single such document, hundreds or thousands of final documents should emerge, one from each activity carried out at the Forum, and each of them fully supported by those who signed it.

Actually, using the freedom of initiative that is assured to all its participants, the manifesto continued, within the Forum itself, the tradition of the great leaders that mobilise the masses. The initiative, or the manifesto, like other attempts to marshal the strength of the Forum for specific ends,<sup>4</sup> reveals the challenges we have to overcome to change current political behaviour—the Forum being, in fact, a school of new practices.

#### **PARTICIPATION BY POLITICAL PARTIES**

Another area where the provisions of the Charter of Principles are being frequently called into question relates to political parties: the Charter prohibits them from engaging in activities at the forums in the way that other civil society movements and organisations do, and from participating in organising the forums. A similar prohibition on governments and 'military' organisations is more easily accepted, since the Forum defines itself as a civil society space, independent of governments, and its participants completely reject violence as a method of political action. The prohibition on political parties, which have traditionally been considered the only route to participation in political action, is questioned repeatedly. The purpose of this prohibition was to prevent the Forum from being penetrated by inter-party strife, which derives from the goal, proper to political parties, of gaining political power. It was believed that parties would all, quite naturally, compete to 'control' the forums as a new tool for mobilising support, and seek to make them political party instruments.

Of course, people who are members of political parties have every right to take part in the forums, individually or through whatever other organisations they may belong to. It would not be practical to identify and prevent members of political parties from participating; indeed,

many of the Forum's organisers are affiliated to political parties. The hope is that no one will seek to turn the Forum space into an instrument for party political aims. As for the parties themselves, it is hoped that they will take the opportunity—while resisting the temptation to win converts—to listen to what is proposed at the forums. Later, at their own meetings, they will be able to discuss the ideas garnered in this way, decide whether or not to incorporate them into their own programmes and even associate with or collaborate in activities in the struggle proposed by Forum participants. Without a doubt, this would help them perform their own role—which is different from that of civil society as such—and at the same time rebuild their links with the grassroots.

The grassroots are indeed becoming more remote from political parties, and at the forums they find a place to engage in political activities that are broader than purely party politics. In fact, it is much more in the parties' interest to maintain the Forum as it is, with its independence from governments and parties, instead of absorbing it into their own natural contradictions, thus finally destroying it.

#### **A MORE FLEXIBLE CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES?**

Another question that arises repeatedly among the Forum's organisers and participants is this: should the Forum's initiators and supporters of the Forum space concept adopt such an unyielding stance and not permit any move towards a more flexible Charter of Principles? The answer is not easy, given the logic and coherence of the principles. Where should there be greater flexibility?

In practice, some of the groups organising forums do treat the Charter more flexibly, without much concern for the consequences. Only the World Forums held so far have strictly abided by the Charter of Principles; the same cannot be said of all the regional, national or local forums. There are cases, for example, of forums that have ended with final documents, been presented as organisations, and had spokespeople or coordinators. Others are not really 'open spaces' but rather events taken over by particular political forces. Others are organised from the top down only, as if they were seminars. One of the most flagrant cases of breach of the Charter had to do precisely with party and government participation. According to the reports of participants, the Socialist Workers' Party and Ken Livingston, Mayor of London, played central roles in the organisation of the European Social Forum held in London in March 2005.

Denouncing such breaches does not always persuade the perpetrators to change their behaviour because they may not fully understand the rationale behind the Charter of Principles. For that very reason there must be wide-ranging and in-depth discussions about the nature of the Forum so that it does not self-destruct—that was the thinking behind the workshop held at the 2003 Forum, inspired by WSF discussion list.

In order to understand the logic of the Charter of Principles, it is useful to situate the Forum in recent history. Its characteristics and principles are rooted in the moment when it came into being. This was marked by a build-up of frustrations and disappointments with the kind of political action hitherto undertaken to confront an economic and political system that had brought humankind to the difficulties it faces today. For those who initiated the Forum and those who joined them then, there was nothing to suggest that good results would come from continuing with the old methods, practices and strategies of the century that had just ended. Why then continue down that path?

The Forum proposed trying new avenues which today are proving more worthwhile. One of the initial motivations was that the former type of mobilisation, limited to protests pure and simple, which had multiplied after Seattle, had reached a stalemate and participants were already showing signs of exhaustion. When the Forum was proposed as a counterpoint to the thinking of Davos, it was insisted that it should table proposals of its own. It had to combine mobilisation with proposals and proposals with mobilisation.

For that reason, two types of concerns arose as the process developed, and the methodology employed in organising the Forums made every effort to deal with them: the need to encourage the formulation of more new initiatives to effect change in the world and the need to get the participating organisations to collaborate at the global level, before, during and after the forums in order to strengthen their actions. It was for this reason that a Mural of Proposals for Action was created during the 2005 Forum. It was to be the centrepiece of the final closing event, where all the participants would come together in all their diversity of actions and strategies and their overall unity of final aims. Because of organisational shortcomings, this did not happen. However, the Mural remained as a product of the debates and collaborations that had occurred during the Forum, and its 352 proposals were posted on the Forum's website, available to both participants and non-participants, forming the basis for further collaboration.

### **THE 'MAP OF ACTION TOWARDS BUILDING A NEW WORLD'**

Building on the Mural, which was designed to make everyone's proposals visible and to facilitate meshing and collaboration among them with a view to their implementation, a further proposal to serve the Forum as a whole was presented in the Utrecht meeting of the International Council. This was to draw up a 'Map of Action Towards Building a New World'.

The purpose of this map was to provide participating organisations with a special programme on the Internet, a kind of permanent 'Mural of Proposals', where initiatives and information on actions in progress could be added continually. Using this programme, interested parties could organise groups to discuss or act on the subjects and proposals that concerned them; they could contact other groups and invite them to consider issues or proposals in greater depth, to hold encounters and meetings and to organise demonstrations or other kinds of concrete action.

The system would function independently of the Forum events, but would be inter-connected with them because the forums would figure as special opportunities for in-person encounters and for furthering understanding and action, and thus would foster quality leaps in the effectiveness of any action proposed. Set free of the events themselves, the World Social Forum process would advance much more quickly in building an ever larger number of local, national, regional and world networks, thus empowering global civil society to achieve concrete objectives in changing the world.

Such an instrument could also work to the benefit of the approach adopted in the WSF International Council's decision to make polycentric the 2006 World Social Forum. Some events will parallel Davos, and others will follow in various regions of the world, all resting on the same participatory approach, characteristic of the process as a whole. The challenge now is to ensure coordination and articulation among them all, so that the whole is not fragmented but rather advances with increasing unity towards the World Social Forum to be held in Africa in 2007.

### **'OLD WORLD' VERSUS 'NEW WORLD'**

Among the various ways of seeing the Forum, supporters of the 'open space' proposal see the tensions indicated above as a confrontation between what they call 'old world' and 'new world' practices. In fact,

these tensions are present throughout the meetings, proposals and decisions about the organisational arrangements of the Forum process, from the local to the world level, however much their members declare and believe they are building a 'new world'. Nonetheless, it can be said with optimism that new types of relationships, which are more cooperative than competitive, are being constructed among the individuals and organisations in the Forum's various set-ups; and now, as we head towards the polycentric Forum of 2006, these advances are visible. The conception of the Forum as a movement reappears regularly in proposals and practices, but without doubt it is the Forum as an open space, along with the other provisions of the Charter, that is asserting itself increasingly.

This is shown by the remarks of some North American participants drafted after the 2005 Forum (Foltz, Moodiliar and Pramas, 2005):

The Social Forum should not be seen as the answer to the challenges of our time; it should be seen as a valuable part of the answer(s) with a very distinctive contribution. Other sites for action, for campaigning, for taking decisions are necessary for the global progressive movement; the Social Forum is an important space for incubating these; those who want action (the authors included) should get on with it and organise those actions, making as best use of the Forum as possible!

Whether or not the Forum will continue as a process in the way it has been to date depends on the orientation adopted by its organisers. In fact, we face a dual challenge. The first is not necessarily easy: to ensure that in the events that are held and the new instruments that are created, the Forum is not swallowed up by the errors of the past that led to its emergence, and that it can continue its endeavours towards the new world that is to be built. The second is as difficult as it is urgent: to expand and entrench this process all over the planet, as quickly as possible. This expansion does not seek to assert the positions of one or another political force, but is designed to make more and more people and organisations join in the hope that the Forum holds out, and participate in the change-making initiatives that are being proposed.

The intention is that increasing numbers of citizens around the world exercise actively and in solidarity—through networks—the enormous power at their disposal as workers and as consumers, and thus contribute to changing the world. At the same time, the expectation is that,

as voters, they will elect and increasingly monitor governments to ensure that they defend and promote the interests of people and not capital, in a real commitment to peace, development and social justice.

In confronting the hegemony of top down political action dependent on enlightened leaders, the Forum can play a decisive role in preventing the defeat of humanisation in the world. If it retreats within the borders of the 'old world', it will certainly disappear. In that case, we will be left watching the dream fade. The right moment will not yet have arrived to change paradigms.

### NOTES

1. Reprinted by permission from Sage Publications Ltd. from 'The World Social Forum: Where do we stand and where are we going?' by Chico Whitaker, Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Bernard Cassen, Copyright (C) Centre for the Study of Global Governance and Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economic and Political Science, and Center for Civil Society, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006.
2. This principle, combined with the priority that came to be given to the activities planned by participants, meant that from one Forum to the next, such activities grew in number, while the number of activities planned by the organisers decreased. Indeed, in 2005 the Forum was completely self-managed.
3. The paragraphs of this section are taken from Whitaker (see Annex 1, 'Notes for a debate on the World Social Forum'). This article (originally published in 2003 under the title 'Notes for a Debate on the World Social Forum') is available in three languages on the Forum website [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br). It has been published in French on the ATTAC movement website ([www.france.attac.org](http://www.france.attac.org)), in Spanish by *Revista de Fomento Social*, No. 233, vol. 59, January/March 2004 (Cordoba, Spain), in English in the book *Challenging Empires*, by Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, Peter Waterman (orgs.), The Viveka Foundation, January 2004; and in its German translation, published by Karldietz Verlag, Berlin, October 2004. It was also recently published in Italian by the organisation *Transform (Pratiche costituenti, 2005—www.transform.it)*.
4. The presence of President Lula of Brazil and President Chavez of Venezuela at the 2005 Forum could be seen as one of these attempts, in the form of reciprocal manipulation of the presidents by the organisations which of their own initiative arranged for them to be present, and of those organisations by the presidents, who took advantage of the opportunity for visibility that the Forum offered them. It remains to be seen whether the Forum gained or lost from these initiatives.

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## 12

### *Annexe*

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## **For an Evaluation of The International Study Days Project**

### **Why is it Necessary to Continue It?\***

In the 1970s I took part in the ‘International Study Days for a Society Overcoming Dominations’, a project launched by the Brazilian Episcopal Conference (CNBB) and supported by other conferences and organisations.<sup>1</sup> This project—in preparation for an international meeting to take place two years later—consisted of setting up a system for free, horizontal inter-communication among endeavours in the struggle to overcome domination and oppression in their various forms. With a view to exchanging experiences—but without yet having electronic media like the Internet at its disposal—it inter-connected groups and organisations in over 100 countries. The texts that were circulated among the participants in the first stage of the project were gathered together in a book published simultaneously in four languages in 1978.<sup>2</sup>

The rules used in this system can be said to fall within the overall set of proposals and initiatives that paved the way for the World Social Forum, at that stage of history when networks were starting to emerge as a non-directive way of inter-linking people and organisations engaged in the struggle for change following the libertarian upheavals that shook many countries in 1968. In the text ‘Citizens uprising against the established order’, (Annex 8), I refer to the ‘Study Days’ and other historic experiences.

I therefore feel that it is also useful to reproduce in this book the following text, written when the project was entering its third stage and

which was published in March 1980.<sup>3</sup> It gives pointers drawn from what was learnt in that experience,<sup>4</sup> with regard to the conditions necessary for really free, horizontal inter-communication and concepts such as power-to-serve—the exercise of which contrasts with power-to-dominate. These indications, in my opinion, are of interest to the thinking we are engaged in at the Forum.

One of the principal characteristics of the International Study Days project when it started was without doubt the pre-occupation of its organisers not to institutionalise it, nor to transform it into a new movement. On the one hand this characteristic was due to the sentiment that the research to which the project was calling us would be incompatible with the rigidity that the processes of institutionalisation almost always lead to and with the tendency towards losing sight of its objectives that in general characterise institutions. On the other hand, given the fact that the project claimed to be at the service of exchange of experiences and reflections between the existing movements, the project could not realise this task in an adequate manner if it was also to become a movement—because within the culture of domination in which we live, each movement has a tendency to enter into competition with the other movements.

However, now that we have reached the third stage of the project on the one hand we are living some kind of institutionalisation by the stability it is acquiring—and on the other, we could be led to the construction of a movement—by the natural deepening of the links that unite its participants and make them, so to say, the bearers of a common message. But the reasons for the organisers' dual initial concern about the project still seem to be valid. So, how can we withstand these tendencies?

In my opinion considering the fact that the initial objectives of the project also seem to be valid, the best way to do so would be to re-analyse it in its present form, in relation to these objectives, namely the struggle for a society overcoming domination. Or more precisely, to verify what is the real usefulness that the development of the inter-communication system, into which the project has been transformed, can have for overcoming domination. Why look for its enlargement, its expansion—or even simply, why continue with it? Considering very clearly the fact that it is not by inter-communication, nor by any other auxiliary activity that one is going to reach the overcoming of domination, but by the concrete actions of those for whom this overcoming of domination is vital. And

in attempting to answer these questions with the necessary courage to stop everything or to change entirely the orientation if the defined objectives demand it.

From when it was started, in reality our project posed to us above all a fundamental challenge: can one overcome one form of domination without having to exercise another? Does not the liberation from one form of domination always involve the establishment of another? In truth, practically all liberation struggles of all times are blocked or exhaust themselves when faced with this challenge; thus in my opinion how we answer this question will help us determine the most profound usefulness of the project.

In this perspective my analysis leads me to the conclusion that the project has a very useful role to accomplish, that it is worthwhile continuing to search how to develop it to the maximum and that the logic itself of its development can constitute a permanent antidote to the tendencies that we wish to avoid.

Such a conclusion could very well be false, for we know that it is always the 'staff' of institutions, as a result of the interests that are created for them, who do the most to maintain and develop their institutions—and I am a member of the Paris bureau that is the only group of participants in the project who find themselves up to a certain point 'professionalised' in its realisation. I can also form my own impressions due to the fact that I work intensively for the project every day. But, hoping to have sufficiently taken into account these risks, I base myself on the discoveries that we have made during the development of the project, because the challenge that it posed to us also obliged us automatically to search for a response already in the way of realising the project. And the methods and rules of work that have been adopted by all those who have participated in the project have constituted an attempt at responding to this demand, and in so doing to the fundamental challenge of the project.

After having presented the main discoveries which in my opinion we have made up to now, I shall indicate the two levels of utility that I see in the project: as a network of mutual aid and as a process of 're-education' for effective inter-communication.

## **1. THE FIRST ORIENTATIONS**

At the beginning it involved preparing an international meeting with a clearly defined objective. But pushed forward by the challenge that the

project constituted, those who were responsible were obliged to seek a new type of meeting. Because normally, international meetings rarely escape the practice of domination: in general they are reduced to meetings of 'specialists' who have the means to meet and serve and above all to reinforce the links and make possible the exchange of favours between the members of these 'clubs' of privileged people. And doing this even when the theme chosen is injustice in the world. As a final result this makes possible the exchange of very serious ideas about the poor and the oppressed, without moving on very much in the struggle against poverty and oppression.

The method used to prepare the meeting was thus a first attempt at escaping from this practice: it was undertaken in such a manner that most of those invited to participate in it would be those who have the greatest interest in overcoming domination, namely, those who are subject to it. Thus it was proposed that they start preparing the meeting through an analysis of their own situations and the struggles that they were developing to liberate themselves from domination. At the same time two 'secretariats' were made available for this preparation, charged with the responsibility of translating these studies and sending them to all those who were available to participate. Thanks to this the preparation of the meeting had already established a usefulness that was equivalent to that which the meeting would eventually have: at the international level an instrument of mutual aid in the reflection of those who would be participating was created. Likewise a pedagogy had been put into motion that could lead those who were involved in concrete actions to reflect more systematically on their own action, their objectives and their methods.

In truth this preparatory work reached those who are really the most oppressed, to give them this chance of speaking and exchange only in a very limited way. But it was revealed to be a sufficiently rich practice to become progressively the essential activity developed in the framework of the project. The possibilities of inter-communication had begun to be discovered. To such an extent that the pressures, directed at the CNBB (the initiator of the project) to give up the idea of the meeting, did not succeed in stopping the 'dynamic' thus begun. On the contrary the project transformed itself into a concrete practice of liberation from a specific domination—that which seeks to prevent the development of free and direct links between the dominated, the sole means able to neutralise the fundamental weapon of the dominating, that is, the division of the dominated.

Our project of preparing for an international meeting was thus transformed into a system of inter-communication. If we want, the meeting of Joao Pessoa could in fact be considered as the international meeting initially previewed, which was held one year later. But it was already lived as a means—qualitatively different—of an inter-communication already going on.

## 2. THE DISCOVERY OF INTER-COMMUNICATION

Thus the 'secretariats' of the project functioned during the first stage as centres for disseminating documents that were sent to them for publication.

All communication and its circulation are useful and important for those who are struggling for social change: they break down isolation and encourage new contacts to adapt information and knowledge, stimulate action, comparison and reflection, make possible the consolidation of a collective 'memory'. We could thus limit ourselves to this service and ensure a certain usefulness of the project, even if it remained—when compared with other initiatives of the same type although having greater means and experience—characterised by a level more modest. But pushed on by the challenge that it constituted for us we were obliged to adopt procedures of work that had little in common with those adopted in 'centres' of dissemination: neither the secretariats, nor the 'coordination' was to judge the value of the documents sent for publication, neither select them nor order them into a hierarchy, but publish everything that was sent to them, strictly according to the chronological order in which they were received, without adding or subtracting anything, respecting evidently the criteria accepted by all. Similarly, we were only to send the documents published to those who had specifically indicated to us their interest to receive them; and all the documents published to all those who put their name down, no matter where in the world and regardless of their branch of work or their level of responsibility.

These rules and the international character of the project have thus given it additional utility: it was possible to have information available that was not manipulated and without intermediaries, it broke down sectorial, geographic and hierarchical barriers able to block knowledge and action, it made possible the discovery of situations deliberately not made public by controlled information systems, or of the myths existing about the differences between the situations lived in the developed and under-developed countries, and also the discovery of the mechanisms of domination common to both, and their inter-relations.

But the most important consequence of the adoption of these rules has been the discovery of the differences between a service of dissemination of documents and a service which sought to develop inter-communication—as that was envisaged in the project. In fact every ‘centre’ of dissemination is obliged to choose what it publishes, either because the resources for dissemination are always limited, or because it is always necessary to prove, so as not to lose the ‘audience’ that what is made known is what is the most important, really useful information. But, if it communicates only what it considers as important and useful, it finishes by exercising a control and power over what is made known. When, in inter-communication, such decisions should be within the scope, only and exclusively, of those who seek to communicate amongst themselves. Or, when for dissemination the relation is established between the necessities of dissemination defined by the centre and the clients it claims to serve, in a system of inter-communication everything should strictly depend on the necessity of inter-communication between those who make it up. It should disappear if no one wants to communicate and develop if inter-communication becomes still more necessary. Once the process has been started by a ‘centre’—an initiative must always exist—it should really no longer depend on the decisions of the ‘centre’, so that it becomes absolutely dependant on the decisions of those who use it. This has repercussions in its own form of existence. [1]

From this, and evidently without denying the importance of ‘dissemination centres’—normally and naturally concerned with making known information related to the ideas and orientations of those who ensure their functioning—we discovered how rare were the means and occasions available for ‘inter-communication’. A discovery that we are increasingly verifying in our own practice, by the continual pressure that we must exert against the pressures of habits and traditional expectations that always suppose or expect a control on our part over what we make known. [2] And it is by resisting in this way that we have been able to take a step forward in our discoveries: the step that has enabled us to identify more clearly the conditions so that inter-communication, once necessary and wished for, becomes real and effective.

### **3. THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE INTER-COMMUNICATION**

I cite eight requirements that it would be necessary to respect to obtain real and effective inter-communication.

Firstly, *Freedom of Expression*, which constitutes what is effectively at stake in all control of dissemination. In truth, so that inter-communication be effective—once it is necessary and wished for, and on the basis of a common objective that everyone seeks to realise—neither the ‘services’ that make it materially possible, nor any of those who participate, can assume the power of censure over what some wish to communicate to others. If censorship begins to exist inter-communication will cease automatically and everything will be reduced to the simple level of ‘communication’ at the service of those who have the power over the resources being used. The sole limitation for existing is obedience of the criteria adopted by all the participants as the ‘rules of the game’—criteria that could evidently be more or less limiting depending on the objectives of the inter-communication and the resources available to achieve it, but the observance of which must also remain the responsibility of all. [3]

The liberty of expression will be followed, almost as a corollary, by a second requirement: *The Liberty of Information*. That is to say that all must have access to everything that the others wish to communicate to them and which serves the realisation of the objectives which they share. In order that the inter-communication not be blocked it is necessary that all also have the right to know everything that is situated within the context of the common struggle. A requirement that is not always easy to respect. [4]

Together, the liberty of expression and information are in fact the conditions for the search of truth. But this demands also that these liberties be exercised with *Equality of Opportunity*.

In fact, the effective conditions of inter-communication imply the refusal of all preference or privilege between those who participate in it, whatever the criteria that one seeks to adopt. All communication must be valued by its content and not by the position of the person communicating it. All must be able to speak and be listened to equally, regardless of the hierarchical position, level of education or experience, social function or position, moral, intellectual or political authority of each. Otherwise some will have more liberty than the others and for many liberty would not even exist.

These conditions together take us further: those who are disposed in favour of adopting them must necessarily exercise *Mutual Respect* and an *Openness towards the others*.

For all that we will have to listen to everybody even though it might not necessarily be in agreement with what we think, and may not

correspond to what we consider as true, or important, or opportune or valuable and may even find it annoying. But for us to be respected in our positions and options, we must in the same way respect the positions and options of other: the respect for what the other thinks or does, for the rhythm of each and his level in the process of struggle in which we are involved; the receptiveness to what is new and unexpected, to that which poses questions to us or challenges us, or to perspectives and pre-occupations that we would have been able to leave aside because they are difficult to accept. As in a dialogue this is really fraternal.

Two new conditions then arise, in order to be able to respect those already discussed: mutual confidence and active responsibility.

Indeed, without *Mutual Confidence* one cannot assume the risks of such a liberty, of equality, of respect and receptivity. We must believe in the fact that the other person assumes these risks; that he agrees to the confidence that we place in him and that he assumes the responsibility of this confidence. That is to say that the others are effectively united with us for the realisation of our common objective, and because of that they too respect sincerely and reciprocally our liberty, they respect us and are open to what we say to them.[5]

Mutual confidence is necessarily coupled with *Active Co-Responsibility*: inter-communication lived in this way is in truth a service that one renders for the others, mutually, to realise the objective that they have in common. The consequences of the choice of what is going to be or what has to be said must take into account he who will listen, and must be assumed in full responsibility by he who is going to say it. The resources for inter-communication, which are common to all, must merit from each person the same concern for efficiency and economy, and all must really try to assure the availability of resources. All can and should react against everything that seems to them to go against effective inter-communication and the achievement of common objectives, and similarly should take all initiatives that could help the inter-communication or directly the realisation of these common objectives, without being dependant on any 'centre' and without the intermediation of any 'centre'. [6]

Taken as a whole these requirements of effective inter-communication cannot be considered as simple criteria chosen from among others equally possible: they are determined by a fundamental characteristic of all collective work, which is the natural diversity and heterogeneity of

those who participate in it and the 'dynamic' of conflicts that follows from this.

In reality, no personal history is equal to another, no past, no temperament is identical to another, no experience or event marks different people in the same way; and similarly, the resources that one or the other disposes of are always different. It is thus that when several people unite around a common objective, even if this objective is very particular or limited, diversity necessarily arises as a condition even of human existence. And from this fact conflicts arise. This does not concern irreparable oppositions like those between the dominators and the dominated, but irreparable conflicts even among people united in a common objective.

The last demand that I would identify for effective inter-communication would be therefore the *Acceptance of Heterogeneity and of The 'Dynamic' of Conflicts that go with it*, a condition that brings us back to the demands already noted. For the sole way of avoiding that these conflicts be resolved by crushing those who find themselves in a position of inferiority—that which of course destroys unity and gives rise to the wasting of forces—is to assure, permanently, for all: the liberty of expression and information, the equality of chances, respect and mutual confidence, openness and active co-responsibility. [7]

#### 4. TOWARDS A PRACTICE OF 'SERVICE-POWER'

In endeavouring that the relations between the participants of the project be real and effective inter-communication, we have also seen that an inter-communication of this type can constitute a concrete base for a form of the exercise of power that is different from the habitual practice: 'service-power'. That is to say, the use of one's own power, not to maintain it or to increase it, but to reinforce the power of those one wants to serve.

In reality, CNBB right from the beginning, and all of those who took specific responsibilities in the project, were already undertaking in the practice of the project, an experience of this type: by not making exclusive use of the 'power of communication' that the project offered us so that it could become an 'inter-communication system', we were automatically sharing this power with all those who wanted to become part of our 'inter-communication network'.

Hence we discovered that through the network of real and effective inter-communication that we were attempting to create, all the participants

could also undertake the same kind of experience, that is to share the diverse kinds of power on which each counts in terms of experience, knowledge, information, material resources and possibilities of action. And we also discovered that this form of the exercise of power leads, paradoxically, to the reinforcement of the power of each person who thus exercises it. For this power will not be an isolated power but a part of the power resulting from the union of all in the almost infinite diversity of needs and possibilities that characterise human beings.

Thus, it was the whole problematic of power that became clearer by the discovery of the character of the 'service-power' that is symmetrically opposed to the use of power that we are used to, namely 'domination-power'.

What we call 'domination-power' is the type of exercise of power that aims to assure the control of available resources. He who exercises power in this way is thus permanently struggling against everything and all those who could take this control from him. Even simple delegation of power is dangerous for him for all that is not concentrated in his hands is in the hands of someone else, in the hands of others who he necessarily considers as being in competition with him, trying as soon as possible to be dominating in his place. This is thus an exercise of power that does not allow 'inter-communication' with anybody, for even if a determined final objective is shared with others, everything is undertaken first of all for the maintenance and augmentation of one's own power.

'Domination-power' is thus essentially competitive; it tends to concentrate and is exclusive. It is necessarily without pity, without respect for others and isolated. It never looks for unity and only yields to this in terms of tactical alliances. It crushes, and if need be eliminates—even physically—anyone opposed to it.

With 'service-power' everything goes on in a completely opposite way. Contrary to the competition of domination-power—where every one constitutes first of all a potential enemy—the exercise of service-power is based on cooperation. Contrary to the struggle for hegemony—an essential element of the 'dynamic' of the concentration of power—with service-power the pre-occupation is decentralisation, having confidence in he who one wants to help to assume his own responsibilities. Instead of deepening and benefiting from dependence as domination-power does, service-power looks to develop self-responsibility and initiative. Instead of being, as domination-power, necessarily limited by

the possibilities of control, and thus being limited, service-power opens immense perspectives of power that indefinitely increases thanks to sharing and mutual help.

### **5. THE FIRST LEVEL OF THE UTILITY OF THE PROJECT**

It is in this perspective that appears, in my view, the first level of the utility of the project: as an instrument of developing the only effective cement that can establish union between the dominated, that is the exercise of service-power between all those dominated—at local, national and international levels, within sectors or between sectors—with liberty of expression and information, equality, confidence and mutual respect, openness and co-responsibility, taking advantage of the heterogeneity.

This utility could be still greater if we take into account the fact that our actual network of information counts still more on the participation of ‘intermediaries’ than on that of people who are effectively dominated and oppressed. That is to say if the foremost pre-occupation of these ‘intermediaries’ was the achievement of one of the aspirations of those who participated in the Joao Pessoa meeting: to ensure that the greatest number of groups and people of the world of the oppressed—for whom the overcoming of domination is a really vital need—begin to make use of the inter-communication network that we have created and can still create with the project.

For in developing mutual help and power together in the conditions of inter-communication looked for in our project, they will be able on the one hand to liberate themselves also from all kinds of ‘intermediaries’ who orient, censure, control, direct and finally dominate and block liberation; [8] and on the other, the ‘intermediaries’ themselves—to whom will be reserved the permanent invitation to exercise all the power they have available in terms of service-power to serve the inter-communication between the oppressed—will have the possibility of a practice helping them also to liberate themselves from the vanity and values of the world of the dominating, in which they have been educated and in which they live. In reality, it is possible that we have already gone beyond, in many countries from the time of ‘awareness building’ with the intermediaries, to that of ‘inter-awareness building’ between the oppressed. [9]

But these possibilities that the development of our project—and all other initiatives of the same kind—open to all those who are struggling against domination also bring forth new strategies in the way to confront the dominating. Strategies that can save us from the tendency of moving

forward while substituting one domination for another. It is there that we again find the fundamental challenge of our project.

## **6. THE TRAP OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DOMINATION**

In fact for the struggle against domination we almost always fall into a veritable trap.

On the one hand, being dominated, we always exercise the power we have available really at the service of those who dominate us, and who oblige us to do this to be able to benefit the maximum from what we do. To defend ourselves from this extortion we try to reduce it to a minimum and get the maximum of that which those who dominate us are disposed to yield to us in exchange for what we give them. In a society where relations of domination prevail we are thus conditioned by the 'dynamic' of domination-power, even to the extent of the way we defend ourselves from this domination. A 'dynamic' that is evidently incompatible with a relation that is without domination: service-power is necessarily characterised by gratuity in terms of direct benefit from it, and supposes a voluntary reciprocity in all the relations between those who exercise it.

On the other hand, given that the overcoming of domination depends on the passing of the power over the resources controlled by the dominating—those which the dominated have need of—into the hands of the dominated, all liberation struggles finish by being formulated in terms of the taking of a determined power—or of 'the' power, when it concerns the State apparatus. Now similarly in our struggle against the power of the dominant, we are pulled towards the 'dynamic' of their universe, for because of the fact that they are dominating we are led to use against them also their own arms—the arms of domination-power.

This double attraction towards the universe of the dominating thus has as a result that this dynamic of domination also invades our relations with our own allies. This is the trap. Caught in this trap we divide and weaken ourselves. That is to say that we do not live with our allies—despite our common objective—the conditions of real and effective inter-communication and because of that our relations with them are not undertaken in terms of service-power, when it is this that would enable us to gain the necessary strength to defeat domination. Instead of that we look in our own camp for the same effectiveness as that of the dominating, namely, that which serves to dominate.

The difficulties to construct unity between those who are struggling today to free themselves from domination in the political domain are the

flagrant results of these mechanisms. That is to say that exactly where we must increase our strength the most in order to face up to those who control the immense material, technological and military power that holds or tends to hold the modern State apparatus, we divide ourselves and compete with each other to control the power we dispose of.

The political organisations that propose taking power ‘for the people’ seem to confront themselves more vigorously than they do those who control the power they want to take. And within these organisations the greatest part of the energy is used in an equally pitiless struggle for the power to control them. All thus lose sight of their real enemy and finish by mutually destroying each other. Meanwhile the people, who one claims to serve, continue being exploited, while indefinitely ‘awaiting’ their ‘liberation’ when they are not bearing the costs themselves of the internal struggles within these organisation: by being used as an instrument, as a mass to be manoeuvred—or cannon fodder—or, still more tragically, being massacred by the dominating all the more violently as the dominating see themselves threatened, and want by the demonstration of their force to frighten the people and discourage them from following those who propose that they defend them but do not have the strength to do so.

The weakness of these organisations multiplies as a consequence the number of times in which the ‘people united’ finish by being beaten, because in reality they do not constitute a people and they are not united: there are only the political organisations that claim to represent them and who struggle between themselves to conquer them and to conquer in a hegemonic way the power of the dominating. Their victories often only being possible when the errors of the dominating accumulate to the point of weakening them, to such a point that a transitory union of those who combat them suffices to defeat them. For all that, in the case of victory, without escaping the establishment of new kinds of oppression, nourished by the dynamic of domination-power.

## **7. THE CONDITIONS FOR A NEW TYPE OF CONFRONTATION**

It seems difficult to escape the extortion exercised by the dominating without acting in the perspective of the ‘relation of forces’, that goes with relation of domination. But concerning the direct struggle for power over the resources with which we are dominated, would it not be possible to confront the dominating with arms that do not turn against those who use them?

The reflections and experiences published within the framework of the project and the discoveries made through the inter-communication led me to identify two ways in which to exercise power which would open this possibility.

First of all, the exercise of the power each of us disposes in terms of *Counter-Power*, that which aims to neutralise the power of the dominating over the resources that they dispose of—as the stopping of a factory or the denouncing of a lie. In the second place, the exercise of an *Alternative-Power*, which aims to eliminate our dependence on the dominating—when for example we discover the ways to satisfy a given need without using resources owned and controlled by the dominating.

By using these two means, victory over the dominating would become viable if our alternative-power renders us sufficiently independent vis-à-vis resources under the control of the dominating and enables us to use our counter-power to completely immobilise them. It would thus become viable if instead of ‘taking the power’ of the dominating, we had an ‘other’ power.

It is certain that with this form of struggle we would not be necessarily condemned to exercise this ‘other’ power also in terms of domination-power. But the most efficient antidote against this tendency would be found in the condition itself that must be respected so that the counter-power and the alternative-power could sufficiently augment to really overcome the domination being affronted namely all those involved in the endeavour to unite by means of the cement of service-power. Thus living, in the process of the struggle itself, this new type of power in such a way that after the victory the dynamic that would prevail would be that of the relation without domination.

It is evident that to effectively reach victory, these three types of power—counter-power, alternative-power and service-power—would have to be exercised in an indissoluble way. [10].

But on the other hand, in order to be able to be developed together, these three forms of power would demand a new strategy of political action: one endeavouring to multiply all kinds of initiatives that lead, on the one hand to resolving ‘alternatively’ all the types of problems and on the other to immobilise the dominating each time this is possible, at all levels and in all aspects; these initiatives unifying and articulating themselves, at national and international levels, through networks of real inter-communication that enable the permanent and growing exercise of service-power, towards all the kinds of solidarity between all those who,

within the immense mass of the dominated today, are struggling against domination. In such a way that all of them together render effective the immeasurable force that this mass can have, thanks to the continual advance of each of its elements.

A strategy of this kind would lead without doubt to the construction of a social movement that would be much more powerful than any form of domination: a social movement having many forms, multi-sectorial, self-directed, decentralised and non-hegemonic, free, dynamic, permanently growing and difficult to repress. A social movement cemented by the service-power which, in not crushing minorities, transforms heterogeneity into a richness of resources; and which, in enabling the most advanced to help those who are behind or who are just starting out, means that as a result no one limits themselves to the borders of their particular action. With a growing diversity of initiatives and the union around common objectives leading to a growing complexity of interdependence, a movement of this kind could escape the need—and the risks—of a single ‘direction’ of ‘specialists’ in leadership. For it would have the conditions to support its advancement by a succession of ‘coordinations’ set up according to the objectives to be reached at each point. Each coordination being able to be dissolved at the end of its task, to give way to another coordination better suited to the following task. Or in resisting the temptation of effectiveness, to give its place to others less experienced, whose progression nevertheless would increase the overall effectiveness. In summary, it would be the type of social movement that could effectively constitute a concrete and solid social base for the birth of a culture of non-domination.

### **8. THE MOST PROFOUND UTILITY OF THE PROJECT**

One can imagine the functioning of a social movement of this type and its force, counting on the sum of the forces of articulated myriad groups able to control the small or large systems charged with responding to their needs, able to stop all that is inhuman and start living, supported by the ‘inventiveness’ and the creativity that the base always manifests, according to styles of life and work that would not necessarily involve oppression and death.

But it is also possible to verify that it involves a difficult progression, for a social movement of this kind would demand a profound re-education of our political behaviour—formed, since the beginning of human history by a continual succession of structures of domination and

struggles for domination-power by those who have been dominated in each phase of history.

However, we can say that there is, like an intuitive force that seems to be emerging in the world as a whole, the search for alternatives to the dynamic of domination-power. It is evident that the strategy that will be found in the end could be totally different from the one identified here. But any new strategy will have to confront a long process of re-education—with even more urgency as the logic of domination-power is leading us more and more quickly to a world entirely dominated by the confrontation between the development-suicide of capitalism and the immense growing power of the bureaucratic States. And it is certain that throughout this re-education the essential element will be to learn to live a real and effective inter-communication with one's fellow men.

Now it is in a process of re-education of this kind that our project will be able to find its most profound utility—as well as serving as a concrete network for mutual help. And above all in multiplying meetings—more difficult, but touching us more profoundly than written inter-communication, as was verified in Joao Pessoa—at national, regional, and international levels. Meetings in which no one sees himself as obliged to defend himself, but in which all are invited to open themselves; in which one will not directly endeavour to programme concrete actions—in these we will always be employed in our respective involvements—but in exerting ourselves effectively to a real inter-communication towards the exchange of experiences, reflections and resources and towards the discovery of new possibilities of solidarity. Just as we proposed to do ourselves from the basis of the Joao Pessoa meeting.

If we should succeed in this our project will become a permanent school, without masters or pupils, multi-present, carrying our experiments and continually recreating itself on the initiative of those who have need of it, where and each time they have need, under the responsibility of those who wish to assume the responsibility of this task and mutually re-educate themselves, with all those who accept the challenge that the project presents.

It is in this perspective that it will be so much more useful as it develops. And it will be able to experience this expansion without fear of institutionalising itself or of transforming itself into a movement, thanks to its own manner of existing and developing. If the opportunities of effective inter-communication, of the type we are looking for, repeat

themselves to a maximum in the framework of our project but also independently of it, parallel to the liberating action of each of the participants; if these opportunities really enable, in a practice of veritable mutual help, that all can draw the necessary lessons from the victories as from the failures lived, the putsches, wars and lies by which the dominating try to maintain domination, the changes produced and the form in which they were put into effect, it is then, at the same time as the good or bad victories of the present political struggles will be accumulated, that it will be possible to prepare the great and lasting victory of the people who will then be really and effectively united because of this fact and they will never be defeated. Towards the fraternal society that we all wish to construct. [11]

## NOTES

- \* Original in Portuguese published in March 1980.
- The project was supported by the Federation of Asian Episcopal Conferences, the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Canada, the French Episcopal Conference, the Ecumenical Service Coordination (CESE), Brazil and the International Commission of Jurists. It received financial support from some dozen Christian third world aid organisations.
- *Por uma sociedade superando as dominações — 1ª. etapa do projeto das Jornadas Internacionais*, book published in Portuguese in the collection *Estudos da CNBB*, No. 19, Edições Paulinas, São Paulo; in French, by Desclée de Brouwer, Paris; in Spanish by *Librería y Editorial América Latina*, Bogotá; and in English in the United States by Valley Offset, Inc., New York.
- This text was published as part of the Study Days, as ‘Discussion Text’ No. 139, alongside the ‘Case Studies’, ‘Summaries’ and ‘Overall Approaches’ which were the substance of the international inter-communication process set up by the project.
- As the title of Chapter 4.7 of this book says, ‘All in good time’: in 1980, the same year that the Study Days project was entering its decentralisation stage, after which it was terminated, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers’ Party, PT) was founded in Brazil, carrying with it the hope that political power could be won and the world changed by the traditional means of political action.
- 1. For example, in the case of written inter-communication, given that disseminated information will only be received and read by those who feel the necessity to inter-communicate, even the demands of graphic presentations—so important in a world where everything must be sold—becomes, within certain limits, secondary.
- 2. The way in which even today numerous new—and even old—participants address our office in Paris, shows clearly the type of pressure of which we are the object to act according to custom: they ask us to decide the ‘usefulness’ ‘for our work’ of a text which they send to us, to choose ‘what interests us’ among the texts in a publication, or they say ‘if it’s possible’ to publish such and such text. In the first stage, most of the attacks against the ‘coordination’ of the Project consisted of saying that we didn’t

know how to choose the published texts, or that we published inopportune or 'non-representative' or even 'unacceptable' texts. Without speaking of the numerous suggestions like we should give complete information supplied in the texts, that we should summarise it; that we 'improve' the editing of the texts or that we arrange all the articles like they are in good journals. Concerning the dispatches, people often find it strange that we don't send our documents to those considered 'compulsory' recipients of such texts or are particularly important—who however have never shown their interest in participating in the inter-communication in progress. People are also surprised that we don't take certain 'initiatives' especially concerning the dissemination of information for obtaining solidarity for special struggles. We get a lot of information about, for example, what happens with all the centres of dissemination, without however any special specification on what we must communicate to the other members of the inter-communication network. The pressures also come from ourselves; we must also control continually the editing of our letters to participants so as not to adopt the position of 'editing managers' or 'directors of publication' and not to multiply these letters beyond a strictly necessary level to clarify instructions; just as we must have the simplicity to draw the attention of a participant to the usefulness he makes to our inter-communication system as if we were one of numerous services of dissemination on which he could count upon. The pressures that we suffer from very often force us to 'exaggerate' on what concerns obedience to adopted norms. For example, in small details like refusing to use headed note paper for our mail, or the non-sending of documents—starting from the second stage—to people who we know are interested in the project but who don't show any interest in receiving the published documents in an active way.

3. Many of those who have a certain difficulty in understanding our Project, pre-occupy themselves with the 'neutrality' that we must have when confronted with the texts we receive. These people are confusing this neutrality with a neutrality that is impossible when we are confronting domination or with a claim of conciliation, between the dominated and those who dominate, through the inter-communication: our project situating itself nevertheless in the framework of the struggle 'for a society overcoming domination', our 'neutrality', as all 'neutrality', isn't something amorphous which floats in space; it's at the service of something to be obtained through it and it corresponds to a very concrete option envisaging an objective that is equally concrete. What happens is that in reality, it is extremely difficult to accept and ensure a real freedom of expression, be it only in the oppressed camp.
4. Very often, pre-occupations with the efficiency of the action lead us to hide the use of one of the most typical arms of domination, that of the control of information under the name of caution. Perhaps this is the reason why the demand for freedom of information always appears to those who dominate as something subversive, more subversive than the freedom of expression. This aspect is certainly felt by a number of those who don't encourage a greater integration of our project in their own institutions.
5. Within an inter-communication like that looked for in our Project, given the breadth of our general objective and the fact that the dividing line between the two camps, dominated and those who dominate, is sometimes hazy the demand for mutual trust can be particularly difficult. This lack of precise interests, by the way, is made even more accentuating by many dominating people by integrating, for example, in their camp the dominated people who fear the changes that the overcoming of domination

brings. But the camp of the dominated is sufficiently and immensely vast so that, in the heart of it, mutual trust can be exercised. A trust which also must be extended to those who belong to this camp or who when confronted by it, joined it, through a coherence with the principles which they adopt, but who have not as yet arrived at involving themselves in concrete struggles. Or those who are already involved in concrete struggles, but are still in the manner itself they lead their struggles. It will be precisely this trust which will mobilise the true ones and which will question the others.

6. The concern to take on its responsibilities, not to depend on any centre and to take initiatives should be totally ensured by the Project participants, during the third stage if the hypotheses we are presenting on its usefulness are correct.
7. It's concerning the heterogeneity which the Project has that challenges us in a particularly pointed way. Because the generality of our objective and the breadth of our field of inter-communication makes us live an important heterogeneity which makes it even more difficult to respect the demands that we must respect. It can be that we were more aware of this heterogeneity and the difficulty which goes with it during the Joao Pessoa meeting. Firstly because in this meeting we had probably a representative sample of the actual participants of our network and their diversity of experiences, options and type of work and even relative expectations from the project. Next, because throughout the meeting we had to try and live the freedom of expression, equality, trust and mutual respect, the opening of the mind and the active co-responsibility as a daily practice of a life in common, what is much more difficult than the inter-communication through the intermediary of written texts that can 'be put to one side' or for a bit later. But it was also at this meeting that we tested in a decisive way the real possibility of accepting positively the heterogeneity and the dynamic of conflicts which accompanies it. Because, despite the insufficiencies of this meeting, we were able to live our heterogeneity in an effective inter-communication, and we all came out of it stronger to take up our actions against domination.
8. In my opinion, this observation has an importance because the 'intermediary' is, in the last analysis, someone from the world of those who dominate, who puts himself on the side of the dominated. Thus he continues, in part, to benefit directly or indirectly from the global system of domination and this influences him, even unconsciously, in his attitudes when confronted with more radical changes. On the other hand, being born and having been formed in the world of the dominators, the 'intermediary' is much more influenced by the values of this world than the perspectives of 'service-power' This finishes by leading him to transform the struggles for liberation that he claims to be helping, into struggles of competition for the 'leadership' of the liberation. Even though sometimes with the best intentions—for example, when he claims that 'his' orientation is the only correct one; the one that leads in fact, to liberation. And this only results in replacing one domination with another, or what's worse, perpetuating or even reinforcing the domination that one claims to be overcoming.
9. It's through this perspective that one can perhaps better understand why our Project has come from the initiative of the Brazilian Church: the greatest wealth of the practice developed by numerous sectors of this Church is probably the type of exercise of service-power which encourages inter-communication between the oppressed. A very clear and concrete example is perhaps the aid given by the 'Indians Missionary Council' (CIMI) towards the holding of assemblies of Indians leaders.

10. In fact the exercise of counter-power without any alternative is either useful for the dominator—who always will yield only what could be sufficient to calm the tensions—or leads to chaos that can only be followed by a new domination-power. As the isolated exercise of alternative-power can also be very useful for the dominator to canalise the creativity towards promoting needs to which the dominator doesn't have the possibility to respond, thus freeing for himself the resources for activities most interesting for himself—like, for example, the development of instruments which maintain domination (the receptiveness which one meets today from the official institutions, the efforts for alternative technologies, contain perhaps a trap that the dominant system prepares for us); like the isolated exercise of service-power can be extremely useful for the dominator because it creates an atmosphere of reconciliation capable of hiding the irrevocable opposition between the dominators and the dominated.
11. If the reflections presented in these pages are valid, they also constitute a provocation to all the Christians participating in the project. Born from one of their Churches, the project in truth questions us also very profoundly. Isn't there some relation between the exercise of service-power and the example left for us by Christ? Between the demands of effective inter-communication and the conditions of love? Between the necessary re-education in order to construct a world overcoming domination and the role of the Church in the necessary conversion so that we will rediscover brotherhood? Between exchange meetings in the respect and the trust and the occasions when Christ-love becomes present when we meet together as brothers? But these sorts of reflections don't enter into the limits of the present contribution and can be better developed by others more capable of situating the searches of our Project in the search for God which is lived by many amongst us.



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