

Section 6

Porto Alegre Manifesto

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6.1

Porto Alegre Manifesto

Group of Nineteen, February 20, 2005

ZMag edit : There was much ado about a document put out by I think it was nineteen notable figures at this years' WSF. Oddly, the document itself wasn't dispersed very visibly or widely, perhaps in part because there was considerable consternation over process as well as some content, I think rightly. We have received what claims to be a translation, and it sounds like it is, so it seemed worthwhile to pass it along as a commentary, as a kind of document of record...

@ http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/20group_of_nineteen.cfm

PORTO ALEGRE MANIFESTO:

Twelve proposals for another possible world

Since the first World Social Forum took place on January 2001, the social forum phenomenon has extended itself to all continents, at both national and local levels. It has resulted in the emergence of a worldwide public space for citizenship and strife, and permitted the elaboration of political proposals as alternatives to the tyranny of neoliberal globalisation by financial markets and transnational corporations, with the imperialistic, military power of the United States as its armed exponent.

Thanks to its diversity and solidarity between its actors, and the social movements of which it is composed, the alternative global movement has become a force to be taken into consideration globally. Many of the innumerable proposals which have been put forward on the forums have been supported by many social movements worldwide. We, the signers of the Porto Alegre Manifesto, by no means pretend to speak in the name of the entire World Social Forum, but speak on a strictly personal basis.

We have identified twelve such proposals, which we believe, together, give sense and direction to the construction of another, different world. If they would be implemented, it would allow citizens to take back their own future. We therefore want to submit these fundamentals points to the scrutiny of actors and social movements of all countries. It will be them that, at all levels - worldwide, continentally, nationally and locally- will move forward and fight for these proposals to become reality.

Indeed, we have no illusions about the real commitment of governments and international institutions to spontaneously implement any of these proposals, even though they might claim to do so, out of opportunism.

Another different world must respect the rights for all human beings to live, by the implementations of new economic measures. Therefore, it's necessary to:

1. Cancel the external debt of southern countries, which has been already paid many times over, and which constitutes the privileged means of creditor states, local and international financial institutions, to keep the largest part of humanity under their control and sustain their misery. This measure needs to be complemented by the restitution of the gigantic sums which have been stolen by their corrupt leaders.
2. Implement international taxes on financial transactions (most notably the Tobin tax on speculative capital), on direct foreign investments, on consolidated profit from multinationals, on weapon trade and on activities accompanied by large greenhouse effect gas emissions. Such financial means, complemented by public development help which should imperatively be 0.7% of the GNP of rich countries, should be directed towards fighting big epidemics (like AIDS), guarantee access to all humanity to clean water, housing, energy, health services and medication, education, and other social services.

3. Progressively dismantle all forms of fiscal, juridical and banking paradises, which do nothing more than facilitate organized crime, corruption, illegal trafficking of all kinds, fraud and fiscal evasion, and large illegal operations by large corporations and even governments. These fiscal paradises are not only limited to certain states, existing in areas of non-legality; they also exist within the legislation of developed countries. In a first instance, it would be advisable to strongly tax capital flux entering and leaving these 'paradises', as well as all establishments and actors, financial or otherwise, taking part in these gigantic transactions.

4. All inhabitants of this planet must have the right to be employed, to social protection and retirement/pension, respecting equal rights between men and women. This should be an imperative of all public polity systems, both national and international.

5. Promote all forms of equitable trade, reject all free-trade agreements and laws proposed by the World Trade Organization, and putting in motion mechanisms allowing a progressive upward equalisation of social and environmental norms (as defined under the conventions by the International Labour Organization) on the production of goods and services. Education, health, social services and culture should be excluded from the scope of the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) by the WTO.

The convention on cultural diversity, currently being negotiated at UNESCO, must result in cultural rights and politics of public cultural support to explicitly prevail over commercial rights.

6. Guarantee the right to for all countries to alimentary sovereignty and security by promoting peasant, rural agriculture. This means a total suppression of all subventions to the export of agricultural products, mainly by the USA and the European Union, and the ability to tax imports to avoid dumping practices. In the same way, every country or group of countries must be able to decide in a sovereign way to forbid the production and import of genetically modified organism, meant for consumption.

7. Forbid all type of patenting of knowledge on living beings (human, animal or vegetal) as well as any privatization of common goods for humanity, particularly water.

B. Another possible world must sustain community life in peace and justice, for all humanity. Therefore is it necessary to:

8. Fight by means of public policies against all kinds of discrimination, sexism, xenophobia, antisemitism and racism. Fully recognize the political, cultural and economic rights (including the access to natural resources) of indigenous populations.

9. Take urgent steps to end the destruction of the environment and the threat of severe climate changes due to the greenhouse effect, resulting from the proliferation of individual transportation and the excessive use of non-renewable energy sources. Start with the execution of an alternative development model, based on the sparing/efficient use of energy, and a democratic control of natural resources, most notably potable water, on a global scale.

10. Demand the dismantling of all foreign military bases and the removal of troops on all countries, except when operating under explicit mandate of the United Nations. Specially for Iraq and Palestina.

C. Another possible world must promote democracy from the neighbouring level to the global level. Therefore, it's necessary to:

11. Guarantee the right to access information and the right to inform, for/by all citizens, by legislation which should:

a) End the concentration of media under gigantic communication groups b) Guarantee the autonomy of journalists relative to actionnaires

c) Favour the development of non-profit press, alternative media and community networks.

Respecting these right implies setting up a system of (NFTT:I BELIEVE THE WORD IS CHECKS & BALANCES) for citizens, in particular national and international media observation institutions.

12. Reform and deeply democratize international institutions by making sure human, economic, social and cultural rights prevail, as stipulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This implies incorporating the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization into the decision-making mechanism and systems of the United Nations. In case of persisting violation by the

USA of international law, transfer the United Nations headquarters outside New York, to another country, preferably southern.

Porto Alegre, January 29 2005

Signed by Aminata Traoré, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Eduardo Galeano, José Saramago, François Houtart, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Armand Mattelart, Roberto Savio, Riccardo Petrella, Ignacio Ramonet, Bernard Cassen, Samir Amin, Atilio Boron, Samuel Ruiz Garcia, Tariq Ali, Frei Betto, Emir Sader, Walden Bello, and Immanuel Wallerstein.

Critique of the text by Patrick Bond available at <http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/22bond.cfm>

6.2

Discussing the Porto Alegre Manifesto

Patrick Bond, February 22, 2005

Patrick Bond discusses the "Porto Alegre Manifesto" by a group of nineteen intellectuals at this year's World Social Forum point by point. The 12 points in the proposal are marked by a ">" mark, followed by Bond's remarks.

ZNet @ <http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/22bond.cfm>

Twelve proposals for another possible world ...

>1. Cancel the external debt of southern countries, which has been already paid many times over, and which constitutes the privileged means of creditor states, local and international financial institutions, to keep the largest part of humanity under their control and sustain their misery. This measure needs to be complemented by the restitution of the gigantic sums which have been stolen by their corrupt leaders.

This first position is weakened by not specifying that cancellation should extend to middle-income countries. Yes, it's implicit in 'southern countries,' but given the awful role of some Jubilee chapters in the North, in dividing the South into HIPC and non-HIPC, it really does require explicit argument - endorsing the Jubilee South platform - so as to ensure that Brazilians, Argentines, Nigerians, Indonesians, South Africans, etc, are included as beneficiaries of total Third World debt cancellation.

The statement is also weakened by its failure to endorse the growing demand not only for return of wealth stolen by elites and lodged in Swiss (and other) banks, where a victory was won against Nigeria's late dictator Sani Abacha this week, but also the demand for reparations.

That demand, applied to South Africa for instance, would entail the recovery of interest paid over many decades by apartheid's rulers, drawn out of social surpluses taken from oppressed black South Africans. The reparations demand against Citibank and its ilk, made by Jubilee South Africa and the Khulumani apartheid-victims advocacy group, recently went before a New York judge, who denied it last November because of pressure from South Africa's comprador government, notwithstanding favourable precedents and the Alien Tort Claims Act (which the Bush administration has been trying unsuccessfully to gut). But the reparations demand will continue to be made (including on appeal in that case), and should have been noted and supported not only in terms of apartheid financing, but more generally in cases of Odious Debts and debts already repaid many times over. The authors should also have noted the ecological debt owed by the North to the South, for the illegitimate abuse of the global commons (again, a Jubilee South movement along these lines is already working hard to make it an international campaign).

>2. Implement international taxes on financial transactions (most notably the Tobin tax on speculative capital), on direct foreign investments, on consolidated profit from multinationals, on weapon trade and on activities accompanied by large greenhouse effect gas emissions. Such financial means, complemented by public development help which should imperatively be 0.7% of the GNP of rich countries, should be directed towards fighting big epidemics (like AIDS), guarantee access to all humanity to clean water, housing, energy, health services and medication, education, and other social services.

The sentiments cannot be disputed. However, there is a very healthy debate on whether a Tobin Tax is appropriate, in contrast to national capital controls. A global Tobin Tax could easily be avoided by financiers (using 'securitisation' instruments which work on derivative movements of asset prices), and

given the power relations we currently face at global scale, the proceeds might well be diverted - as then IMF acting director Stanley Fischer suggested in 2000 - back into the Bretton Woods Institutions.

>3. Progressively dismantle all forms of fiscal, juridical and banking paradises, which do nothing more than facilitate organized crime, corruption, illegal trafficking of all kinds, fraud and fiscal evasion, and large illegal operations by large corporations and even governments. These fiscal paradises are not only limited to certain states, existing in areas of non-legality; they also exist within the legislation of developed countries. In a first instance, it would be advisable to strongly tax capital flux entering and leaving these 'paradises', as well as all establishments and actors, financial or otherwise, taking part in these gigantic transactions.

This is a fine statement, and a long-overdue demand. The post-911 hunt for Al Qaeda finances shows that these offshore money centres aren't immune to pressure. However, have the authors done the necessary work with the residents (especially low-income) of Switzerland, Panama, the Cayman Islands, Jersey, etc etc, so that the full implications are explored, and alternative modes of livelihood promoted?

>4. All inhabitants of this planet must have the right to be employed, to social protection and retirement/pension, respecting equal rights between men and women. This should be an imperative of all public polity systems, both national and international.

This is an excellent sentiment, but what sort of international state arrangements would be required to enforce compliance? Does the global progressive movement want to move in this direction, given the adverse power relations?

>5. Promote all forms of equitable trade, reject all free-trade agreements and laws proposed by the World Trade Organization, and putting in motion mechanisms allowing a progressive upward equalisation of social and environmental norms (as defined under the conventions by the International Labour Organization) on the production of goods and services. Education, health, social services and culture should be excluded from the scope of the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) by the WTO.

By promoting 'all forms' of equitable trade, aren't the authors ignoring the ways in which trade and transport operate inefficiently and irrationally? Aren't the authors buying into the export-led growth fetish of neoliberalism? Wouldn't it be better to consider John Maynard Keynes' advice (in 1933): "Let goods be homespun where reasonably and conveniently possible"? And why do the authors ignore the vast campaign by water activists to remove water from GATS?

The convention on cultural diversity, currently being negotiated at UNESCO, must result in cultural rights and politics of public cultural support to explicitly prevail over commercial rights. 6. Guarantee the right to for all countries to alimentary sovereignty and security by promoting peasant, rural agriculture. This means a total suppression of all subventions to the export of agricultural products, mainly by the USA and the European Union, and the ability to tax imports to avoid dumping practices. In the same way, every country or group of countries must be able to decide in a sovereign way to forbid the production and import of genetically modified organism, meant for consumption.

This is excellent, and hopefully works against the pro-trade bias of point #5. Yet here was an opportunity, apparently lost, to talk not only about food sovereignty, but about the need to establish nutritional priorities, to assess the full cost (e.g. virtual water) associated with food production, and to help movements engaged in food decommodification.

>7. Forbid all type of patenting of knowledge on living beings (human, animal or vegetal) as well as any privatization of common goods for humanity, particularly water.

This is also an excellent sentiment, however it does not go far enough. One of the very most severe threats we face - which on February 16 the Kyoto Protocol has formally brought into force (just a fortnight after the authors' statement) - is the privatisation of the air.

This technique is being established by companies and agencies (especially the World Bank) addicted to

C02 emissions, and allows them to enhance their carbon-emitting rights (a bogus property right established through Kyoto) by buying into Third World carbon-reduction scams such as monocultural timber plantations (Brazil's Plantar) and toxic dumps in low-income/black neighbourhoods (South Africa's Bisaser Road). Given that the commodification of the commons now entails the privatisation of the air (as endorsed even by some coopted environmentalists), the authors should be alerting their audiences to this danger.

>Another possible world must sustain community life in peace and justice, for all humanity. Therefore is it necessary to:

>8. Fight by means of public policies against all kinds of discrimination, sexism, xenophobia, antisemitism and racism. Fully recognize the political, cultural and economic rights (including the access to natural resources) of indigenous populations.

>9. Take urgent steps to end the destruction of the environment and the threat of severe climate changes due to the greenhouse effect, resulting from the proliferation of individual transportation and the excessive use of non-renewable energy sources. Start with the execution of an alternative development model, based on the sparing/efficient use of energy, and a democratic control of natural resources, most notably potable water, on a global scale.

To blame global warming first of all on "individual transportation" - without a self-ironic nod to the flights the authors themselves took to Porto Alegre - is missing the point, when so much more C02-generating transport is associated with unnecessary trade in commodities, which the authors have unfortunately already endorsed in #5.

>10. Demand the dismantling of all foreign military bases and the removal of troops on all countries, except when operating under explicit mandate of the United Nations, especially for Iraq and Palestine.

This sounds like a necessary but entirely insufficient demand to deal with the kinds of military threats faced by countries like Iran, which is facing US bombing runs in the very near future. It also fails to get at the proxy mechanisms by which imperialism continues to operate, with venal local elites serving US and EU interests so that 'foreign military bases' are hardly the first line of attack by anti-imperialists. The global arms trade, for instance, should have been mentioned here.

>C. Another possible world must promote democracy from the neighbouring level to the global level. Therefore, it's necessary to:

>11. Guarantee the right to access information and the right to inform, for/by all citizens, by legislation which should: a) End the concentration of media under gigantic communication groups b) Guarantee the autonomy of journalists relative to actionnaires c) Favour the development of non-profit press, alternative media and community networks. Respecting these right implies setting up a system of checks and balances for citizens, in particular national and international media observation institutions.

This is excellent, but should be augmented with some brief discussion about reform of state media, which in many Third World settings is also a severe barrier to progress.

>12. Reform and deeply democratize international institutions by making sure human, economic, social and cultural rights prevail, as stipulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This implies incorporating the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization into the decision-making mechanism and systems of the United Nations. In case of persisting violation by the USA of international law, transfer the United Nations headquarters outside New York, to another country, preferably southern.

This position is quite destructive for the growing campaigns - such as IFIs-Out! (<http://www.ifi-out.org>), hosted by Jubilee South - which are not supportive of incorporating the Bretton Woods Institutions and

other neoliberal agencies into the already mainly neoliberal UN.

Given the global-scale power relations that will prevail for the immediate future, probably into our children's and grandchildren's generation, does it make sense to empower global-scale institutions? What about the danger that a UN process will give legitimacy to the ongoing malevolent roles of global-scale actors, as occurred with the UN's recognition of the US occupation and of the puppet Iraqi regime?

Porto Alegre, January 29 2005

PB : Did the 18 men and 1 woman who authored these points think them through as thoroughly as possible? Should critiques of their process - namely, launching a major manifesto into the WSF without proper consultation and *without explicit references to actual campaigns by activists across the world* - be joined by concern that, for whatever reason, they are perhaps not sufficiently close enough to the issues to have solved some of the problems noted above?

I just ask, in the spirit that Porto Alegre has been an unprecedented space for these sorts of debates. Personally, I would be thrilled if the WSF and its affiliates developed programmatic points of convergence. My own feeling is that the programmes will emerge from struggle, as they always have, and that probably the ideological diversity of the WSF will not permit sufficient clarity on matters of the sort I raise above (especially over whether we should 'fix' or 'nix' embryonic global-state institutions). Instead, I think real progress in these directions will be found in transnational sectoral forums, of which there are many many examples, some of which are already generating the global-scale analysis, demands, strategies, tactics and alliances which the 19 authors should have made reference to.