
ANOTHER WORLD IS NECESSARY

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The international media ignored the big event that took place in Porto Alegre in January 2003, when thousands of women and men walked through the streets shouting, "Another World is Possible !" More than a hundred thousand people came to Porto Alegre this year (2003) to say why another world is not only possible, but also *necessary*. I live in Egypt, and have travelled in Africa, Asia, Europe, to the two Americas, to Australia, and everywhere I have seen how people are dying of hunger, in wars, in the so-called 'free market', and under so-called 'democracy'. The media was occupied with the few who dominate the wealth of the world, who were meeting at the same time in Davos, at the World Economic Forum. This is not a *world* Forum. It is a Forum for the few individuals who own multinationals and the 'free market'.

Under capitalist democracy, 'freedom' means freedom to kill, to declare war, to exploit the oil, the land and natural resources of others. It is the freedom to occupy other countries by military force. It is the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the American and British occupation of Iraq and Kuwait. These are only a few examples of what is happening in our post-modern era. In Davos, the Swiss police protected a small minority of the world's wealthy rulers. They could not move without police and military protection. However, they have now been exposed by billions of people in the world. People became aware of their lies, which they try to conceal with beautiful words such as democracy, the free market, human rights, development, etc.

Lula, Brazil's Nasser ?

Meanwhile in Porto Alegre's biggest square, the third WSF was being inaugurated by 'Lula' (as they call Brazil's elected President, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva). In his speech, addressed to over 60,000 women and men, he began : "I am going tonight to Davos to tell them about your goals, to carry your message to them". But the crowd was not convinced. One of them shouted, "Why go all this long distance, Lula ? Send them an email" ! and the crowd roared with laughter. Many people in Brazil consider Lula a liberal capitalist, despite the twenty years he spent leading the Workers Party. Power corrupts revolutionary men and women and Lula may be no exception. A Brazilian woman told me his economic policies would benefit the "nationalist bourgeoisie". This reminded me of Gamal Abdel Nasser's economic policies during the sixties. The Egyptian capitalists corrupted the public sector and this led

to the downfall and defeat of Nasser and finally to his death on September 28, 1970.

Some women and men in Porto Alegre believe that Lula is Brazil's Nasser. But others disagree. They still consider him the hero of the left wing groups fighting against globalisation and imperialism. Brazil's new Left is more radical, younger. They describe the old Left who dominate the WSF as dogmatic, rigid, undemocratic, linked to the new liberals who are playing a role in isolating the Forum from ordinary women and men, from the daily struggle of people.

In January 2004, the fourth WSF will be held in Hyderabad, India; the following year in Africa.¹ Neither Brazil nor any other country should be allowed to dominate the WSF. It belongs to the world and not to one country. Since it started in 2001, it has been held in Porto Alegre. Why this monopoly? The participants from the Arab countries may one day have a World Social Forum in Palestine, Cairo...or even Baghdad. For the time being, this seems to be just a dream. But why should we not have big dreams? In Porto Alegre everybody is dreaming of another world based on justice and freedom, in which women and men will be equal, in which there will be no wars and no poverty and no pollution of the environment by capitalists.

Listening to the Music of Words

I walk along the Jacui River under the sun of Porto Alegre. The smell of the air reminds me of my village in the Nile Delta — the waters of the river look the same, and the sunrays are almost the same sunrays. The faces around me are brown, sunburned, like the faces at home in Cairo. I feel at home. I do not know the Portuguese language but I understand the music of words and the beat of drums.

My talk was in a hall which seats 5,000 people. As they were giving me a standing ovation, an old German man with narrow eyes and a big nose pushed through the crowd and shouted angrily, "There's no bridge between the First and Third World — you'd better get used to it" ! I laughed. Many women and men laughed too. A young Pakistani woman with a veil hiding her face was also angry. "I *chose* to wear the veil — it is my personal freedom" ! she said. An American woman with a coating of make-up on her face shouted, "I *chose* to put on make-up. Why are you against make-up? How can you call it a postmodern veil? It is a free choice ! I feel I am free to do whatever I want" ! I smiled, "Yes, you are free like the free market, like George W Bush, like Ariel Sharon, like Adolf Hitler; you are free" !

Creating an Alternative

For me, this third WSF tore the veil off the face of neoliberal capitalism, which dominates the world. NAFTA and the European Union (EU) are not democratic. They are key players in corporate globalisation. The European Referendum campaign² has been launched in order to build real democracy and ensure the full participation of women and young people in the EU. For it is the old men who still dominate the politics of the world (whether Left or Right, whether in the West or East, in the North or South). Across the globe, capitalist globalisation is still riding triumphant. The shadows of imperialism and neo-colonialism are very evident, especially in our region, the so-called Middle East (middle to whom, by the way?). The leaders of the so-called 'free world' who met at

Davos are moving steadily to the Right, hiding their economic interests behind a religious veil, whether Christian or Jewish, using Islamic fundamentalism or post-modern terrorism to reinforce and expand their domination. The so-called 'War against Terrorism' has devastated Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, and is relentlessly building up plans to devastate Iran, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Korea and others.

The WSF is not merely an annual event in Porto Alegre. It has become a global movement, a continuous process to create an open space for free and equal exchange of thoughts and action. In terms of numbers it grew from 25,000 people in the first meeting in 2001 to more than 100,000 this year. But it is not just the numbers that count. The Forum has created an alternative to capitalist globalisation. It has created a new hope, a new power which is playing a profound role in helping to free people all over the world from the shackles of despair and false consciousness propagated by the global media. But more thinking is needed to close the gap between what is called political activities and social activities, between women's groups and socialist groups.

Look to Women, Look to the Future

The Left, the socialist movement (including the Marxists) have learned a great deal from women's movements in our countries and all over the world. They now tend to combine social activities with political, economic, religious, historical, and other activities. Women's input to human thought and to philosophy has been and continues to be significant and should not be ignored.

In Egypt, as in countries all over the world, the traditional left wing (including the new anti-globalisation groups) tends to exclude women in spite of having learnt new ideas from them. Traditional left-wing groups should change their old habits. Most of the people at Porto Alegre were women and youth. But there were old professional political groups there too, and they tended to regress to old habits in order to monopolise and exclude women and young people.

Right now we need to struggle against the WSF being hijacked by certain left wing groups in France, Europe, the US or elsewhere. Left-wing groups in Europe are stronger than they are in Africa and they try to dominate. A French man, a leader of a group called ATTAC in Paris tried to control some of the groups from Africa. An American man in a group called Habitat tried to control some groups from the Arab countries.

Advice to the West's Left

Revolutionary groups in Europe and the US should know that we the women (and men) of the so-called 'Third World' are not backward, not in need of their leadership. We can lead ourselves. We do not need leaders from abroad to show us the way. We appreciate the ability of these revolutionary groups to transcend their nationality, religion, gender, colour, class, creed, language and other divisions inherited from the slave period. We appreciate their socialist leanings in the struggle against capitalist globalisation. But they must overcome their remaining prejudices. We refuse to submit to their domination under the guise of freeing us from local or global oppressors. We can fight our own battles just as they fought theirs. We want to co-operate, but on equal grounds. We want an equal exchange of ideas and experiences.

They need to move on from the concept of 'giving help' to that of equal exchange. They must stop focussing so obsessively on economic capitalist globalisation and look at other types of globalisation and exploitation in the everyday life of women and men. These myriad other forms of globalisations have been playing havoc with the private and public life of women, refugees, immigrants and workers under the guise of so-called revivals of religion or spirituality, or even socialist ideologies. We need to unmask the post-modern game of new political groups, and de-mystify the new language of progressive groups which work *for* us and not *with* us.

'Glocal' Action

We need to stop seeing the Forum at Porto Alegre as the only World Social Forum, and regarding the local or thematic ones as marginal. Self-critical reflection is an essential part of the WSF. Without this it cannot grow, create new ideas and new actions locally or globally. I like the new word 'glocal' since the local is inseparable from the global.

In Porto Alegre, I met a few participants from Egypt and other Arab countries. Most came from Europe and the US. However the Palestinian flag dominated the demonstrations, and the protesters against the war in Iraq were visible, though all the other flags were drowned in the red of the flags carried by Brazilian peasants and workers. The Forum in its totality condemned American unilateralism, militarism and lack of global responsibility in spite of its claims as a global superpower. Power without responsibility is a political disease inherited from the patriarchal class system that was born with slavery. This is one of the dichotomies forced on us by religion and philosophy. We must resist this idea of an irrevocable split between a good, divine power and the devil's responsibility for evil. We must un-mask and strip away the language of George W Bush the father, son and holy ghost, and his axis of evil.

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NOTES

¹ Two corrections: WSF 4 will be held in Mumbai, India, and not in Hyderabad; in 2005, the world meeting is being held again in Porto Alegre. There was a lot of confusion about locations of future events after the intense discussion that took place at the meeting of the WSF International Council in January 2003 where all this was decided, including as reported in the world media, and the views expressed here — written immediately after the 2003 meet — only reflect this general situation. Eds.

² <http://www.european-referendum.org/>