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The WSF Challenge



Chico Whitaker

Innovative social initiatives arise when they capture the perception of those interested in them. Such was the case with the World Social Forum in 2001, hailed by *Le Monde Diplomatique*, when it wrote that “the 21ST century is born in Porto Alegre”. We were facing a strong affirmation of the World Economic Forum in Davos, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and our forum arose with the alternative vision of future of those fighting for "another possible world". Any initiative of this type has yet its time of life. It can weaken when circumstances that led to its appearance change. It may even collapse entirely, becoming a ghost who insists on appearing without scaring anyone else.

The world has now changed. The Davos Forum it speaks for itself, although facilitating the elite’s networking. We face nowadays problems far more serious than the agreements of the “owners of the world ” may think they can solve – such as the ecological crisis, the wars, the large migration flows, the austerity required by financial interests, and others that go beyond neoliberalism, as xenophobia, the struggle for hegemony, the limits of representative democracy, etc.

In this perspective, we have before us three orders of questions: the World Social Forum event itself; the "WSF process", born from its first edition in 2001, by the multiplication of regional, national, local and thematic social forums, inspired by its Charter of Principles - several having global dimension; and the WSF International Council - IC, currently quite emptied, but still the only instance available for legitimizing the worldwide event.

We have problems with the world event and with the IC, while the "process" exists with a certain amount of force. However, it still needs to be powered by the worldwide event.

Accordingly, I propose that we start a debate that goes beyond the already discussed by the working groups created on the "future of the WSF." In addition, we need to create an "extended list" of participants, incorporating as much as it is possible the "facilitators" of events held in the "WSF process". I personally believe that the renewal of the worldwide event has to keep it as a tool for the construction of a new political culture – horizontal and self-organized – to make the "other world" possible, and to help to articulate social organisations and movements that are struggling for it, building their unity while respecting their diversity. We still required the creation of open spaces - methodological improvements being always possible - aiming to "facilitate" the mutual recognition and support between these movements and organizations and creating networks around common goals.

All this can continue through the various and different events of the "process". The worldwide event now has to be something different and new within the process, which includes it. Without adopting the verticalism nor the pyramidal structures of the single instances of articulated convergences, that we know do not lead to change, he has to open new leads to increase the effectiveness of the struggle for "another possible world". To do it we will need to actually "to invent". Is it well worth the effort?

Chico Whitaker (Sao Paulo)

WSF in 2018: A Brazilian Proposal

Since the last meeting of the International Council of the WSF in Porto Alegre in January, an intense process of dialogue and consultation took place within the civil society of Bahia and Brazil and with potential partners, leading to the accession of hundreds of organizations and movements to the proposal, but also for the establishment of a Brazilian Collective for the WSF in Bahia at the end of March 2017. This period of consultations ended with a national seminar of the Brazilian social movements, and then, the organisation of the WSF was adopted by consensus for the 13 to the 17 March 2018. The proposal is that the central theme of the WSF 2018 deals with Peoples, Territories and Movements in Resistance.

The elections of the Presidency of the Republic, state governments and federal and state parliaments are scheduled for the end of 2018 in Brazil. However, the context of institutional overturn remains deep, the future is uncertain and the possibility of future events that affect this scenario cannot be ignored. Even in an electoral context in Brazil, we reaffirm that the autonomy of the social movements within the framework of this construction will be conserved, in accordance with the Charter of the Principles of the FSM. Nevertheless, according to the views of the organizations and social movements present in this debate, elections should be seen as an opportunity to deepen the critical debate between civil society, political parties and progressive governments in Brazil, Latin

America and the world. For this, the coincidence with the electoral calendar is not an element that will call into question the character of the WSF in Brazil in Bahia.

The Brazilian Collective of organizations will be facilitated by a facilitating group about 20 members, formed by organizations and social movements of Bahia, Brazilian organizations present in the IC, and national organizations and movements representative of the diversity of struggles, with the responsibility to lead and articulate this collective construction.

The Government of Bahia, in a context of restriction of expenses, confirmed its support for the event and the Federal University of Bahia will make available its university campus, where most of the activities will take place. Nevertheless, we are aware, in addition to mobilization and political organization, that the resources currently in perspective are inferior to the needs. Other support is needed to begin this new stage of building the event.

To summarize, the minimum political and financial conditions have been created. In this way, in view of the decision of the Brazilian organizations and movements gathered in Salvador at the national seminar to carry out the event, we consider it necessary that the members of the WSF IC reaffirm their support for this initiative in order to what we can formalize the launch of the realization of the 2018 WSF in March next year in Brazil, in Salvador.

BRAZILIAN COLLECTIVE OF 2018 WSF

When OXFAM Novib aligns itself with the government against a human rights organization in Niger

After eleven years of partnership, the Dutch NGO OXFAM Novib decided to cut off all partnership relationship with the Nigerien Association Alternative Citizens' Spaces (Alternative Espaces Citoyens or AEC). This decision was taken by the Executive Director of OXFAM Novib, Farah Karimi, to sanction a call to chase from his office the President of the Republic of Niger that was allegedly made by the Secretary General of AEC during a citizen demonstration held in Niamey on December 21, 2016. According to Mrs. Karimi, *"Such a call is not acceptable to Oxfam Novib, which stands for democratic values as the only viable way of solving societal issues and meaningful solutions"*.

The only problem is that Mrs. Farah Karimi did not confirm the veracity of this accusation. It is not the first time that such accusations against AEC and other civil society organizations, whose involvement and activism particularly disturbs the Minister of the Interior. Convinced that a Minister of the Republic cannot tell stories to a great lady like her, Mrs. Karimi did not seek to know the version of Alternative. She therefore considered that what she heard from such an official source did not need to be verified with the partner in question; because trying to verify these allegations amounts in a way to committing a real *lèse-majesté* crime against the *"democratic authorities"* of Niger.

The problem between AEC and the government was aggravated in March 2005 in the aftermath of the demonstrations against the high cost of living and in May 2015 following

the publication by Alternative of a report denouncing the forced evacuation of the populations bordering the Lake Chad. Between 2001 and today, it is important to recall that the Secretary General of the Association has made several stays in prison and other places of detention under various charges; but he has never been the subject of any condemnation by the Nigerien justice which, on each occasion, has released him to allow him to continue his activities. In May 2015, accused by the Ministry of the Interior of criminal association in connection with a terrorist enterprise, in this case Boko Haram, he was provisionally released after ten days' detention at the Anti-Terrorist Unit in Niamey; even if the prosecutor has retained against him, without any solid element, the charge of attacking the national defense, a crime punishable by death penalty according to the Nigerien penal code.

A.T. Moussa Tchangari, Secretary General, Alternative Espaces Citoyens

Brazil: An Emergency Plan for the People



MST leader Joao Pedro Stedile

Who are the putschists?

In previous coups, like the 1964, and during the 1994 government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the bourgeoisie was united, under a single command, a single project for the country and with strong support from US capital. Now, it does have a project, and has lost their US rearguard. The putschists also don't know who to put in place of Temer. Their ideal solution would be to take Lula out of the picture, make a transition government that the majority of the population accepts until October 2018, and then try to win the elections.

What can workers and people's organizations do?

First of all, to take the putschists down and suspend every legislative measure they have taken against the people. Then, having a transition government that calls presidential elections for October 2017. Another item is for the new government to commit to convene a Constituent Assembly to build a new Emergency Plan for the People which includes over 70 emergency measures that the transition government and the new government will have

to implement, which we believe would take the country out of the economic, social and political crisis.

How will be it possible to defeat the Putschists?

To mobilize, fight, and not leave the streets. We need to work in the upcoming days on the possibility of a general strike with indefinite durations. All of our social militancy and the readers of this newspaper need to be in a state of alert, since the next few days will be decisive to define the destiny of the country. The strength of the working class is only expressed on the streets.

Europe Standing Up with Standing Rock

Stand Up With Standing Rock is a European solidarity tour with water defenders of Standing Rock fighting against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Rachel Heaton, Nataanii Means, Wašté Win Young and Rafael Gonzales, activists of the Standing Rock movement, will carry the voices of the water protectors to various parts of Europe: Paris, Brussels, the Netherlands, Bonn, Geneva, Bologna, Barcelona, Bilbao and Madrid.



Dates:

Netherlands: May 28th till June 2nd

Germany: June 3rd till June 5th

Switzerland: June 6th till June 8th

Spain Catalonia and Basque Country: June 9th till June 14th

Italy: June 15th till June 20th

<https://standupwithstandingrock.noblogs.org/presentation/>

<https://www.facebook.com/StandUpForStandingRock/>

Searching for a New Left: Perspectives and Strategies



A compelling international conference where 60 activists from around the world (except from Asia, regrettably) converged to develop new left thinking and strategies in the search for a new emancipatory politics. There was robust debate on a number of important issues with a number of important questions asked that we need to reflect upon as develop new left perspectives and strategies. The questions we asked ourselves was – in these times of political, economic and social crisis manifesting all around the world, what is a new emancipatory politics, what are the lessons we can learn from history and each other struggles in mapping out a new politics in response to the multiple crises we face around the world. It was a space for old and new, a space for learning and unlearning, for robust but constructive debate. A willingness to make mistakes, to fail and a readiness to change was of outmost importance. A new emancipatory politics cannot be a once of conference, it is a process, thought to be carried out through a new politics platform. The New Politics Platform is an initiative aimed at developing new responses to the multiple crises we face locally, regionally and internationally. Many of the changes to the context, and the crises arising as a result, are interconnected and reinforce each other in various ways. We need to think about how we on the Left position ourselves in response to this constant dynamism.

Rise of the Right

The Left has created the conditions for the right to rise. The right has been allowed to rise, because people worldwide are looking for alternatives to growing unemployment, inequality and poverty – as well as to the major ecological problem that we face, but the

Left, for the most part, has failed to capture the hopes and hearts of people in the same way as right wing populists. This crisis is best illustrated with the rise of Trump in the USA. Trump's election means an intensification of misogyny, patriarchy and the systemic war on women, along with a stated climate denialist. One can anticipate that Trump will not deliver on his promises of creating jobs, or for that matter, "making America great again". In fact, one can indeed expect a rise in conflict in order for to divert attention away from Trump's inability to deliver on his promises. The rise of Trump cannot be seen in isolation, there has been a [rise of right wing populism](#) around the world (Brexit, Erdogan, Temer are just a few examples of this but not the only ones, and the list of right wing governments keeps growing). So, the rise of the right cannot be spoken about without mentioning the weakness of the left both intellectually and in terms of being able to build and organise mass movements that can counter the dominance of a rising right-wing narrative. There are exceptions, Podemos and Syriza are perhaps glimpses of this. Some may argue that the rise of Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK signals a resurgence of the Left in these countries but this is highly debatable considering that they were recently trumped by right-wing forces – as mentioned above. Thus, a rough overview of the balance of forces suggests that the Left is in retreat.

Crises we are facing today

We need a new way because the old way was not working. What is the old way? It is the way things have been and are still is being done in present day. After the rise of Trump in the USA , and the determined rise of the right around the world we see the bolstering of power of rich men with an authoritarian agenda, who are pro-corporate, seeking to reduce taxes and roll-back civil rights, in order to increase their profits and further debilitate any possibilities of uprising against themselves and the system which they ultimately depend upon in order to maintain power. The consequences of this is there for all to see and feel – [rapidly growing inequality](#) within and among countries (the 8 richest men own the wealth of the poorest 50% of the worlds population), long term changes to our natural environments and high levels of personal economic debt are some examples of this. These pressures in addition to the general attack on the standard of human life has brought humanity to a crossroads – things can no longer continue as they are – something has got to give. At this juncture human existence on the planet can go one of two broad ways: either we collectively head towards a harmony between humans and nature, and restore the universal humanity in all of us or we regress into state of barbarism, forced by the degradation of the basic conditions of life for the sustenance of our current society. The problem is that it will not naturally go in a way that leads to a general improvement of human life and a universal elevation in our humanity. Only the strength in our masses will be able to demand real social reforms towards radically transforming society. Urgency is key, and the desperate need for strong mass popular organisations cannot be overstated, especially considering the global multi-layered, with little optimism about short-term prospects. The costs of the crisis will continue to be socialised.

What is a new emancipatory politics?

New politics is developed all the time. New politics as an idea., and as an emancipatory praxis, it will develop and evolve as we create it together.,I as we think

about new perspectives and the ways in which we carry them out. It is critical that we reimagine not only the substance of a new emancipatory politics but the form that it takes. Nevertheless, regardless of the form it takes, it is clear that any new emancipatory politics must be pluralistic, participatory and intersectional in its thinking and approach.

Pluralism

We need a pluralism of perspectives and ideas. There are a number of ways of understanding the world and the its issues. In the current juncture, there is a need to recognise that there may be limitations in our diagnosis of a fast changing world, and our prognosis for a program of action.

A Marxist analysis provides a sound foundation for both understanding a changing world and being able to develop a plan of action in response to the contradictions that continue to arise as a result of the current state of our society.. However, it we need a pluralism of Marxisms – drawing on what works, from various other traditions which may offer a different way of understanding the world.

People participation

New politics needs to be inclusive. All spheres of society, including organisations and movements, must feel welcome to join the struggles and to actively participate regardless of their particular motivations. Different people can and will contribute in different ways, this must be valued and respected. We must understand our roles and see how we fit into the collective. Recognising our positionality within different spaces is very important, not in order to silence ourselves or others but to try and get greater levels of participation from everyone. While recognizing that total horizontal structures have their limitations, it is imperative to have participatory democracy in our organizations and that the conditions for active participation are created. A top-down bureaucratic leadership structure is disempowering in any system, so there must be a conscious effort to address hierarchies and power structures – this will go a long way to tap into hidden creativity and new ideas.

Intersectionality

There are a number of different oppressions, and we must recognize that certain intersections of oppressions are more prevalent. Nevertheless, competing about who is more oppressed than the other (“the olympics of the oppressed”), in order to legitimise what we have to say is ultimately divisive and counter-productive. It is vital to understand how different identities are oppressed in different ways, and seeing the intersection between class, race and gender as sites of oppression, while not falling into a trap of identity politics. In this sense, even though we cannot essentialise class, it must be emphasised. Falling into this trap will inevitably lead to a self-induced paralysis, with no way of being able to build a counter hegemonic force to the current paradigm whose foundation rests on patriarchal, racist, sexist and able-ist traditions. The implications of this are that reforming the economic structure of society is imperative but not enough to put an end to racism, patriarchy and other forms of prejudice and oppression. In organising ourselves, in our movements to build power to force for social reforms towards radical transformation of society, it will be essential that we learn and

unlearn lots of things about our relationships. We must reinvent and build new relationships towards constructing a new society and new social consciousness.

Language of transformation

Language is immensely important to any transformation project, new politics must be spoken and written in the languages of our communities, in ways in which people can understand. Language can also be inspiring, it can be used to stir emotion. This includes poetry, and song to evoke imagery and the imagination of possibility and *utopia*

How do we create solidarity?

Human beings are capable of great acts of solidarity. We are more than just selfish beings. There is a *human nature*, and it is relevant to think about what is at its essence. But human nature is never decisive. History shows us that there have been many times of human change spurred by the need to adapt to changing social and material conditions. Solidarity equals love, This raises the salience of a human centered approach, where we emphasize the essence of life – human life and the life of the entire eco-system.

The butterfly effect

In the words of Ahsok Subron from Mauritius the symbolism that the butterfly represents is key for social activists. Like a butterfly, New Politics must represent Diversity, it must Colourful, its must be transformative. By taking leaps, a New Politics must be in harmony with nature and the Ecological system. There must be a politics of love and life at the centre of any transformative project.

Mercia Andrews (Cape Town)

USA: Resistance Growing

People recognize the dangerousness of the Trump administration. The Resistance that had begun the day after Trump's inauguration continued throughout the first hundred days as various groups engaged in street protests or in putting political pressure on their representatives.

- **Day without an Immigrant** - On February 16, thousands of immigrants in cities across the country took the day off work to protest President Trump's policies on immigration and refugees. Some employers, either because they are immigrants themselves or because they are sympathetic to the immigrant cause, shut their businesses so that their workers could participate. In other cases immigrant workers simply didn't show up for work in what was in effect an immigrant worker strike, and at least 100 workers in different cities were fired for their participation. In some cities, such as Milwaukee, the Day without Immigrants involved mass demonstrations of thousands of immigrants and their supporters who marched to protest Trump's policies.
- **Not My President Day** - Less than a week later, thousands of protestors in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and some two dozen other cities marched in opposition to President Donald Trump and his policies on what is usually called

- “President’s Day” (Monday, February 20), though this year this occasion was marked by many as Not-My-President Day. On what was in the Midwest and the East a beautiful spring-like day—thanks to climate change and global warming—protestors marched to protest Trump’s environmental and immigration policies and just about everything else that the new president stands for.
- **Town Hall Protests** - Thousands of people also showed up at town hall meetings across the United States later in February to challenge Republican congressional representatives and senators. Angry voters rose to demand that the health care plan’s fundamental features be preserved, that immigrants’ rights be respected, and that the Environmental Protection Agency be funded. Nothing like this has taken place at local town hall gatherings since the rightwing Tea Party’s demonstrations in 2009 and 2010, protests that provided the model for the current left-of-center protests.
 - **Anti-War Protests** - After Trump bombed Syria, there were a number of anti-war protests in major cities around the country, but the protestors numbered only in the hundreds, and the organizers from groups like ANSWER were supporters of Assad, Russia and Iran. Quite unlike the mass protests of women, immigrants, and the town hall rallies, the anti-war demonstrations with their sectarian leadership lacked a genuinely popular character. The anti-war movement that was needed, one that could oppose U.S. imperialism, but also Putin, Hezbollah and Assad, had yet to appear.
 - **March for Science** - Tens of thousands, many of them scientists, joined the March for Science on Earth Day, April 22, in cities across the United States and around the world. There were some 400 marches in the US with crowds estimated at 20,000 in New York and Los Angeles, some 15,000 gathered on the Washington Mall, and 10,000 in several cities. Other marches took place in hundreds of other cities around the world from London to Tokyo.

The Need for a Politically Independent Movement

While opposition to the Trump administration has spread throughout the society and now involves many social groups, the movement does not have a clear and independent political position. The Democratic Party, still thoroughly corporate, neoliberal, and therefore unreliable—as demonstrated for example in its failure to support single-payer health care (“Medicare for all”)—has taken the lead in the organization of much of the Resistance, and especially in its more political expressions. If the Resistance is to be successful not only in stopping Trump and the Republican Party, but also in fighting the corporate Democrats, and more important the capitalist system, we will need to build a movement that creates its own political identity, even if we have no political party of our own.

Dan La Botz¹

¹ Excerpt from an article published in New Politics, <http://newpol.org/content/trump-power-first-100-days>.

Intercoll is an open space for the development and confrontation of social and citizen movements. It is run by individuals linked to those movements, and by anyone who is involved in social struggles and mobilizations. Intercoll aims to contribute to the gradual emergence of a new "international collective intellectual" from the reflection of movements and networks of research and public education. Intercoll aims to create an international and multicultural space. The website operates in six languages.

<http://intercoll.net/?lang=en>