

There Is Another Way

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The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre in 2001 represented a fundamental change in the cultural order of things: from 'there are no alternatives' to 'there is another way to think about the economy, politics and culture'. That is a qualitative leap of great importance.

Nevertheless, the world's present expectations are for alternatives. This will be the challenge of the Porto Alegre meeting of 2002. Notwithstanding that, the World Social Forum cannot become simply a supermarket of alternatives. That is why there is a need, on the one hand, for coherence in the proposals and, on the other, for a broad view of the alternatives.

From this perspective it seems important to think of three levels of alternatives. The first consists in rebuilding the *utopias*, not in the sense of impossible things but rather as goals that mobilise. It's a matter of knowing what kind of a society we want, what work, what education, what agriculture, what communications, what ethics. Utopias don't fall from the sky. They can't be anything but the result of teamwork drawing on ideas from all over the world.

The second level is the *medium-term* alternatives; that is to say, goals that will take time to achieve because they involve lengthy processes or are the result of arduous social struggles, because of resistance from the capitalist system itself.

The third level consists in *short-term* alternatives: things that are feasible in the foreseeable future and can be a mobilising factor even though they are only partial goals.

In the light of the above, we can review firstly what globalisation means today; secondly, what its consequences are, and the movements organised to resist it; thirdly, what stage globalisation has now reached; and, finally, what the strategies are against the globalisation of capital.

What is globalisation today?

It's an economic process with political, military and cultural support. It's a new stage in the neo-liberal phase of capital accumulation, which

began in the mid-seventies, with what is known as the *Washington consensus*. We are using the word globalisation with a very precise meaning, realising – of course – that it is a long-standing, historical process that has taken on specific characteristics in the last 30 years.

The main reason this economic process was set in motion was that returns on capital were decreasing, because of falling productivity. After World War Two, productivity had enabled income to be distributed to some extent between capital, labour and government. In other words, it was the end of Keynesianism, to which must be added the failure of development policies in the Third World and, finally, the collapse of real socialism in Eastern Europe.

To accelerate its growth, capital has had to develop two main strategies.

Firstly, to cause labour's role in social output to shrink. This was done by a veritable offensive against labour: reducing its share in the social product by lowering real wages, deregulation, relocations, lowering social benefits, and loosening the grip of organised labour.

Secondly, to cause the role of the State, as the distributor of income and social mediator, to shrink. This was accomplished by successive waves of privatisations, not only of sectors of the economy, but also of public services, with the austerity programmes imposed by the international financial institutions, specially the International Monetary Fund (structural adjustment programmes).

If you analyse the main instruments of the current economic globalisation, you will see the following. Firstly, production and distribution processes are being integrated in ways that ignore national boundaries. Also, production, distribution and communications are being concentrated in the hands of an ever decreasing number of large corporations. Financial capital is what predominates. Finally, the frontiers of capitalism, both geographical and technological, are being pushed back.

Social and cultural consequences and opposition

The process of globalisation is resulting in the destruction, in a number of ways, of all that mankind does collectively.

Destruction of the economy: if the economy is human action directed to establishing the material basis for the physical and cultural life of all mankind the world over, capitalism is the most inefficient system in human history. Never have there been so many poor, never have there been so many social disparities. This constitutes the first basis for revolts and resistance.

Destruction of natural resources: the use of resources for short-term profit brings on ecological disasters in both climate and the depletion of natural resources, which has resulted in the emergence of large numbers of green groups in the last few years.

Social destruction twice over: Firstly, there is the spread of direct relations between capital and labour (i.e. wage labour), now extending world-wide, albeit not involving the majority nor all sectors of collective activity. Trade union and rural workers' movements have emerged in new geographical areas and in new sectors of economic activity.

Secondly, the spread of indirect relations between capital and labour, which is affecting more and more social groups in the world. These are the indirect mechanisms of the logic of capitalist organisation of the economy, like raw material price-fixing, foreign debt, the re-export of capital, tax havens, etc., all of which are obstacles to the true development of local economies and whose consequences affect hundreds of millions of people. This is why we are witnessing an ever-growing number of instances of resistance and social movements.

This concerns women, for example, who are affected particularly by the feminisation of poverty and the increase in violence, or simply because the logic of the system of capitalist exploitation uses gender relations to further its own interests: for example, lower salaries, national accounts which ignore women's work in restructuring productive forces (to speak in economic terms), etc. It also concerns the opposition movements of indigenous peoples, who are the first victims of new economic policies and who are redefining their sense of identity through such movements. It also concerns the caste movements in India, where the struggle of the *Dalits* (untouchables) has intensified since neo-liberal guidelines were adopted. It also relates to youth movements. It also concerns ethnic conflicts, which are closely linked with macroeconomic mechanisms, like the fall in certain farming prices, and so on.

Clearly, capitalism did not invent or initiate male chauvinism or patriarchy, the oppression of indigenous peoples, the contradictions of the caste system, ethnic conflicts, or the marginalisation of youth. Capitalism, however, – and this can be proved – aggravated the conflicts and often used them to build its organisation of labour and its strategies for the absorption of surplus.

Cultural destruction: We are witnessing the meaning of education, of the media, of philosophy and even of religions, being deviated to suit the values of capitalism, with its own definition of modernity, as it exploits the cultural apparatus to support its project and to legitimise its objectives. Also, there are new movements in ideas, cultural resistance, liberation theologies developing, as forms of resistance in this domain. At the same time, backward-looking cultural movements, expressed in various types of fundamentalism, are developing as defence mechanisms against a modernity that depreciates cultural traditions.

Political destruction: Democracy, which is already relatively limited from the point of view of parliamentary political organisation, has less and less meaning when political authorities emanating from the popular vote see their decision-making powers diminished, especially in the economic sphere. In response to this, new efforts are also being made towards decentralised decision-making, participatory democracy, and to rebuild grass-roots politics.

The situation can be summed up by saying that, faced with a capitalism which is laying the foundations on which to reproduce itself world-wide using new technologies, we are witnessing opposition movements and struggles increase – but also fragment – both geographically and by sector.

The current stage of the globalisation of capital

Two things can be said with regard to the current stage, which are relevant to thinking about how opposition is organising, and spreading world-wide.

Firstly, the neo-liberal project has not been abandoned, though it may be losing credibility. It is weakened because it has relatively short-term strategies. This is manifested in different ways:

- economically: the financial system; the system of production and public services
 - ecologically: the ecological limits are more and more apparent
 - socially: the increase in poverty and the widening gap between rich and poor, the rising level of migration
 - culturally: intellectual, artistic and grass-roots criticism of the system.
- Secondly, capitalism is now adopting new strategies in many sectors:
- economic strategies: it is moving progressively from out-and-out neo-liberalism to a neo-classicism focused on reinstating the conditions of competition by means of new regulations (re-legitimation of the State)
 - ecology: certain urgent measures are being adopted (Kyoto Protocol)
 - social strategies: the World Bank has initiated concerted policies to fight poverty; non-governmental organisations, voluntary associations, Churches and religions are being co-opted in an attempt to diminish their strength in opposition and to obtain legitimation; and administrative – and gradually also police – repression is growing, not to mention the military dimension in international affairs.
 - cultural strategies: the language of ecology and of concepts used by the opposition, such as civil society, participatory democracy, and so on, are being adopted to change their meaning and the concepts.

Strategies for the struggle against the globalisation of capital

We can set out some of the main elements of strategy which have been initiated and are to be developed in the immediate future:

Firstly, to delegitimise the system, not only by condemning its abuses, as do several ethical bodies, such as the social teaching of religions, but by denouncing the logic of the capitalist system, which constitutes the basis for the various forms of destruction.

Secondly, to build convergence among efforts to work against the system, with each one preserving its specific identity, but also understanding its place in the whole.

Thirdly, to formulate alternatives at the three levels mentioned above: utopias, medium-term, and short-term.

Fourthly, to find formulas for political expression, also in convergent forms, because the four aspects – economic, ecological, social, and cultural – all have a political dimension and because, without a presence in this dimension, we cannot arrive at workable solutions.

Fifthly, not to allow ourselves to be marginalised by the economic and political system; that is, not to accept being reduced to a corner where we can take the floor and express opinions, and not to be rendered ‘folkloric’, especially

by the communications media which emphasise certain types of violence or apparently 'rare' cultural expressions.

The criteria for selecting themes and actions

Three main criteria seem to be important. Firstly, to keep in mind popular contemporary sensitivity to certain themes, and in particular the approach of new publics which, as they are affected by the direct or indirect effects of globalisation, seem ready to enter into the converging resistance.

Secondly, to link up on events of the moment, such as the international conferences on racism, Rio plus ten, ratification of the Kyoto protocol, or on policies such as 'Star Wars', and so on.

Thirdly, to address themes on which considerable preparation has already been done by specific groups and which can lead to concrete alternatives.

A dream

I can end by saying that I have a dream. Not like the World Bank, which inscribed on the entrance to its building in Washington: We have a dream, a world free of poverty, under which I would write: *and thanks to the World Bank it remains a dream*. But in the sense of Dom Helder Camara, who told me when I worked with him in Vatican Council II that one could not understand Brazil if one did not understand carnival and football. Where will the carnival and football be in Porto Alegre? It is a way of asking oneself how symbolically to express the values that we want to affirm: overall orientations for mankind today which contradict the fundamental logic of capitalism. Two principal orientations come to mind: the contemplation of nature and inter-human solidarity.

Nature: respect, love and contemplation

Considering the great texts of the religious traditions of the world, including indigenous religions (the Pacha Mama); the great creation myths; the texts of the poets of various peoples, it can be said that nature is not an object of exploitation, but rather that we are part of it and that we want to express a sense of admiration and of contemplation. This could be expressed by songs, dances, recitations: participation by all in a collective act.

Inter-human solidarity

In the same cultural and religious traditions can be found everything that celebrates brotherhood, love, peace, and the rejection of aggression and violence, and also economic individualism. It is not a question of celebrating values of this kind romantically, but rather of referring to concrete social relations under capitalism and all their human consequences, and also of expressing the need of a new ethic for a new world.

English translation by volunteers:

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