

# Social movements' international Newsletter

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## Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth's Rights

Considering that climate change represents a real threat to the existence of humanity, of living beings and our Mother Earth as we know it today; (...);

Making clear that those most affected by climate change will be the poorest in the world who will see their homes and their sources of survival destroyed, and who will be forced to migrate and seek refuge;

Confirming that 75% of historical emissions of greenhouse gases originated in the countries of the North that followed a path of irrational industrialization

Regretting the failure of the Copenhagen Conference caused by countries called "developed", that fail to recognize the climate debt they have with developing countries, future generations and Mother Earth;

Affirming that in order to ensure the full fulfillment of human rights in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to recognize and respect Mother Earth's rights;

Reaffirming the need to fight for climate justice;

Recognizing the need to take urgent actions to avoid further damage and suffering to humanity, Mother Earth and to restore harmony with nature;;

Confident that the peoples of the world, guided by the principles of solidarity, justice and respect for life, will be able to save humanity and Mother Earth, and Celebrating the International Day of Mother Earth,

The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia calls on the peoples of the world, social move-

ments and Mother Earth's defenders, and invites scientists, academics, lawyers and governments that want to work with their citizens to the Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth's Rights to be held from 20th to 22nd April 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia.(...)

Evo Morales Ayma  
President of the  
Plurinational State of Bolivia

To know more: [www.cmpcc.org](http://www.cmpcc.org)

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# Collapse at the summit *rank-and-file victory*

We knew the United Nations summit in Copenhagen would not conclude with a new international treaty but a simple statement of intent – just one more. But the text adopted at the end of the meeting is worse than anything we could imagine: no quantified objectives for emissions reduction, no reference year for measuring them, no deadlines, no date!

The text included a vague promise of 100 billion dollars yearly for adaptations in developing countries, but the formulas used and various comments lead us to fear that these will be loans administered by major financial institutions rather than true reparations paid by those responsible for the mess.

The document is totally incoherent. Heads of state and government recognize that “climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time”, but at the closing of the fifteenth conference of its kind, they are still incapable of taking the slightest concrete measure to meet this challenge. They admit – this is a first! – the need to remain “below 2°degrees” temperature increase, hence the need for deep cuts in emissions “according to science, and as documented by the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report”. However they are incapable of endorsing the quantified conclusions drawn by climatologists: at least 40% cut in 2020 and 95% in 2050 in developed countries. They emphasize their “strong political will” to “cooperate in achieving” (this goal) (less than 2°C temperature increase) but have nothing to propose beyond a hodgepodge of proposals, with each country communicating to the others what it intends to do, by February 1st 2010.

Trapped by the hyper-mediatisation they orchestrated themselves, the powerful of our world found themselves in the spotlight, with nothing to show beyond their sordid rivalries. Thus, the representatives of 26 major countries booted out the NGOs, sidelined small States and scribbled a text whose major purpose is to convey the impression that there is a political pilot in the plane. But there is no pilot. Or rather, it's an automatic pilot: the race for profit among capitalist groups rushing into the trade war for world markets. Candidate Obama and the European Union promised to the high heavens that business would have to pay for their emissions rights. Snake oil!

at the end of the day, most companies received these rights free of charge and are making profits on them, selling them off and billing consumers for them! The rest is in keeping. Don't touch the money, that is the watchword.

This so-called agreement is oozing impotence from every pore. You can't just tell the climate to stay below 2°C. If this can still be possible, there are drastic conditions to fulfil. These involve definitely consuming less energy, thus transforming and transporting less matter. Less must be produced for solvent demand and at the same time human needs must be met, in particular in the poor countries. How can this be done? This is the key question. It isn't so hard to solve. We could stop producing weapons, eliminate advertising budgets, and do away with many types of useless productions, activities and transports. But this would come up against capitalist productivism, the race for profits than requires growth. A sacrilege! That is taboo! And the outcome of this race? While world emissions have to be cut 80% by 2050 at the latest, although developed countries are responsible for more than 70% of warming, the only concrete measure specified in the agreement is a halt to deforestation... which only concerns the South and represents 17% of emissions. Ecological headway? No way! “Protecting” tropical forests (by expelling the people who live there!) is the cheapest way for polluters to buy the right to keep on producing (weapons, advertising, etc) and to pollute ... thus to keep on destroying forests via warming. This is how the law of profit corrupts everything it touches and changes everything into its opposite.

### **Planet first, people first**

Fortunately, in the face of this total collapse at the summit, Copenhagen was a magnificent rank-and-file victory. The international demonstration on Saturday 12 December brought together some 100 000 people. The only precedent for such a massive mobilization on this issue was were the different simultaneous marches that brought together 200.000 Australian citizens at once, in November 2007. But this was a national mobilization and Australia was being hard-hit by the impact of warming. This is not (yet) the case in the European countries where most of the demonstrators came from, flocking to the Nordic capital to cries of “Planet first, people first”, despite ferocious police repression..

Copenhagen symbolizes this new consciousness. It was the expression of participation of social movements that until very recently were on the sidelines of ecological issues, and sometimes even suspicious of them: women's organizations, peasant movements, trade unions, North-South solidarity associations, peace movements, global justice movements etc. Indigenous people are playing a key role by struggling against forest destruction (in a power relationship worthy of David confronting Goliath!), symbolizing at once resistance to the dictatorship of profit and the possibility of another relation between humanity and nature. Yet all these forces count more on collective action than on lobbying, so dear to major environmental associations. Their coming onto the scene has radically moved the centre of gravity. From now on, the struggle for an ecologically effective and socially just international treaty will play out in the street – more than in the corridors of summit meetings – and will be a social battle – more than a debate among specialists

While the official summit gave birth to a scrap of paper, social mobilization and the alternative summit laid the political foundations for rank-and-file action to carry out in the coming months “Change the system, not the climate”, “Planet not profit”, “bla bla bla Act Now”, “Nature doesn't compromise”, “Change the Politics, not the climate”, “There is no PLANet B”. Despite its limitations (particularly in terms of the role of the United Nations) Klimaforum09's declaration is a good text, rejecting the carbon market, climate neocolonialism and offsetting emissions by planting trees, or other phoney techniques. More and more people understand it: climate degradation is not the outcome of “human activity” in general but of a mode of an unsustainable mode of production and consumption. And they draw the logical conclusion: the climate can't be saved only through changing individual behaviour; on the contrary this will take deep structural changes. It means putting the onus on the race for profits, because this race inevitably leads to an exponential growth in production, waste and transport of materials, thus of emissions.

### Failure?

Is the summit's failure a disaster? On the contrary, it is excellent news. Excellent news because it is time to stop this blackmail claiming that in exchange for fewer emissions, it would take more neoliberalism, more markets. Excellent news because the treaty that governments could conclude today would be ecologically inadequate, socially criminal and technologically dangerous. It would provoke a rise in temperature between 3.2 and 4.9°C, a rise in ocean levels from 60cm to 2.9 metres (at least) and a headlong rush to sorcerer's apprentice technologies (nuclear power, agrifuels, GMOs

and “clean coal” with geological sequestration of billions of tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>). Hundreds of millions of poor people would be the main victims. Excellent news because this failure clears up illusions that “world civil society” could, via “good governance”, in partnership with “stakeholders”, arrive at a climate consensus among antagonistic social interests.

It is high time to see that there are only two utterly counterpoised strategies out of fossil fuels: a transition piloted blind by profit and competition which takes us straight into the wall; and a consciously and democratically planned transition based on social and ecological needs, independent of the costs, which means involving the public sector and sharing wealth. This alternative path is the only means of averting disaster.

The Emperor has no clothes. The system is incapable of responding to the gigantic problem it created without inflicting irreparable damage on humanity and nature. To avert this, the time has come for the broadest possible mobilisation. This is everyone's concern. Planetary warming is much more than an “environmental” issue: it is a huge social, economic, human and ecological threat, which objectively requires an ecosocialist alternative. The heart of the matter: capitalism, as a system, has exceeded its limits. Its capacity for social and ecological destruction clearly exceeds its potential for progress. Let this observation help to foster convergence of the struggles for another society. The Copenhagen demonstrators have opened the road. They invite us to join them in taking action: “Act now. Planet, not profit. Nature doesn't compromise”.

Daniel Tanuro ●

*Translation International Viewpoint*

# Socialists, the environment and ecosocialism

There is an ecological crisis in the world and this crisis can be traced to capitalism. There is deforestation due to the trade in timber. There is climate change due to unsafe production methods.

The working class is the class that suffers the most from the ecological crisis. Working class people are in the majority and their life conditions make them more vulnerable. Workers live in flimsy houses and shacks that are easily washed or swept away by strong rains and winds. When workers are sick or injured there is always not enough medical help for them.

Over the years not enough attention has been paid to this problem by socialists. What is worse is that some people who call themselves socialists have added to the ecological crisis, for example, the Soviet Union was responsible for one of the biggest nuclear accidents in human history in Chernobyl. The Chinese Communist Party continues to supervise the destruction of nature through its single-minded and ruthless adoption of capitalist production methods.

The distortions of Marxism and socialism whereby the values and standards of capitalism are adopted and pursued by “socialist states” need challenging if we are to fight against the destruction of the environment by capitalism. In the 20th century it was Stalin with his theory of “socialism in one country” and the resultant imperative to compete with and match the West in productive and destructive capacity. He succeeded somewhat but in the process exploited and enslaved the very working class in whose name he ruled. In the 21st century we have to disagree with Hugo Chavez’s “petro-socialism” because the pro-

duction of more oil might yield more petrodollars but it means more carbon emissions.

Human beings are part of nature and socialism is humanistic. In today’s world this means there can be no genuine socialism unless it has an ecological component. To emphasise this some people have come up with the term “ecosocialism”. Other comrades have resisted this on the grounds that socialism is inherently ecological. Fine. I think that if calling it ecosocialism will focus our minds on the issue at hand then it is fine for socialists to embrace this new concept or use it when necessary. Remember the debate about “democratic socialism”? It was about the need to emphasise the democratic nature of socialism in the light of its distortions by “Marxist” dictators.

The failure of socialists to take a serious interest in ecological issues has two dangers. The first one is that after the earth has been destroyed there won’t be a world where we can build socialism. The second danger is that “market environmentalism” will take over thus sidelining socialists and ultimately leading to the destruction of nature including human beings

Market environmentalism” is the attempt to solve the ecological crisis without questioning the profit system – capitalism. The end result is that ordinary people think something is being done when in fact the problem gets worse. For example, the 1992 Kyoto Protocol deal adopted carbon trading as a mechanism for reducing carbon emissions. But since that day carbon emissions have increased and not decreased in the world. Another example is that of recycling. Many people do this but most of it does not help to reduce the problem because the same companies that pollute are often involved in the cycle of recycling.

The ecological crisis is an opportunity for socialists to reach wider layers of people because the environment affects everyone. Also, the ecological crisis can only be solved if the profit motive is severely restricted or eliminated altogether. Capitalism is incapable of solving the ecological crisis because it is the main culprit. Socialists can point this out in concrete ways and make concrete demands that are transitional in nature; drawing in more and more people and forcing the capitalists to either capitulate or show their true colours. Already some capitalists are sponsoring a denialist message and getting exposed in the process.

The obstacles to socialists embracing the ecological struggle are the following:

- The historical distortions of (what is) socialism
- No tradition of taking up environmental issues or ignorance about these traditions e.g. the less known revolutionary anti-nuke movement
- Viewing environmental issues as “liberal” or “reformist” or “soft” e.g. the much ridiculed “save the whales” campaign, the disparaging if humorous reference to “tree huggers”).
- Allowing the adherents of liberal ideology to define and appropriate environmental issues and struggles e.g. Earthlife Africa, Greenpeace, “we are the experts”, “it is our issue”, a kind of division of labour in the struggle
- Ignorance by socialists of the seriousness, gravity and nature of the ecological crisis. For example: as a socialist do you know what exactly caused the Tsunami?

## THE SOCIALIST/COMMUNIST VISION

Workers produce all the wealth. With their hands they make the things we need in order to live. They do this together. Collective production is the foundation of modern existence. Imagine if workers not only produced but also organised and controlled production, that is, instead of the bosses controlling and owning the wealth it was workers coopera-

ting with each other in order to produce the things that they need. Imagine how this would allow the basic needs of everyone to be met. Life would be much better and happier. There would be no reason for anyone to oppress or dominate anyone because people, together, would control their lives and make sure that, through their direct control, no one is allowed to dominate, control, oppress or exploit anyone else. When that happens then people would become the best that they can be – and not the worst that capitalism makes them to be (competitive, aggressive and basically sub-human).

Socialism, by getting rid of the bosses's system and private property, by reuniting producers to the means of production, lays the real possibility of society advancing to communism, the happy society without classes. In the 21st century, into this vision we must inject eco-awareness, what Joel Kovel calls “ecocentrism”, that is, respect for the world's ecology. We need to take active steps to address the global ecological crisis by, at a conceptual level, stopping to regard ecosystems as mere commodities to be exploited for profit. Nature is not the “environment out there” but rather, as Jacklyn Cock has cogently argued in her book, “The War Against Ourselves: Nature, Power And Justice: human beings are part of nature. Kovel argues that we need “ecocentric” production processes rather than capitalism's profit-driven production. Kovel calls for a struggle to replace the capitalist mode of production with ecosocialism. He defines this new mode of production in this way:

Ecosocialism [is] that society in which production is carried out by freely associated labour and with consciously ecocentric means and ends.

## SOME IDEAS ON THE WAY FORWARD

To avoid losing the reader's attention and to be as clear and short as possible I have organised this section in point form: :

- Socialists need to explore carefully the notion of ecosocialism. In this respect we must engage with Joel Kovel's writing on the subject, among others. We are fortunate in that he will be giving talks in South Africa very soon. Tho-

se who can must attend his talks, and if possible record them so that they can be shared with a wider audience of socialists. I think it is important to call on all socialist groups to include the ecological crisis and the ecosocialism in theory discussions and in study groups. Social movement and trade union education and discussion should be asked to do the same. Left intellectuals with access to students and the thinking public should expound these ideas and engage the masses. Ordinary people need to put their stamp on our vision of a future ecosocialist society.

- We (socialists and other progressives) need to encourage the social movements, trade unions, youth and other mass organisations that we work with to take up environmental struggles. We need to identify issues and campaigns that can help the working class learn more about the ecological crisis. This will involve taking up new issues or identifying an ecological component in present struggles.

Some examples of such issues and possible struggles are the following::

- The fight against Eskom building more coal power stations to make electricity - The promotion of the development and use of renewable energy as opposed to fossil fuels - The struggle against dumping that is harmful to the environment and the people e.g. fighting for proper garbage collection and cleaning of open spaces in townships and informal settlements - The fight against pollution e.g. Iscor on the Vaal, Engen in south Durban, the burning of industrial tyres on the East Rand, etc. - The fight against capitalist marketing that promotes destructive mass consumption - The fight against the use of the private car and the struggle for adequate and affordable public transport
- The left must develop a set of demands that can unify the struggle around the ecological crisis

- We need to popularise our perspective and demands through slogans e.g. Keep the oil in the soil! Keep the coal in the hole! Keep the tarsands on the land! • The left must link up with environmental groups e.g. the newly-formed Environmental Justice Now! South African chapter. • We need to demystify and simplify environmentalism and ecocentrism in order to couch it in workers' language and align it to workers' concerns • We need to include ecological issues and demands in left platforms e.g. the Socialist Green Coalition election platform in the last elections and the call by the Conference for a Democratic Left
- We need to produce a generic/ seminal pamphlet on the environment and the socialist approach to the ecological crisis. Such a pamphlet should explain eco-socialism in a practical way that links it with current struggles in the country and the world.

## CONCLUSIÓN

This very brief paper set out to explain the basic argument why socialists should take up environmental issues and why there is a need to systematize this into a vision of eco-socialism. It is short in order to be read and understood quickly. There are many aspects which have been left out, for example, an assessment of the idea of the "commons" and how this can be construed to be an advance on the "human rights discourse". Another important discussion left out is the current global economic crisis which the great Immanuel Wallerstein, recently touring South Africa, suggested announced the death knell of capitalism. In writing this I tried to avoid preaching to the converted; my imagined target audience is "a fresh mind", say, a young person still learning the ABC of the struggle, or an older comrade who has been too busy struggling on the ground to give much thought to these issues. To such comrades I say: the time has come to take up the struggle to save the earth and to safeguard nature from capitalist destruction and its structured ignorance. Animals

and plants are part of nature. Human beings are also part of nature, they too inhabit the earth. We need a vision of a world where humans, animals, plants, forests, rivers, mountains, valleys and all other aspects of nature live harmoniously together. We cannot turn the clock back to the idyllic and uncomplicated stage of primitive communism. But we can embrace the idea of eco-socialism and struggle to realize it practically in order to advance to communism – the classless society.

Trevor Ngwane ●  
*South African activist*

Paper presented to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation conference The Global Crisis and Africa: Struggles for Alternatives

Randburg, 19 November 2009

# What happened in Geneva?

Pursuant to its statutes, the World Trade Organisation must hold an assembly with all its members every two years. Practice is quite far from statutes. Indeed, due to the difficulties encountered by negotiations to successfully accomplish the Doha Round, there has not been a meeting of all the WTO members since the last WTO conference took place in December 2005. In order to convene a plenary meeting without running the risk of a new negotiations setback, the Director-General of the WTO had called up the representatives of the 153 countries members of the WTO and the 56 countries having the status of observers not for a negotiation session but a discussion meeting and assessment of multilateral negotiations.

Nonetheless, the various organisations of civil society keeping a close eye on trade negotiations expect the presence of all the ministers in Geneva to be the occasion of dangerous parallel and informal meetings to prepare a successful accomplishment of the Doha Round in 2010. Approximately a hundred people of the OWINFS (Our World Is Not For Sale) network travelled to follow the inside of the progress of the conference that gathered around 3000 delegates. About a hundred people (thirty of whom were representing Via Campesina) kept an active presence outside the conference venue (vigils, symbolic blockade of the WTO building, guided tour of Geneva's criminals in different areas – finance, agriculture, climate – press conferences, etc.).

### The Official Content

En síntesis, nuestro esfuerzo de movilización fue de alguna manera desproporcionado con respecto a lo que en realidad sucedió. Los ministros corroboraron la necesidad para la economía mundial de concluir la Ronda de Doha en 2010 y abordaron la complementariedad que hay que buscar entre las negociaciones multilaterales y los acuerdos bilaterales o regionales. También expresaron la voluntad de reforzar lazos con la OMC y otras instituciones internacionales y lanzaron la alerta con respecto al «proteccionismo verde».

### G20 and Developing Countries: conclusion at any cost!

In relation to the ministerial meeting in New Delhi in early September 2009, no progress was made in Geneva with regards to the position of developing countries and the less advanced economies. Those ones and cotton-producing countries in particular (Mali, Chad, Burkina, Benin) repeated that they are attached to the proposal put forward in December 2008 as the basis for future negotiations. This position can be explained by the fear of developing countries towards seeing the

United States re-open negotiations in order to gain even more access to their markets. Fearing the worst, they have now accepted a proposal that was described as unacceptable a year ago. Last October, the main African cotton-producing countries led us to believe that they would block all negotiations if the question regarding the subsidies that the United States is granting to its cotton producers was not resolved prior to any negotiation. In early December, this strong position of negotiation passed completely unnoticed. The declaration of the Egyptian ambassador, in charge of the group of African countries, remained quite general. He reminded of the fact that some African countries were attached to the initial mandate of the Doha Round as a development round and he defended the political weight of developing countries (“85% of the world population”). However, he did not take any risks as to African countries being held responsible for the multilateral negotiations setback in 2010.

In general terms, the pressure is huge on the least countries that deviated from the political line mapped out by the G20. As they repeated in their statement on the 29th of November, G20 countries want a conclusion of the Doha Round in 2010. They are prepared to make the best of the text of December 2008, which in practical terms means that they abandon all their demands of July 2008 (demands for the effective reduction of subsidies to developed countries and the guarantee of a system for the protection of domestic peasant agriculture in case of an outbreak of imports from the global market).

India in particular keeps its enthusiastic and proactive attitude since early September. While committing to protect the domestic agriculture, the Indian Minister for Trade is pushing at the international level, like the other G20 members, for the conclusion of the Doha Round in 2010. But since this schizophrenia is not proving easy to keep up, he refused to meet with NGO representatives and workers' and peasants' trade unions in Geneva. He also explained to the journalists that the suicide cases in India had nothing to do with agricultural trade liberalisation.

That was quite a flippant manner to evade the issue seeing as it is known that since January 2009 more than 900 suicide cases have been registered only in the region of Vidarbha.

### The Conclusion of the Doha Round within reach of the United States

Everything looks as if the conclusion of the Doha Round depended only on the United States. However, the U.S. Trade representative, Ron Kirk, was in Geneva



this time under very strict instructions: not to negotiate. The United States is in a tight spot because they are aware of the fact that what they are doing at home is the complete opposite to what they are asking others to do at the international level. While trying to introduce more regulations in the American finances, they are demanding a wider liberalisation of the banking sector in developing countries.

While the other actors involved in the negotiation process wonder when the United States will be ready, two U.S. senators presented a legislative bill the content of which is the exact opposite of the Geneva talks. This bill demands an assessment of the existing agreements (ALENA, CAFTA) and of the participation of the United States in the WTO. It proposes new criteria to achieve a new participation mechanism for the United States in international negotiations which would replace the former Fast Track. The aim is to lay the foundations of a type of trade agreements that are more suitable for the resolution of issues such as hunger and poverty in the world. The U.S. trade policy is certainly not defined yet!

#### **Read between the lines**

There are several things to get our heads around that arise from the closing statement of the meeting in Geneva – the concern displayed to strengthen the ties between the WTO and the other international organisations, the warning against the “green protectionism”. One of those things, on the one hand, is that the WTO does not intend to let go of the carbon credit market. Even if there was nothing in particular to discuss, it was important, however, to hold this conference prior to Copenhagen in order to re-establish itself as a vibrant and active institution. On the other hand, following the recent summit in Rome, it is also necessary to remind of the hegemony of this organisation over agricultural markets at a time when voices are being raised to give FAO all its legitimacy back in this sector.

The talks that were held on finding complementarities between multilateral negotiations and bilateral or regional agreements are also remarkably important. One of the topics of discussion is the extension to the group of members of the WTO of advantages granted between two countries within the framework of a free trade agreement (FTA) or amongst several countries within the framework of a regional agreement. FTAs and regional agreements often push trade liberalisation too far; therefore, this idea is extremely risky.

The issue is all the more relevant since a meeting was held in Geneva, in parallel to the 7th Conference of the WTO, of trade ministers from the countries that are taking part in multilateral negotiation process encouraged by the UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 43 countries – of which Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam, Iran, etc. – are members of this process called Global System of Trade Prefe-

rences (GSTP) since 1989. This process aims for the establishment of a tariff preference system amongst developing countries. On the past 2nd of December, the ministers took a very concrete step when they agreed on a tariff reduction of 20% applicable to 70% of the products traded between the members of the GSTP by September 2010.

It is clear that within a context where on the one hand the negotiations of the Doha Round are blocked but where the regional agreements are making progress on the other, the issue of the extension to the group of members of the WTO of regional agreements is not neutral.

#### **Paradoxical Situation**

Those of us who went to Geneva left with the unpleasant feeling of knowing that we were undoubtedly close to an agreement – without a shadow of doubt even closer than in the last 8 years. Such agreement depends greatly on the United States, but they are trapped at the international level by their own national policy. Yet, this scheme is finally up to the majority of the governments present in Geneva and this is undoubtedly our chance. There is a huge difference between the promises made by the governments to their people and the policies that they defend at the international level. The financial, climate, economic and food crisis are increasingly bringing those contradictions to light. We can see the agreement coming more by the lassitude of the majority of the governments than by true convictions. They return to their countries without a solution to the crisis that they are facing in spite of the fact that the declared goal of this conference was to tackle the role of the WTO in the resolution of the current economic crisis..

Although it has been mentioned that an agreement is within reach for 2010, it should be added that a conference like the one held in Geneva shows a World Trade Organisation weakened and discredited by the economic situations of the majority of its members. .

Solenne Pirou ●  
Via Campesina



Declaration from Social Movements/NGOs/CSOs Parallel Forum to the World Food Summit on Food Security Rome, November 13-17, 2009

**Uno no vende la tierra por la cual camina su pueblo** *Tashunka Witko 1840 – 1877*

We, 642 persons coming from 93 countries and representing 450 organisations of peasant and family farmers, small scale fisher folk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, youth, women, the urban people, agricultural workers, local and international NGOs, and other social actors, gathered in Rome from the 13-17 of November, 2009 united in our determination to work for and demand food sovereignty in a moment in which the growing numbers of the hungry has surpassed the one billion mark. Food sovereignty is the real solution to the tragedy of hunger in our world.

Food sovereignty entails transforming the current food system to ensure that those who produce food have equitable access to, and control over, land water, seeds, fisheries and agricultural biodiversity. All people have a right and responsibility to participate in deciding how food is produced and distributed. Governments must respect, protect and fulfil the right to food as the right to adequate, available, accessible, culturally acceptable and nutritious food.

Governments have obligations to provide emergency aid. But this must not undermine food sovereignty and human rights. Emergency aid should be procured as locally as possible and must not be used to pressure countries into accepting Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). Food must never be used as a political weapon.

We call attention to the violations of rights of people, both urban and rural, living in areas under armed conflict or occupation and in emergency situations. The international community must urgently address violations of human rights like those related to forced displacement, confiscation and alien exploitation of property, land, and other productive resources, demographic manipulation and population transfers.

**Who Decides?**

We declare our support for the renewed Committee on World Food Security. We take particular note

of the commitment of those Heads of State present at the FAO Summit have shown to this important body in their Declaration. We emphasize the fundamental importance of the renewed CFS as the foremost inclusive international policy body for food and agriculture within the UN system, and as an essential body where the knowledge and perspectives of those whose daily labours have fed humanity for generations are not only heard, but also acted upon. We assert the centrality of the Right to Food as a principle to guide all elements of the Committee on World Food Security's work.

We express concern that the CFS is not receiving the funding appropriate to the ambition of its work programme. We urge FAO member states to back their political commitment with financial resources. We also note that much work remains to be done within the CFS to ensure that there is coherence between the different organs of the global food and agricultural institutional architecture. In this regard, we are extremely concerned by the proposed World Bank Global Agriculture and Food Security programme whose governance mechanism appears undemocratic, un-transparent, and destined to lead to a replication of past mistakes. As long as institutions such as the WTO continue to privilege commercial interests over the globally marginalised and malnourished, hunger will continue to stalk the world.

Civil society has played a fundamentally important role in the CFS reform process, opening up a critical space which we intend to fully occupy in a responsible and effective manner. In so doing we will ensure that the voices of the excluded continue to be heard at the heart of food and agricultural policy-making and governance, at all levels. However, whilst we value the work that has been done, and hold high expectations regarding the CFS's future achievements, we will vigilantly monitor its work to ensure that member states follow through on their commitment to create an effective mechanism that is strong in its powers of

coordination at all levels; able to hold its members to account; and start now to realise its commitment to develop a Global Strategic Framework for food security and nutrition.

### **Ecological Food Provision**

We reaffirm that our ecological food provision actually feeds the large majority of people all over the world in both rural and urban areas (more than 75%). Our practices focus on food for people not profit for corporations. It is healthy, diverse, localised and cools the planet.

We commit to strengthen and promote our ecological model of food provision in the framework of food sovereignty that feeds all populations including those in marginal zones like small islands and coastal areas. Our practices, because they prioritise feeding people locally, minimise waste and losses of food and do not create the damage caused by industrial production systems. Peasant agriculture is resilient and can adapt to and mitigate climate change. We insist, however, that food and agriculture be kept out of carbon market. We will defend and develop our agricultural, fisheries and animal biodiversity in the face of the aggressive commodification of nature, food and knowledge that is being facilitated by the 'new Green Revolutions'. We call for a global moratorium on GMO. Governments must protect and properly regulate domestic food markets. Our practices require supply management policies in order to secure availability of food and to guarantee decent wages and fair prices. We are ready to discuss new legal frameworks to support our practices.

We call for a reframing of research, using participatory methods, that will support our ecological model of food provision. We are the innovators building on our knowledge and skills. We rehabilitate local seeds systems and livestock breeds and fish/aquatic species for a changing climate. We commit to promote the findings of IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development). We call for accountability by researchers. We reject corporations' control of research and will not engage in forums that are dominated by them. We will promote our innovations through our media and outreach programmes for capacity building, education and information dissemination.

We will strengthen our interconnecting rural-urban food webs. We will build alliances within a Complex Alimentarius-linking small-scale food providers, processors, scientists, institutions, consumers-to replace the reductionist approach of the Codex Alimentarius. We commit to shorten distances between food provider and consumer. We will strengthen urban food movements and advance urban and peri-urban agriculture. We will reclaim the language of food emphasising nutrition and diversity in diets that exclude meat

provided from industrial systems.

### **Control over food producing resources**

Land grabbing by transnational capital must stop. Landlessness and land grabbing have intensified in the wake of the global food crisis, deforestation, sequestering of water bodies, privatization of the sea inland waters and coastal zones. Land and water confiscation and isolation practiced by occupying forces must be stopped. Countries and companies are colluding in alarming land grabbing practices. In less than a year, over 40 million hectares of fertile land in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe have been usurped through these deals, displacing local food production for export interests.

Instead of promoting large-scale industrial agricultural investments, we urge our governments and the FAO to implement structural changes implied in the Declaration of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) and in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) must play a critical role in ensuring the effective participation of social movements and civil society organizations.

We demand comprehensive agrarian reforms which uphold the individual and collective/community rights of access to and control over territories. All States must implement effective public policies which guarantee community (those whose derives their livelihood) control over all natural resources. Strong accountability mechanisms to redress violations of these rights need to be in place. Gender equity and the youth interests must be at the heart of genuine agrarian and aquatic reforms. Reforms should guarantee women and youth full equality of opportunities and rights to land and natural wealth, and redress historical and ongoing discrimination.

Access to water is a human right. Water must remain in the "commons" and not be subject to market mechanisms of use and governance. Aquatic reforms should give legal recognition, protection and enforcement of the collective rights of small-scale fishing communities to access and use fishing grounds and maritime resources.

Closure of pastoralists routes and expropriation of lands, natural wealth and territories from local communities through economic concessions, big plantations, industrial agriculture and aquaculture, tourism and infrastructure projects and any other means must come to an end. Gathered food is also an important source to feed many of our communities and therefore deserves specific protection.

The rights to territory for indigenous peoples encompass nature as a living being essential to the identity and culture of particular communities or peoples. As

guaranteed by Articles 41 and 42 of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights, we call FAO to adopt a policy for Indigenous Peoples, to recognize Indigenous Peoples' Territorial Rights, and to ensure their participation in resource decisions. We urge FAO and IFAD to create a Working Group with Indigenous Peoples in the CFS.

We reject intellectual property rights over living resources including seeds, plants and animals. De facto biological monopolies –where the seed or breed is rendered sterile – must be banned. We will keep the seeds in our hands. We will keep freely exchanging and saving our seeds and breeds. We value our traditional knowledge as fishers, livestock keepers, Indigenous Peoples and peasants and we will further develop it to be able to feed our communities in a sustainable way. Our songs and tales express our cosmivision and are important to maintain our spiritual relationship with our lands.

### **Civil Society Commitments**

We commit ourselves to increase our level of organization, build broad and strong alliances and promote joint actions, articulations, exchanges, and solidarity to speak with a strong voice for defending our food sovereignty. We are convinced that only the power of organized peoples and mobilization can achieve the needed changes, thus our principal task is to inform, raise awareness, debate, organize and mobilize people.

Women participants in the forum, noting the systematic oppression of women through the processes of globalization and corporatization of agriculture, fisheries and livestock, intensified by patriarchy, commit ourselves to achieving equality in representation and decision making bodies. We demand gender justice, peace and respect for the rights of women, including common property rights. Our rights over seeds, productive resources, our knowledge and our contributions to enhancing resilience must be respected, valued and protected. Women agricultural workers and their communities must be assured safe working conditions and fair wages.

Youth participants of the forum reaffirm that young people are key to the development and implementation of ecologically and socially sustainable agriculture policies. All decision making bodies must ensure the effective participation of young people. We insist on agricultural, fisheries and livestock education (formal and informal) from an early age, and the FAO and IFAD should provide adequate funds for capacity building training at all levels to address the needs of young people and rural women. Our commitment to food sovereignty includes a demand that the Committee

on Food Security be transformed into the "Committee for Food Sovereignty" and a call for a moratorium on agrofuels.

We engage ourselves to collectively accept our responsibilities to mobilize from the local to the international levels in our struggles for food sovereignty. We claim the control and the autonomy of our processes of organisation and alliances and we will further enhance our mutual accountability by valuing the wealth of our diversity and in the respect for our autonomies. We recognise the essential role of the IPC in the facilitation of alliance building.

**We demand Food Sovereignty now!**

# Women on the March until we are All Free!

In 2010, the World March of Women will be in the streets around five regions of the planet where it is present – Africa, Americas, Asia/Oceania, Europe and Middle East/Arab world – carrying out its Third International Action. The WMW will once more demonstrate our strength as collectively organised women with diverse experiences, political cultures and ethnic backgrounds, but with a common identity and goal: the desire to overthrow the current, unjust world order that provokes violence and poverty, and to construct the world we want based on peace, justice, equality, freedom and solidarity.

Under the slogan “Women on the March Until We are all Free!”, the Third International Action will be organized around two prominent moments:

\*The first one from 8th – 18th March, with regional marches of different types, forms, colours, and rhythms that will also mark the 100-year anniversary of the Declaration of International Women’s Day, called by delegates of the 2nd International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen, in 1910;

\*Simultaneous marches and actions in the countries will mark the second moment, from 7 to 17th October, with an international meeting point in Sud Kivu, Democratic Republic of

the Congo, as a way to express international solidarity with women leaving in conflict situation and to strengthen women’s protagonism in the resolution of conflicts. This action in Sud Kivu will close the WMW Third International Action

In addition to these two big moments, actions in regional level, putting together women from different countries from the same continent, will be organized in Asia/Oceania (in May, in Philippines), Europe (in June, in Turkey) and the Americas (in August, in Colombia)

In each country, mobilization is prepared around demands and commitments in the four action areas of the WMW:

- Common good and public services
- Peace and demilitarization
- Women’s work (for women’s economic autonomy)
- Violence against women

Each WMW National Coordinating Body (NCB) has defined specific issues that better represent their realities and national and local struggles within each one of those fields. They look for raising awareness for the link between oppression that occurs in local level and the global capitalist and patriarchal system, as well as for the common problems that

women experience in different realities around the world.

The challenge facing WMW activists is very big: the world context in which the action will be developed is marked by an increasing offensive of the conservative sectors of society, religious fundamentalisms of every kind, like communalism, the criminalisation of protest, the disrespect of people's rights over their territories, rising militarization and violence, implemented by governments in the name of an allegedly "war against terror".

"Patriarchy, capitalism and racism are three systems which are interlinked to control our bodies and our lives. In the South and North countries, their institutions - governments, big companies, religions - want to avoid us to achieve our rights and try to take away rights gained", affirms the call to action issued from the VII WMW International Meeting, held in October 2008, in Galicia.

Below, follow further information on the actions in the countries and regions, as well as on the closing action in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Soon the website of the WMW Third International Action will be online, where complete details on the actions in each country will be available as well as other information: [www.wmw2010.info](http://www.wmw2010.info) :

[www.wmw2010.info](http://www.wmw2010.info)

For further information on the WMW, please visit the website:

[www.worldmarchofwomen.org](http://www.worldmarchofwomen.org)

### **National preparations for 2010**

For the first moment of 2010 action, there are countries preparing marches and mobilizations during all the period that lasts from 8th to 18th March or during same days in the same period, in this way bringing women's situation and demands for justice to the attention of the press, civil society and authorities. It is the case of Kenya, for instance, where activities will start on the 8th and will finalize on the 18th and will include street theatre, cultural events, conference, marches, vigils and visit to communities. In Brazil, around 3,000 women

from the WMW and allied movements will march together during 10 days, from Campinas until the capital of Sao Paulo state. The same will happen in Pakistan, where rural and urban women will march from Hyderabad to Karachi with buses, tractors and bullcars. In Sri Lanka, the march will be developed between the cities of Thaladena and Marawila, from 8th to 11th, will stop some days and will restart from 15th to 18th. In Mali, workshops to prepare material for diffusion and a launching ceremony, as well as decentralized march will be organised in six districts of Bamako from 8th to 15th March. These actions will culminate in the organization of a march on the 18th, in the North region of the country..

National and local demonstrations and / or other activities are also being planned on, or close to, the 8th March to launch our International Action and to celebrate the Women's International Day in the following countries around the world: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, the Basque Country, Belgium, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Canada, Chile, England, El Salvador, France, Galicia, Greece, Guatemala, India, Italia, Japan, Kurdish Territory, Macedonia, México, Mozambique, Nepal, New Caledonia, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Quebec, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Turkey, Western Sahara..

In October, sisters from Quebec will also be marching during five days, from the 12th – 17th October in a march composed by different marches which will depart from different regions of the province and will arrive in Rimouski, in Bas Saint-Laurent.

Other countries will carry out actions in other months of the year, particularly from 11th June to 11th July, when activists will denounce the promotion of the industry of prostitution during the World Cup in South Africa.

### **The Third International Action in the regions**

***Asia: lucha contra libre comercio, bases militares y tráfico de mujeres***

The WMW National Coordinating Bodies in Asia and Oceania will meet from the 12th –

14th May in Quezon City, the Philippines. This will be a time to reflect on and evaluate the mobilisations carried out in March in the countries of the region, deepen the debate around the four WMW Action Areas, and plan actions for the expansion and consolidation of the WMW in the region following the 3rd International Action. In addition to the meeting, a street demonstration is being planned to raise awareness of, and make known our demands, in relation to the struggle against trafficking of women, free trade, militarisation, and climate change as part of the regional action.

### ***In the Americas, meeting of women against war and for peace***

The meeting, being organised by the Social Movement of Women against War and for Peace, of Colombia, and the World March of Women, will be held from the 16th – 23rd August. The objective is to reflect, and take action, on the critical situation of social and armed conflict that the American people are experiencing, particularly in Colombia. This situation affects the territory, the sovereignty, and especially, the lives, autonomy, and bodies of women, who suffer from the social, psychological, economic and physical damages caused by war.

The invitation to the meeting affirms: “War has worsened violence, poverty, and inequality; it is women who suffer most perversely from displacement, feminicide, and disappearances, as well as being responsible for supporting their families due to the fact that the State prioritises military spending over the provision of basic services.”

In addition, the recently-announced installation of U.S. military bases in Colombia represents a threat to the entire continent, as these bases become an instrument of military intervention for political and social control of the people, placing their sovereignty at risk.

The meeting will consist of three parts; it will begin with an international humanitarian action in different regions of the country, followed by the meeting of women in Bogotá,

and closing with a public political action represented by a mobilisation and vigil for life and sovereignty.

### ***In Europe, a march and discussion of demands at the regional level***

The European WMW action will take place on the 30th June in Istanbul, Turkey, the day before the European Social Forum (1st – 4th July) – although independent of this event – with the participation of 200-300 WMW activists. Plans for the day of action include the organisation of a march, plenary discussions and workshops on the four Action Areas, with presentations of the struggles of Turkish and Kurdish women. Actions are also planned together with the media. A working group is currently preparing a proposal for WMW demands at the European regional level to be debated by the NCBs prior to the meeting in Istanbul.

### ***Africa: international mobilisation closes the 2010 action***

The closing mobilisation will take place from the 14th – 17th October in Bukavu, in the province of South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with the presence of an international delegation composed mainly of women from the African continent but also women from other countries in conflict around the world. During the first international planning mission which took place in October 2009, the format of the action was defined: two days of panel discussions on the four Action Areas of the WMW, a day of a food sovereignty fair, and a day of protests in the streets where women will speak out against war and for peace. Planned activities also include planting trees and the inauguration of a memorial to honour women victims of violence in the DRC, particularly the women were buried alive in Mwenda territory (Kasika).

The next edition of the newsletter will bring more information about the social, political, and economic situation in the DRC as a whole, and particularly of women.

### ***WMW focus on the fields of action***

The four fields of action synthesizes the whole set of actions carried out by the different par-

ticipant groups which are in the base of the WMW in various countries. They were the result of a large process of discussion held in local levels (by the National Coordinating Bodies) and, after, in international level (mainly in the International Meetings). You can find highlighted below some of the struggles that will be put in evidence along 2010 in each field of action:

**Common good.** We fight against the privatization of nature and public services and against the market solutions to face climate change. We affirm the principle of food sovereignty and the right to health care, education, potable water, and sanitation.

**Peace and demilitarisation.** We strive to show the complexity of the causes of war, which include the desire to control women's lives and bodies, the manipulation of ethnic and religious conflicts, the exploitation of natural resources, and the interests of the arms industry.

**Women's work.** We defend access for all workers, men and women, to their legal rights, social security, and equal pay, including a fair minimum wage, everywhere in the world, without discrimination of any kind.

**Violence against women.** We combat violence

through actions to increase awareness in society, together with allied social movements, and also through the elaboration of demands made to the State. We want to show how violence towards women occurs, its causes and how they manifest themselves, and make visible all forms of women's resistance to sexist violence, particularly in the collective sphere.

Complete texts for each field of action are available on the WMW website, in the links below:

<http://www.marchemondiale.org/actions/2010action/text/en/>



### Des nouvelles marches européennes contre le chômage et la misère en 2010

Originellement la proposition vient de militantes d'organisations de lutte contre la pauvreté en Belgique, et notamment dans la région flamande. Ces organisations essaient de dépasser un rôle de lobbying, et d'organiser de véritables mobilisations des pauvres. Ainsi on voit chaque année à l'occasion du 17 octobre, journée mondiale de lutte contre la pauvreté, une véritable mobilisation de pauvres dans les rues de Bruxelles. C'est assez impressionnant.

#### L'origine

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Ces militantes flamandes parlaient du constat que l'Union Européenne a décrété 2010 année européenne de lutte contre la pauvreté, et que la Belgique a la présidence de l'UE dans la deuxième moitié de 2010, donc notamment le 17 octobre 2010. Elles se demandaient si ce 17 octobre 2010 ne devait pas être l'occasion de nouvelles marches européennes convergeant sur Bruxelles. Afin d'en discuter, elles ont contacté des militants à Bruxelles du réseau des « Marches européennes»(1).

Ainsi l'idée a fait son chemin, via Kiev et Saarbrücken pour atterrir dans l'Assemblée des Chômeurs et des Précaires au cinquième Forum Social Européen à Malmö en septembre 2008, et être repris dans les conclusions de ce FSE.

#### Une conférence européenne

Afin de progresser dans la concrétisation de l'idée, les Marches européennes ont participé à une conférence européenne au Parlement Européen le 3 et le 4 novembre 2009, qu'elles

organisaient en collaboration avec la GUE, le groupe politique de la gauche au Parlement Européen. Des représentants de l'EAPN, de la Marche mondiale des femmes et d'autres réseaux y participaient également.

Lors de cette conférence, nous avons constaté qu'il y avait plusieurs projets pour octobre 2010 qui convergeaient. Citons-les.

- Le samedi 10 octobre 2010 la Marche Mondiale des Femmes (MMF) organise une mobilisation à Tervueren, une commune tout près de Bruxelles, aux bords du Musée de l'Afrique Centrale. Cette mobilisation est une des activités de clôture de la MMF 2010. La semaine après une délégation partira au Kivu (dans l'Est du Congo) où la MMF 2010 sera clôturée. La lutte contre la pauvreté est une préoccupation importante de la MMF, et ce n'est donc pas un hasard si cette édition de la MMF se termine le 17 octobre 2010, journée mondiale de la lutte contre la pauvreté. Pour plus d'informations sur la MMF, voir notamment leur dernier bulletin international:

[http://www.marchemondiale.org/bulletin\\_liaison/2009/200903/fr](http://www.marchemondiale.org/bulletin_liaison/2009/200903/fr)

- Trois jours après, le mardi 12 octobre 2010, le réseau européen de lutte contre la pauvreté EAPN envisage d'organiser avec 4000 personnes une chaîne humaine entre les trois institutions européennes (Commission, Conseil et Parlement). C'est EAPN qui a revendiqué que 2010 soit une année européenne de lutte contre la pauvreté, et ils veulent maintenant que cette année mène à des résultats tangibles. Une de leurs revendications les plus importantes est que l'UE doit imposer à ses états membres l'adoption d'un revenu minimum adéquat par état membre. Voir : [www.eapn.org](http://www.eapn.org)
- Le dimanche après, le 17 octobre 2010, les organisations de lutte contre la pauvreté en Belgique organisent comme chaque année un ensemble d'activités, avec

une mobilisation importante à Bruxelles. Vu que 2010 est l'année européenne de lutte contre la pauvreté, un effort supplémentaire sera de mise.

- A partir d'août des actions seront organisées un peu partout en Europe contre le chômage qui explose, le travail précaire et l'exclusion sociale. Ces actions consistent entre autre en des marches qui devraient converger cette même semaine du 10 au 17 octobre vers Bruxelles, parce que la Belgique préside l'UE la deuxième moitié de 2010. Cette initiative est portée par un large éventail d'organisations, et permettra des initiatives décentralisées dans une série de villes en Europe et en Belgique. En Belgique sont impliqués notamment les Travailleurs Sans Emplois de la FGTB et plusieurs organisations de pauvres et de sans papiers. Ces marches ont repris la revendication d'une taxe sur les transactions financières, qui est une revendication emblématique des réseaux européens qui travaillent sur la crise financière (on ne peut découpler la lutte pour l'emploi et la redistribution des richesses).
- Des organisations de sans-abri prévoient pendant la même semaine à Bruxelles une conférence européenne sur le logement..

Toutes ces organisations sont en contact entre elles au niveau européen et/ou belge, et collaborent pour transformer ensemble les mobilisations du 10 au 17 octobre en un succès.

### **Le Forum Social de Belgique**

Il va de soi qu'une convergence entre ces différentes initiatives s'impose, pour transformer octobre 2010 en une mobilisation européenne contre le chômage et la misère. Suite à cette conférence, les participants se sont donné rendez-vous à la prochaine réunion de préparation du FSE d'Istanbul fin janvier 2010 à Berlin, et à une nouvelle conférence européenne à Bruxelles le weekend du 10-11 avril 2010.

Le Forum Social de Belgique (FSdB) prépare elle aussi la présidence belge de l'Union Européenne. .

Le FSdB est une structure permanente, avec une mi-temps au secrétariat (Monica Espinoza), et est composé d'un 'comité de pilotage' et d'une assemblée générale. Le FSdB a connu une longue période difficile suite à des

divergences internes sur sa fonction (quelle est sa mission spécifique à côté des nombreuses autres plateformes et coordinations), mais compte se relancer, notamment donc en s'investissant dans la préparation de la présidence belge de l'UE. Rappelons que le FSdB a été fondé en février 2002 suite aux mobilisations dans le cadre de la présidence belge de l'Union Européenne fin 2001 (« D14 »).

Les Marches européennes font partie des organisations fondatrices du FSdB, et ont longtemps assuré le lien entre le FSdB et le FSE.

Pour préparer la présidence belge, le FSdB organisera une journée de discussion et de mobilisation le samedi 10 avril 2010. Cette date du 10 avril a été consciemment choisie pour qu'elle coïncide avec la deuxième conférence de préparation des marches européennes le weekend du 10 et 11 avril, afin de faciliter des échanges réciproques. En effet, les mobilisations contre le chômage et la misère en octobre 2010 font maintenant partie de la préparation par le FSdB de la présidence belge de l'UE, à côté d'autres initiatives et axes.

### **Quelques questions politiques**

Citons quelques problèmes politiques qui sont discutés dans le cadre de la préparation des marches de 2010.

Une première question est le lien entre la répartition des richesses et le chômage et la misère. Comment traduire ce lien en revendications ? Le choix a été fait d'adopter comme une des revendications phares la taxe sur les transactions financières. Cette taxe est adoptée comme une revendication emblématique lors des réunions successives de l'espace inter-réseaux (cross network space) né dans la foulée de la crise économique et financière lors de réunions successives à Paris, Francfort et Bruxelles.

La revendication de cette taxe a un avantage évident dans la mesure où elle vise clairement les pratiques du secteur financier, délégitimées dans les yeux de l'opinion publique. En reprenant cette revendication, nous avons voulu renforcer les convergences entre mouvements et réseaux, et notamment avec les forces qui réfléchissent à partir de la sphère financière, là où notre point de départ pour attaquer les mêmes politiques néolibérales est la crise sociale.

Une deuxième question est le rapport entre revenu et emploi. C'est une question récurrente parmi les forces qui se reconnaissent dans le réseau des Marches européennes. Comment articuler la revendication d'un emploi et d'un revenu ? Ce n'est pas une difficulté théorique abstraite, mais une question qui reflète la façon différente de vivre la crise sociale par différentes couches de la population. On s'imagine facilement que pour les travailleurs menacés de l'automobile la question du maintien de l'emploi est une priorité absolue, tandis qu'un chômeur de longue durée mettra spontanément plus l'accent sur la question du revenu. Les Français ont résolu la question par leur slogan « Un emploi, c'est un droit, un revenu, c'est un dû », mais le débat reprend à chaque rencontre.

La troisième question est celle du lien entre les luttes dans les états membres et la nécessité de confronter les politiques de l'Union Européenne en tant que telles. Spontanément, au niveau européen, c'est la question du revenu qui surgit : la revendication que l'Union Européenne adopte des normes contraignantes pour des revenus et des salaires minimum dans les états membres, pour contrebalancer le marché et le dumping social. Mine de rien, c'est une revendication qui ferait exploser la cohérence de l'architecture néolibérale actuelle de l'UE. Mais elle met l'accent sur la question du revenu, tandis que dans la réalité des états membres avec l'explosion des licenciements et du chômage, c'est la question de l'emploi qui est centrale... Faut-il donc privilégier des revendications qui d'emblée s'adressent à l'Union Européenne, ou bien des revendications qui unifient les luttes dans les différents pays (par ailleurs membres de l'UE ou non), par exemple contre les licenciements ?

Une quatrième question est celle des alliances, qui en partie recoupe les questions précédentes. En effet, comment construire une alliance entre une salariée d'Opel menacée par les licenciements, un sans abri dans les rues de Bruxelles, et un jeune Africain qui au péril de sa vie a traversé la méditerranée ? Toutes et tous ils sont victimes de la crise de l'emploi qui depuis quatre décennies mine nos sociétés en Europe. La précarisation du marché de l'emploi et la montée des travailleurs pauvres relativise les frontières entre

ces groupes sociaux, mais sans les effacer pour autant, et la situation est assez différente entre différents états membres.

L'objectif n'est évidemment pas de résoudre toutes ces questions. Au contraire, il faut définir des objectifs qui permettent d'agir ensemble, tout en créant les espaces pour continuer la discussion sur les questions qui restent ouvertes.

### **Le prochain rendez-vous**

Tout cela sera rediscuté le vendredi 29 janvier 2010 à Berlin, lors d'une réunion européenne qui se situe dans le cadre de l'AEP de Berlin ce weekend-là.

Le potentiel des Marches2010 est évident. Ces marches pourraient aider à commencer à surmonter la passivité et la résignation face à l'énormité de la crise, et permettre aux forces les plus militantes de prendre l'initiative. La gauche politique pourrait y trouver un levier pour agir au niveau européen aussi en dehors des institutions.

Mais tout cela reste de l'ordre du potentiel, car actuellement et comparé au défi les forces qui portent l'initiative restent assez fragiles..

Frank Slegers

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(1) Ce dernier réseau existe depuis le Sommet européen d'Amsterdam en 1997. Il a été le premier réseau à organiser de véritables mobilisations sociales à l'échelle européenne pour combattre le néolibéralisme de l'UE, et à initier une manifestation à l'occasion d'un sommet européen (50.000 personnes dans les rues d'Amsterdam). Il se situait à l'intersection entre la montée du chômage en Europe dans les années 1990, et l'accélération de l'unification sur une base néolibérale de l'Europe (Acte Unique, Traité de Maastricht). Le réseau était et est toujours composé d'un large éventail d'organisations sociales et syndicales, et à après 1997 continué à se mobiliser et a participé à la construction du FSE, même si son noyau stable s'est rétréci.

# FINANCIAL CRISIS *or crisis of capitalism*

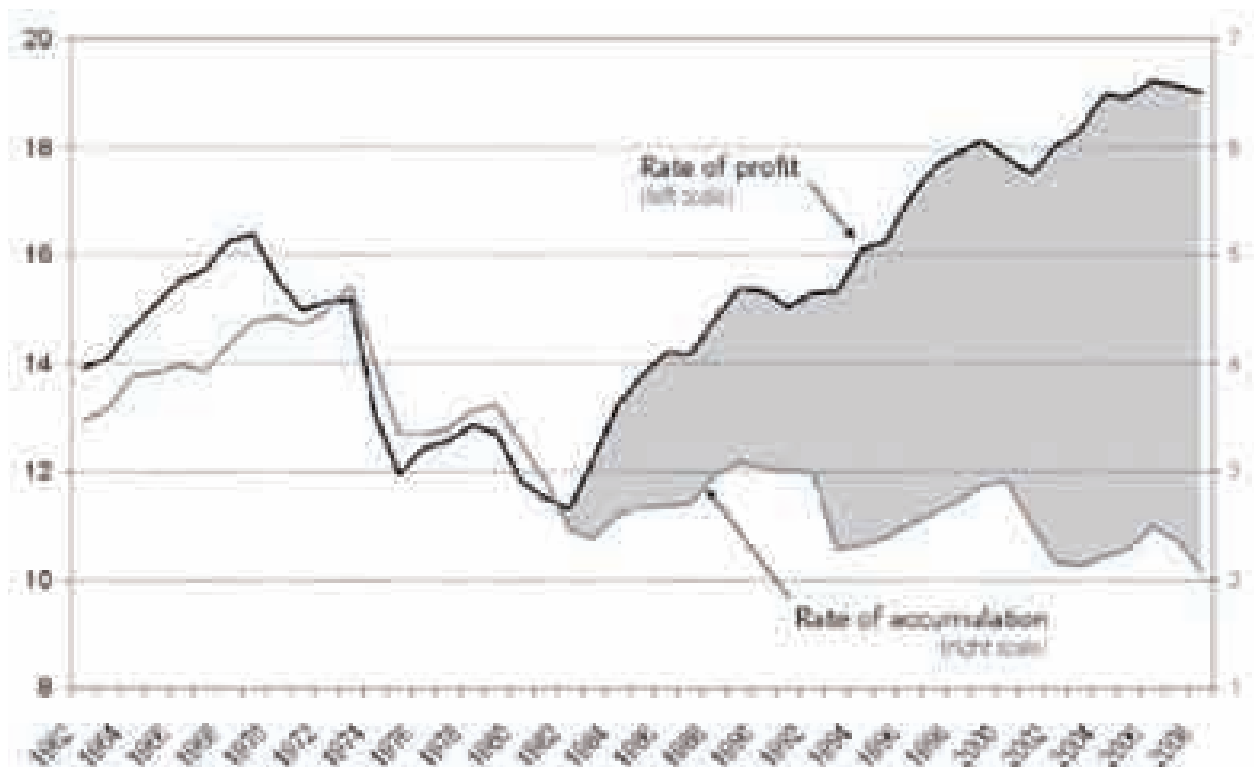
The current crisis originated in the financial arena but quickly spread to all of the so-called real economy. This observation raises two questions. A theoretical question: how to analyze the relationship between finance and the real economy and their responsibility for the crisis? And a more practical question: what are the channels of transmission from one to another and how to reverse financialisation?

### What is the link between finance and the real economy?

Very schematically, it is possible to say on this point, that between progressive economists, two theses are opposed according to whether finance is considered as parasitic or functional. In order to discuss these two positions better a possible starting point is consideration of an essential characteristic of contemporary capitalism. From the neoliberal turn at the beginning of the 1980s the rate of profit has recovered considerably, but this has not led to an increase in the rate of accumulation (see diagram). In other words the extra profits were used for something other than investment.

Manifestly, the “theorem of Schmidt”, enunciated by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt at the beginning of the 1980s (“today's profits are tomorrow's investments and the jobs of the day after tomorrow”) has not worked. That this behaviour is unprecedented in the history of capitalism has been established and emphasized by many analysts, and is a key element of the critique of financial capitalism.

Figure 1. Profit and accumulation (USA + UE + Japan)



Source : Ameco Database, European Commission, <http://tinyurl.com/ameco8>

Rate of accumulation = growth rate of net capital

An increasing amount of the wealth produced has been absorbed by bank profits and dividends. The first explanation for this phenomenon is that the financial sector extracts profits made by enterprises in the productive sector. This is referred to as parasitic or predatory finance, which implies that the requirements of profitability will continually grow and exert a growing pressure on business management and particularly on employment. This interpretation contains some truth but it may relieve productive capitalism of responsibility. There would be a "good" capitalism which would be unable to function properly as a result of the puncture made by the "bad" finance. Such a reading grid logically implies that the horizon of an alternative plan could be limited to the regulation of capitalism through relieving the financial pressure that is the source of all the ills, and through this would provide it with the means to function normally.

A variant of this view distinguishes between two measures of profit rates as calculated before or after payment of interest and dividend payments. The rate of capital accumulation is seen as evolving in line with the narrow definition of profit of enterprises, thus implicitly advancing the idea that finance drains away the capital needed for investment. It is a distorted view of the theory of capitalism to make the dynamics of accumulation dependent on the distribution of profits between companies and stockholders. It is opposed both by Marxist theory and conventional theories which postulate that the remuneration of shareholders is justified by their provision of savings and therefore investment

Another objection to this reading is based on a reality in several countries, and in any case in France; domestic investment is relayed through foreign investment. Analysis on a global scale would show the difference between profit and accumulation to be reduced significantly. In addition to the statistical difficulties that hinder such an assessment, observation of international investment flows shows that they still relate mainly to developed countries, although the share of emerging markets has increased. IMF data show that in 2006 the two superpowers (U.S. and EU) were net exporters of productive capital, but at a level of a small proportion of their private investment, respectively 1% and 3%.

This approach is unsatisfactory because it can not account for the change of capitalism since its entry into the neo-liberal period. The transformation of the financial system must be analyzed through two key trends at work since the early 1980s. The first is the continuing decline in the share of produced wealth that accrues to employees, almost everywhere in the world. Even the IMF or the European Commission are now finding this. It is this decline in the wage share that has led to a dramatic recovery in profit rates from the mid-

1980s. But, again, this additional profit has not been used to invest more.

The growing mass of profits not invested was mainly distributed in the form of financial revenue, and here lies the source of the process of financialization. The difference between the profit rate and investment rate is also a good indicator of the degree of financialization. One can also verify that the rise in unemployment and job insecurity is associated with the growth of the financial sphere. Again, the reason is simple: finance has succeeded in capturing most of the productivity gains at the expense of employees, by blocking the growth of wages and does not sufficiently reducing, in fact increasing, the duration of labour.

The relationship between productive capital and financial capital was profoundly changed. But this has been in the direction of increasing interdependence: we have moved from an economy of debt, where bank credit provides financing to companies to a financialized economy where firms have developed their own financial activities. The requirement of financial profitability is very high, an effect which in turn influences the conditions of exploitation of workers. One can therefore not artificially separate the role of finance and that of the conflict between capital and labour for the distribution of value added. It is not the rise of finance which lowers wages but, conversely, the rise of the share of profits which not invested which feeds finance.

If one thinks in terms of the reproduction of capital, then we are facing the following problem. The share of wages has fallen and that of investment stagnated: in these conditions, who will buy production that continues to grow? The solution to this problem relies on the recycling of profits not invested, which is carried through by the redistribution operated by finance.

Financialisation is not an independent factor and it appears as the logical counterpart of the decline in wages and the scarcity of investment opportunities which are profitable enough. Therefore, the rise of social inequalities (within each country and between areas of the world economy) is a constitutive feature of the functioning of contemporary capitalism.

This approach to finance is reinforced with the inclusion of globalization. In the gradual establishment of a global market, the role of finance is to eliminate as much as possible any boundaries to areas of valorisation. The great strength of finance capital is in effect to ignore geographical or sectoral boundaries, because it has the means to quickly pass from one economic zone to another; from one sector to another the movements of capital can now be deployed on a scale greatly enlarged. The function of finance is here to intensify the law of competition and to make the movement

of capital more fluid.. The current configuration of the global economy strengthens this mechanism. It is indeed fundamentally unbalanced, since the deficit of the United States is financed by the rest of the world. However, this imbalance contributes to an enormous amount of liquidity in search of maximum profitability which fuels finance and add to its inherent instability. The main feature of contemporary capitalism does not lie in the opposition between financial capital and productive capital, but the devaluation of work and the hyper-competition between capitals which leads to financialisation.

### **Which transmission channels?**

In 1987, a major meltdown led most economists to predict a sharp slowdown in the global economy. The opposite happened: from 1988, developed countries experienced a cycle of dynamic growth. The stock market crash did not transmit to the real economy and, instead, drained the excesses and allowed resetting of the meters to zero. It is after all a classic function of crises to clear the accounts and eliminate lame ducks. A few years later, a housing crisis and major mortgage shock hit Japan, which was presented at the time as the rising power set to conquer world markets. This opened a decade of approximately zero growth, from which the Japanese economy has struggled to emerge.

Finance is more or less independent in different places and times but it is clear that in the current crisis, the transmission to the real economy has been rapid, brutal and universal. Neither Europe nor the emerging countries have avoided the collapse of the mortgage market in the United States. This transmission has worked through several channels:

- restrictions on credit affect both household consumption and corporate investment. This effect was particularly marked in countries like the U.S. or the UK, where household consumption is driven by debt
- devaluation of financial assets and household property will encourage lower consumption through the wealth effect;
- the general uncertainty weighs on consumption and investment behaviour, the housing crisis contributes in its own right to the general economic downturn;
- public spending to support the banking system represents considerable sums which will require spending cuts or tax increases;
- last but not least, the slowdown is spreading to the entire world economy through trade and investment.

All these mechanisms currently at work are combined

with other dimensions of the crisis to extend its impact well beyond the financial sphere. There is no watertight division between finance and the real economy, because finance is a cornerstone of neo-liberal capitalism. This also means that the very foundations of its current operation will be jeopardized by the current crisis. For example, the growth model of the United States is based on a double deficit; the foreign trade deficit and the internal savings deficit. In both cases, finance plays a key role in managing these imbalances: internally it has made possible over-indebtedness; externally it has sustained the balance of payments through capital inflows. But if the financial sector collapses, it is the basis of this mode of growth that will be challenged: household debt is now blocked, and capital inflows are no longer guaranteed. Therefore, the financial crisis will lead to a lasting slowdown in growth in the United States which will be communicated to the rest of the world.

### **The nature of the crisis**

This interpretation of the crisis opposes certain dogmatic interpretations which lay a claim to Marx and allot a central role to the famous law of the falling rate of profit. However, all empirical evidence shows that the rate of profit has recovered sharply in the major capitalist countries. Without twisting the measurement of the rate of profit to show it falling contrary to the evidence, it is necessary to think about a crisis that resulting from an overflow of profit. Against this backdrop, a debate is growing on the characterization of the crisis: overproduction, overaccumulation, under-consumption? Contributions to this debate are often lengthy comments of Marx's Capital instead of a concrete analysis of the current crisis. It is no doubt necessary to return to more detailed discussion of this tedious debate, but it is especially important to stress here two dimensions of the crisis which it obscures..

It results primarily from the exploitation of workers worldwide. Overall, the main characteristic of contemporary capitalism is a general trend toward higher rates of exploitation. From this point of view, capitalism has managed to restore its rate of profit but it faced a problem of realisation which appeared in the mid-1980s. This contradiction was managed in two ways: by increasing inequality which generated alternatives to consumption out of wages and by a headlong rush into debt distress. In both cases, the role of "finance" is decisive in ensuring the recycling of capital gains income to stockholders, and supporting the rush towards debt.

Capitalism has been caught short by this contradiction, and this is the meaning of this crisis. But we must go further and ask the question why capitalism is now investing a smaller proportion of its profits. We can once again see the pressure of finance, but this would

not be exercised with the same force if capitalism had sufficient opportunities for profitable investments. It is here that the systemic character of the crisis is located, at a deeper level, and involving the vital springs of this mode of production. The source of this crisis is fundamentally the widening gap between the social needs of humanity and the criteria specific to capitalism. Social demand is focused on goods that are not likely to be produced with maximum efficiency. The productivity gains allowed by new technologies and innovation lead to a choice (based on profitability in production) which is less in line with the social demand and which consequently, is not sufficiently profitable in the market.

This gap is in two main dimensions. The first, in developed countries, is the shift in demand from manufactured goods to services which are associated with lower productivity growth and hence lower profit outlook. No outlet has taken over at a scale sufficient to play the same role as the automotive sector in the earlier Fordist phase. The second dimension is the result of geo-economics and globalization: it tends to create a global market, ie an enlarged space for valorisation. The lower levels of productivity of less advanced sectors are directly confronted with profitability requirements aligned with the performance of countries or companies which are more efficient. The resulting supplanting means that a number of producers and so the social needs that they could meet, are no longer viable based on the criteria of hyper-profitability that they face

Under these conditions, the reproductive system goes through a double movement of expansion in the field of goods and refusal to respond to needs which are not profitable. Contemporary capitalism has met the conditions of optimal functioning from its point of view. Rather than improving social welfare, perfect competition, free of regulations, rigidities and other distortions, shows a total lack of legitimacy, since social regression is explicitly claimed as the main condition for success of the system. In this framework, finance is not only the compensation for the increased exploitation of workers, it is also an outlet for capital in search of maximum profitability. The excessive profitability requirement it imposes on the real economy in turn reinforces the low buoyancy of investment and social inequality as a condition of reproduction of the system.

This analysis leads to two general conclusions. The first is that capitalism has been overtaken by its contradictions and sees itself reduced to the situation that it was in after the recession of 1974-75. For over 25 years, it existed entirely on credit and is now faced with deadlines with which it can not cope. The bank failure is the symbol of its own bankruptcy, and it has no other alternative. Under these conditions, and this

is the second conclusion, regulation of finance would be a useful remedy, but that does not address the root causes. Financialisation feeds on the declining wage share and imbalances in the global economy. To deflate finance therefore requires closing the two valves which feed it, which implies a different distribution of wealth, and another organization of the world economy, both perspectives absolutely foreign to capital.

Michel Husson

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Translation into English: Andy Kilmster

# CRISIS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

## notes for discussion

I- On October 15th 2008, when the crisis had reached its most critical point, a series of meetings were held by the Asia-Europe People's Forum in Beijing. They were hosted by the Transnational Institute and Focus on the Global South. These meetings ended with the "Beijing Declaration" (which is a document that includes proposed measures on the financial sector; tax reform, public spending and investment, international trade and finance, environment, agriculture and industry). The objective was to move forward on "proposals for notes for discussion, development and action".

The initial idea was that the crisis provided an unequalled opportunity to attract people through concrete action to support ideas that we had been developing for many years and whose objectives were anchored in the WSF Charter of principles: "interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism".

After one year, and a lot of mobilisation in France, Italy, Greece...the different initiatives that had been set up – including the "Cross-Network Space on the Global Crises" and the successive declarations – showed themselves to be incapable in this crisis of organising mobilisation against employers' or governmental policies, as well as the political and strategic weakness of the movement.

II – The origins of this weakness is the fact that the central objective was to get the system to "work properly" again, rather than to formulate alternative. The most highly developed logic of this position can be found in Peter Whal's text *With realistic radicalism: Which approach to the upcoming era of reforms [Con radicalismo realista : cuál es el enfoque para la próxima era de reformas]*. He is one of the key people involved in the "Cross Network Space on the Global Crises".

According to Peter Whal, what has happened does not mean the end of capitalism as such, but rather of a certain kind of capitalism. He concludes by stating that the central line of movements at present should involve "seizing the opportunity to influence the fundamental reform process in order to achieve a New Deal". This is the sum total of a "radical realism". It is difficult to see how these two concepts can fit

together, and they lead to policies that are neither realistic nor radical in nature.

This is because firstly, the neoliberal policies are not genuinely undermined by the elite, and because we are not on the road to a New Deal (there margins for manoeuvre in the system are very limited; the determining factor is the balance of power and not the crisis) and secondly because the "radical" proposals are limited to financial regulation; nevertheless, finance is indeed the mirror in which the systemic crisis is reflected.

The radical nature of this type of proposal does not even come close to one of the elementary conclusion of F. Houtard as formulated in the Commission for the reform of the monetary and financial system in the General Assembly of the United Nations: production should be geared to the values of use and not to values of exchange.

And as they are anchored in the capitalist system, they stop at the line of private property (which is sacrosanct and untouchable) and the social control of production and finance. "Radical realism" is therefore confined to "cleansing" measures introduced by the system and for the system.

This "radicalism" is indeed far from the radicalism of the altermondialist movement that is based on a break with the logic of the market economy, the appropriation of the private sector and encouraging mobilisation around social transformation. Nor does this radicalism provide a reply to the three fundamental questions posed by the crisis:

- What decisions need to be taken (as far as the crisis, production, distribution, consumption, social crisis, energy, environment are concerned)?
- Who is taking the decisions? (What powers have citizens, workers, peasants and indigenous communities...)? and
- Where are the decisions being taken? (In institutions with no democratic control, such as the WTO, IMF or G-20... or by using mechanisms of participatory direct democracy?)

III- Apart from this reality, there is also the reality of the mobilisations that we have seen in recent months: the first general strikes in Greece, France and Italy, and of the struggle against the closure of companies and lay-



ing off of employees. These have been difficult, radical struggles, with factories occupied, employers sequestered... There have also been some that have been long, that died out, isolated, disorganised due to union strategies aimed more at achieving political consensus, social dialogue with employers and the government, rather than at confronting the crisis.

With the faith of those converted to economic competitiveness as the means of overcoming the crisis, thus singing from the same song-sheet as the employers and successive governments, the trade union movement (ICU and ECU) are still following a path that has only succeeded in weakening the balance of power of the worker's and trade union movement's confrontation with capitalism over the last thirty years, that of social dialogue.

This policy has produced almost no results, and in the current crisis it has shown its inability to link a co-ordinated response to the process of job conversion proposed by employers (with factory closures and/or laying off of personnel) in the multinationals (the automobile and steel sectors etc...) or in encouraging mobilisation to fight the steep increase in unemployment and the organised destruction of social services by the governmental policies that have been introduced.

The Via Campesina is one of the movements that stand out by their ideas and their strategy to fight the crisis. They have correctly analysed the systemic root causes of the crisis – not only from an economic standpoint, but also in terms of the environment and food dimensions) and they are working to build alliances everywhere throughout the world. Sadly, they are often alone to follow this road.

IV - The crisis, over and above the recovery of financial markets or the increase in GDP, will remain, and its social impacts will become increasingly acute as time goes on. And one year after its appearance, the balance of power with employers and governments has not improved.

In this context, the Social Fora – that should be useful in helping to co-ordinate the response and organisation of movements – as was the case in protesting against the war in Iraq) appear to be paralysed. The energy that is needed to reach a broad consensus is often detrimental to the development of significant mobilisation; this leads to precarious commitments that have no real impact in terms of mobilisation. The low level of mobilisation on March 28th 2009, in spite of the radical attitudes expressed during the WSF in Belém, proves the point.

What is most worrying is the low level of participation in the major events, such as the 12th of December in

Copenhagen, by many collectives that are involved in the Social Fora. This all raises some questions:

1. Firstly, as to the usefulness of broad consensus and precarious commitments to mobilisation when it takes on a vital importance in responding to the crisis, and
2. The need to create a new dynamic in the Fora – and elsewhere – for the Assembly of Social Movements whose aim is to “jointly organise efficient actions” to fight the crisis.

V – Mobilisations such as that of 12th December in Copenhagen demonstrate the ability to mobilise. There is also an on-going struggle against the aggression of employers and governments. The problem is that these struggles have little connection with the policies of the trade union Confederations or the NGOs that monopolise the Fora, and they are also very distant from initiatives such as the “Cross Network Space on the Global Crises”.

The question is not to renounce on the possibilities provided by these spaces for discussion and political exchange. But achieving “another world” certainly does mean holding in-depth discussion between those who consider that the alternative is that of “influencing” the face of “new capitalism” and those who favour a break with capitalism. But more than anything else, it means becoming aware that dealing with the crisis involves more than discussion, dialogue and political or ideological confrontation of ideas.

More than anything we need a space for jointly co-ordinating actions and struggles:

- Mobilisations that will genuinely undermine the logic of capitalism: is it really possible to save jobs while respecting private property? And to protect social gains while saving the profits of the banking sector, shareholders and multinationals? And to stop the destruction of agricultural economies and save 20% of the world's population from hunger while protecting the profits of agribusinesses?..
- Mobilisations that will take place not only against the Summit meetings such as Copenhagen, but that will be in solidarity with struggles against the attacks of employers and governments. Initiatives that will overcome the isolation of struggle in companies and the public sector and help them to converge.

How can we succeed in doing this? That is the really urgent question we now need to discuss.

Josu Egireun  
29-12-09

English translation by Judith Hitchman,

### Vale Inco, - Canadá & Quebe

## Strike at world's largest nickel mine

International solidarity organizes against Vale Inco, 2nd largest transnational mining giant in the world

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In France's south Pacific colony of New Caledonia, a small delegation of Vale Inco strikers from Sudbury, in Northeastern Ontario, most of them Franco-Ontarians, met in October with the union at the island's Vale Inco nickel mine, due to open in 2010 although it threatens a UNESCO nature reserve. The newspaper *Nouvelles calédoniennes* reported the encounter, in its October 31 edition:

"In the face of the global economy, the labour movement is looking to internationalize. In Canada, 3,500 workers at Vale Inco are currently on strike. Their union, the United Steelworkers, has launched a crusade to visit every Vale Inco site on the planet, for the purpose of forging alliances. In New Caledonia, union representatives met with the unions that represent the workers at the plant located in the south. (...) For the past three and a half months, ...workers at Vale Inco in Canada have been engaged in a test of strength with the Brazilian multinational that absorbed Inco, the Canadian nickel giant which initiated the Goro Nickel project in Caledonia. ...

They are accusing the Vale group of taking advantage of the global crisis and lower profits to make underhanded cuts in employees' wages, pension plans and social assistance programs. They are also organizing visits to all of Vale Inco's sites in Brazil, Indonesia, Australia and New Caledonia, to create a sort of worldwide alliance between the various unions that represent the multinational corporation's employees." [1]

#### Vale, too big to be defeated in a single country

The strike at Vale Inco began in mid-July at Sudbury, a city of 150,000 inhabitants, one third of them Francophone. In early August the strike was joined by workers at the Vale Inco refinery in Port Colborne, on Lake Erie, and the mine at Voisey's Bay in Labrador. Vale is engaged in a frenzied competition with BHP-Billiton, an Australian-British com-

pany and the world's largest, Rio Tinto, the third largest, and other mining giants in a process of concentration and centralization of the international mining industry. They are seeking to profit from the exponential rise in metal prices in recent years as a result of the explosive growth in demand in the emerging economies, and to strengthen their position with the major purchasers, above all the Chinese government and the big new producers in those countries.

In a push for diversification, Vale, a leading iron ore producer, purchased the Canadian nickel transnational Inco two years ago. The current economic crisis suddenly forced down raw materials prices, particularly for nickel (see chart). Vale, which had earlier settled for contract improvements with its employees in Thompson, Manitoba, is now demanding that its other workers agree to a three-year wage freeze, a defined contributions pension plan for new hires (the current plan is defined benefits), a major reduction in the annual production bonus (which in the past has averaged 25% of the base wage) pegged to the firm's profitability, and a weaker wage indexation clause.

But unlike its major rivals, who have experienced liquidity problems resulting in major layoffs — Rio Tinto-Alcan in Quebec, for example — Vale has remained quite profitable despite the collapse in prices and has not carried out massive layoffs, although it did dismiss a few hundred Inco employees after buying this company. In Brazil itself, it plans to increase its workforce by 12% in 2010 following major investments demanded by the Brazilian government; the state-owned banks are significant financiers of Vale. In Brazil, as in New Caledonia, wages are lower, and perhaps the environmental constraints as well.

In 2008 Vale made a profit of US\$13.2 billion. Its subsidiary Vale Inco made more profits in two years (2006-2008) than Inco did in ten (1996-

2006): US\$4.1 billion. In the third quarter of 2009, together with the new rise in nickel and iron ore prices, its profit doubled from the previous quarter although it was only a third of what it was in the same period in 2008. The company was so proud of this result that its directors had planned to go to the New York and London stock exchanges for media events in late October. Unfortunately for them, they had to cancel when small delegations of strikers came to disrupt the events with the help of local union members linked with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) — about twenty strikers in New York supported by U.S. steelworkers but also some teachers.

Vale was so optimistic at that point that it announced it would be distributing \$2.75 billion in dividends in 2009 — more than the cost of the wages and benefits of its 100,000 plus employees in 35 countries worldwide. But the strike has been relatively effective. Nickel production in the third quarter of 2009 is down by 45% from the second quarter and by 55% from the equivalent quarter in 2008, not to mention the direct cost of \$200 million for the strike. However, the new rise in nickel prices has somewhat offset the lower volume, and the production of nickel (and copper, which Vale Inco extracts concurrently) is a marginal component of the transnational's overall operations, while it was central for the old Inco.

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### **Vale profits from the severity of the crisis in Ontario**

Since its privatization in 1997 — it was a state-owned corporation in Brazil, founded during the Second World War — Vale has been systematically fighting its workers. In Brazil, its employees

have no job security; the company dismisses them without cause and fires most once they have three to five years seniority in order to hire at a lower wage, which explains why the majority are on fixed-term contracts. In the current strike in Canada, Vale has hired strikebreakers and required its other workers to do the work of the strikers. The New Democratic Party sought unsuccessfully in the Ontario legislature, with the applause of strikers in the visitors' gallery, who were expelled, to present anti-scab legislation like that in Quebec. The NDP, a social-liberal party linked to the trade-union movement, is the most left-wing party in the Ontario legislature. It divides the northern and northeastern seats, which are very blue-collar, especially outside the few major urban areas, with the governing Liberals, although it has only 10 out of the province's 107 MPPs.

The relative isolation of the strikers from the major metropolitan centers in the south of the province has not facilitated efforts to build solidarity. However, it is worth noting the solidarity of other Steelworkers locals and the Ontario branch of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), known for its vanguard role in the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign in support of Palestine, and for its municipal worker locals in Toronto and Windsor, which waged hard-fought strikes this summer to fend off concessions demanded by the municipal authorities including the so-called progressive city council in Toronto. These politicians sought to benefit from the crisis in the automobile, steel and financial industries that has hit hard at the Ontario economy, which accounts for 40% of the Canadian GNP. It is no accident that the conflict at Vale Inco began this summer while these major strikes were taking place.

Nevertheless, this solidarity consists at best in visits by a few leaders, sometimes with cheques in support, and the mobilization of limited pockets of militants when strikers visit Toronto, for example to agitate at Queen's Park, the site of the Ontario legislature, or to respond to the invitation of the iconoclastic film director Michael Moore when he was in Toronto for the premiere of *Capitalism*, a love story. Until quite recently the international mobilization has remained quite modest: letters of support from unions in less than a dozen countries and tours in Germany and Sweden accompanied by international leaders to convince certain companies not to import nickel ore from Vale. Even the big rally in late September with international guests, including

the president of the CUT, the major Brazilian trade-union central, drew only 3,000 persons, slightly less than the total number of strikers in Sudbury.

### **A possible turning-point in October**

It appears, however, that things took a turn for the better in October. The women's strike support committee, which played such an important role in the very militant nine-month strike in 1978-79, was re-established with the help of former activists. Working with the recently constituted support committee, it will be organizing a series of family activities in November. The Ukrainian community in the region has also become involved. The spirit of 1978-79 could be regained. There appear to be some changes as well in terms of international solidarity. In addition to the trip to New York, a small delegation has returned from Australia, where Vale purchased several coal mines in 2007, and New Caledonia, where Vale Inco will soon open a new nickel mine. Dozens of Australian miners expressed their sympathy with the delegation, as did their leaders. But their contract terminates only in 2011.

The Kanaks are the first nation in this French colony, although they now make up only 45% of the total population. Did the Kanaks sense they had a lot in common with the Franco-Ontarians in the delegation — two nationalities suffering oppression of their language, their economic conditions and their lack of territorial autonomy? Oddly enough, the Steel-workers web site devoted to this conflict, from which most of the information in this article is derived, is bilingual — in English and Brazilian Portuguese. And the publication materials are English-only. But the Sudbury region itself is strongly Francophone, and is not far from the Quebec border. Will this uniform and formal unity strengthen the capacity for mass mobilization? Is this the best way to build a pan-Canadian movement? Internationalism, to be effective, must begin at home.

It is in Brazil, Vale's economic base by far, where the situation is most promising. The miners in the company's largest Brazilian mine, and two other mines, staged a two-day strike, October 26-27, around their own demands. A few days later, at two other mines affiliated with the smallest union central, Conlutas, which is known for its militancy, the bargaining committee symbolically invited the woman representing the Canadian steelworkers to be part of their bargaining team, to the anger of the employer's negotiators who threatened to break off the talks. And 700 workers in these two

mines signed a letter to the company calling on it to settle the strike in Canada, where negotiations have not resumed since the strike began. In a release issued November 4, the union's leaders said:

“Vale fears more than just the possibility of victory in the strike by Canadian brothers and sisters, a possibility strengthened by this gesture of solidarity. It also fears the growing international unity which is being built among Vale workers and also people in communities around the world where Vale's profits have resulted in environmental disasters, degradation of the natural environment and community disintegration.”

### **Internationalist optimism and bureaucratic contradiction**

This optimism is justified. But so far the development of international links has been primarily at the initiative of the union bureaucracies. Their willingness to develop an internationalist response should not be underestimated. They have been caught off guard by this strike and the membership's willingness to take on a powerful transnational corporation capable of holding out through even a militant strike as long as the workers are isolated. They realize that the usual bureaucratic methods of bargaining supported by a national strike limited to picketing and controlled from above will inevitably result in some setbacks. When the union ranks hesitate to fight back in the face of a difficult objective situation, as in the automobile industry, the leaderships can force through some concessions. But there may be a high price to pay in terms of credibility once the threshold of an unlimited strike has been crossed. To defeat Vale, there must be a certain degree of international coordination in strikes, except perhaps in Brazil, where a national inter-union coordination might suffice.

The need for the union bureaucracy to mobilize the ranks to some degree, or to let them mobilize themselves without too many impediments, opens the door to self-organization. Has the women's committee given the cue? The need to develop international links and an openness toward working-class internationalism, particularly with the Brazilian unions, forces the bureaucrats to restrain any temptation to engage in the kind of chauvinist language characteristic of a small imperialist power that we hear so often in Canada — “defending our middle-class, anti-ecology status” while allowing Vale to chip away at the wage scales and working conditions of its employees elsewhere.

The Steelworkers are styled an “international” union, although they have locals only in the USA and Canada. So when the “international” president of the union called for nationalization of Vale at the big strike support rally in late September, to the standing ovation of the strikers, there was a note of ambiguity. If nationalization means a takeover by the capitalist state in order to escape Brazilian living conditions, that is a setback for internationalism — and an economic illusion, for the nickel market is worldwide. A state corporation would do as Vale does. However, nationalization can signify the first step in the takeover by the workers collectively, as the Zanon workers took over their plant in Argentina [2]. The self-managed collective would confront the state with the need to provide financing, technical assistance and guarantees of international markets, if not conversion of the company and retraining of the workers. It would make the undertaking an integral part of the community, and in the case of a firm that is intrinsically an exporter, would also link with the workers in client and competitor firms abroad in support of their demands and their struggles, within a perspective of collaboration for joint marketing in the context of a levelling upward of living conditions. It would be a first step toward internationalist self-management..

Irrespective of whether it goes forward or is worn down, this strike against Vale gives some idea of what the strike movement will be like in the 21st century. Global strikes against transnational corporations will be an essential pillar of internationalism. They are just beginning.

BONHOMME Marc  
5th nov 2009

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[1] <http://www.fairdealnow.ca/?cat=17>. Retranslated from the French.

[2] A strike made famous by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis in their film *The Take*. For recent coverage of the Zanon struggle, see <http://tinyurl.com/my25o5..>

\* The web site of the Vale Inco families and community members may be accessed at <http://www.fairdealnow.ca/>.



On October 23rd 2008, after several weeks of doubt and rumours, the management at Villemur/Tarn announced that they planned to close the site in June 2009. The climate in the company had been far from sunny for months, with terrible rumours circulating and the management denying nothing, a sure sign that something serious was afoot.

The announcement was made on a Thursday; it hit all the workers like a ton of bricks. Even if most of them expected some sort of bad news, facing the fact that the whole site was to totally close down had the effect of a bomb. One of the European managers of Molex who had come to the site especially for the occasion, was almost lynched when he announced the reasons for the closure. They said that the decision was for economic reasons, but this has never been proved. These economic reasons are all the more incomprehensible as just two months before, Molex had congratulated all the workers at the Villemur site on their previous year's results. Because the fact is, that the Villemur site was very profitable, and we were informed in May 2009 in the course of an independent financial audit - something to which all representatives of salaries workers in France are entitled in the course of mass redundancies (called a "social plan"), - that Villemur was the most profitable site of the whole Molex automobile division...

The immediate reaction of the workers was the reflex of wanting to pocket as much cash and get out as quickly as possible. It is actually fairly good to leave with a lump sum, and it's a way of compensating for the damages incurred. But whatever the financial compensation, there are still 283 jobs that have been

lost, as well as the loss of a company that Molex had bought "for a song" in 2004 from SNECMA (Aeronautics), a State-owned company at the time (and many of the political personalities in Sarkozy's government were indirectly involved...), the loss of know-how in a hard-hit catchment area, the loss of a factory where generations of workers had succeeded each other.

The announcement of the closure made all the local politicians angry, as well as the public bodies. A lot of solidarity rapidly developed with local elected representatives to help do everything they could to save the factory. There were a lot of skills present on that site, and these skills were recognised even by such companies as PSA, who had classified the factory second on their internal rating of best suppliers. Second, because our management refused to provide a long-term industrial plan for the site; and guess why? Because Molex were preparing to close the site down...

That's why it was natural for the workers to put up a fight and to defend their factory. We have gone down all possible legal avenues, and defended this site tooth and nail against the rogues of international finance who have stolen our wealth.

From the beginning of the conflict, we saw how cynical the rogue bosses were: we were able to prove that the legal procedure for informing the Works Council had not been respected as early as November 2008, and there were many other proofs of this as we continued our struggle. It was one of these elements that led to the sequestration of 2 of our

bosses for 26 hours in April 2009: we discovered that Molex had “cloned” our production in the United States without informing us, and that PSA (Peugeot-Citroën) had known about it all along.

Molex was convicted by the law courts 4 times over an 11-month period:

- February 2009 : Molex refused to produce the requisite documents for a financial audit, hiding behind American Federal law. Molex was convicted, but never produced all the requested documents.
- May 2009: Molex was legally obliged to stop the implementation of the planned redundancies and to justify the economic reasons of the closure. Molex put forward the same reasons as before.
- August 2009: After a one-month strike that started on the 7th of July, caused by a general dissatisfaction with the management’s attitude and total refusal to negotiate, and also in order to bring pressure to bear on the French political class to take action to save the factory, the management broke off all negotiations with the workers’ representatives on August 4th 2009. This is what caused two of the company managers to have eggs thrown at them. This was qualified as “an act of violence”, and was used by the management to block workers’ access to the site, using dozens of vigils for security.

The following day, the workers decided to go back to work, and called off the strike, but they were locked out of the plant by Molex’s private militia who wouldn’t allow the workers in to work! But in France you need a judge’s permission to close a plant. And two days later, the courts refused to grant Molex that authorisation: they had to open up again! The site would never open again ...

- Molex considered the workers were on strike, and refused to pay their salaries, although it was they who were preventing us from working! This led to a fourth conviction in September. But this conviction came too late, because after two months with no pay, and after having been victims of the most terrible blackmail by the rogue bosses, who demanded that the workers accept the planned mass redundancies against the payment of salaries and severance pay, after the French government’s blackmail to accept saving 20 jobs in exchange for the Molex mass redundancies, on

September 15th, 65% of the workers threw in the towel and decided that their elected representatives should accept the offer.

So yes, we lost the battle for our jobs, but it was lost from the outset, given that Sarkozy’s government is working with the self-same financiers who caused us to be laid off.

But the workers didn’t leave empty-handed either, because the severance pay we got was well over the national average (with 62 000 euros on average and 9 month’s pay at 100% to help find a new job).

But the limits of the struggle to save our jobs are also clear. Still, the Molex conflict did create a lot of hope for workers engaged in struggles and citizens too. But what was missing was a strong united political link to oppose Sarkozy’s ultra-liberal policies. We did everything we could to call on the politicians, and many of them did come and demonstrate at the factory gates. The General Secretary of the CGT even came to Molex twice. (Bernard Thibaut is currently highly contested by the radical trade union grassroots, and comes up for re-election in December. The reformist strategy of the trade union approach of the CGT confederation is strongly criticised...)

But the political forces of the left were not capable of unity and singing from the same songbook when it came to the requisition of the company. Yet everyone in their own way had talked about “taking over” “requisitioning” or “sequestering” the company; they just never got together to put their joint weight behind the idea.

We may also have missed something on our side. Yet at the same time, when you look at the fact that the French government was incapable of ensuring that legal decisions were implemented, we can only wonder what else we could have done.

Sarkozy’s government made a lot of noise about Molex, but they never showed any real will to save the plant. But when it came to pouring money into the venture capital investment fund (HIG Capital) that has taken over the 20 jobs that are left in the plant, the government came up with 6.6 million euros to support them.

But at the end of the day, who foots the bill?

Alexis Antoine ■

*English translation by Judith Hitchman*



### A privatisation bill against citizens

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The French mobilisation initiated in November 2008, after the government announced, right in the middle of the financial crisis, a bill to change the legal status of the French national mail service called La Poste, a first step towards its privatisation. This bill is strongly opposed by the mail service users and local councillors, as well as postal workers. But the Sarkozy government intends to use a steamroller policy. The ongoing mobilisations reveal the attachment of the people to public services and their awareness of the damages of liberalism.

#### A real privatization

Aware of the popularity of public services, especially mail services, the government go on claiming that their bill is only about a change of status and has nothing to do with privatization. La Poste is today a national state-owned company and the bill will change this status into that of a commercial company. At first, the state will keep control of it.

Nobody can believe that the government is well-intentioned. Every time it has privatized a public service, it has proceeded in stages : first, it transforms the public company into a limited company, then the capital is enlarged with private shareholders and, finally, the state only keeps a minority stake.

On each occasion, as in the case of France Telecom in 1996 or for the energy provider EDF-GDF in 2005, the government swore that it would never privatize. Yet, these companies were privatized in the following years. Therefore nobody today believes the government any more.

In the case of La Poste, its community character, its presence all over the country, including in isolated rural communities, the good repu-

tation enjoyed by postmen and postwomen, the public affection for daily mail delivery, have made this privatization a bitter pill to swallow.

#### The support of the users

From the previous privatization experiences, we have learnt that we cannot win only with the mobilization of the employees and that we must associate the users with the fight. A National committee against mail service privatization, gathering more than 60 unions, associations and political parties, was set up in order to demand a public discussion and a referendum on the national mail service, thereby making use of new stipulations of the French Constitution that had never been brought into play. It is not acceptable that the government decides in favour of the profit of private shareholders. The people should decide about what concerns them.

The governmental turned a deaf ear to this demand and, in reply, merely created a committee of so-called experts which ratified its bill. The government waited for the end of the European elections to avoid a debate on the privatization during the electoral campaign.

Just after the European elections, the government hastened to introduce its bill right in the middle of the summer holidays, in July 2009.

#### An exemplary citizens' mobilization

Faced with such contempt, all the organizations of the National committee decided to organize by themselves a popular referendum about the bill with the help of those councils and councillors who wished to be associated.

People and councillors used this initiative to express how fed up they were with the way public services were degraded, not only mail



service but also health and education. Despite the unofficial character of the referendum, its non official organisation, more than 2.3 million people participated and voted against the bill. Many councillors or simple citizens organized the vote by themselves, setting up ballot boxes in cities, villages and workplaces.

President Nicolas Sarkozy refused to acknowledge the value of this popular vote. His only reaction was to scoff at its organization and to announce a schedule for the parliamentary process of debates of the bill : at the beginning of November 2009 for the Senate and mid-December for the Parliament.

The right wing majority of senators voted unanimously for the bill despite the fierce battle of the left opposition and multiple doubts of some right wing senators. The mobilisation went on in November and December with a mass mailing of postcards to the President (5 millions of postcards were distributed all around France), street rallies, etc.

### **On the postmen and postwomens' side**

Among postmen and postwomen, nobody deludes themselves about possible benefits of this privatization. Two strike days, in September 2008 and September 2009, were among the strongest national strikes of these years and showed very clearly the opposition of postal employees to privatisation.

An inter-union committee gathers the five main unions of La Poste (SUD, CGT, FO, CFTC and CFDT), which is an unusual situation at La Poste where, at the national branch level at least, division among unions is common. This inter-union committee is rather weak as the CFDT refuses to support the citizens' mobilisation and is far from really opposing the change in the legal status of La Poste. Furthermore, some unions, like the CGT, refuse to break with the CFDT and always try to make compromises.

The SUD PTT Union, after the success of the two national days of strike, put forward to the inter-union committee, the necessity of a continuous renewable strike, relying on mobilizations and rallies of the population, to force the government to withdraw its bill. But this proposal was not accepted by the inter-

union committee. The CGT was firmly against it. In this context, the latest one-day strike of La Poste was weaker than the previous ones and there is great risk the government will succeed in passing its bill through Parliament before the end of the year.

### **La Poste transformed into commercial company**

Day after day, postmen and postwomen are subjected to the transformation of La Poste into a commercial company, looking first for profits and profitability, to the detriment of users and public service. The aim is to reduce the costs by work intensification and job reductions. Several thousands of post offices have been closed. In rural areas, a reduced service, a few times a week, is more and more provided by grocery stores or local communities, acting as independent sub-postmasters.

Reorganizations are increasing with continual changes of jobs or workplaces for the workers, often with unwished -for geographical displacements.

### **Stop liberalism**

The steamroller of liberalization and competition for public services has been launched, even if the mail service is not a very profitable industry. Social dumping is going on. One of the main postal operators challenging La Poste, Alternative Post, became bankrupt for lack of profitability, axing several hundred employees overnight.

Only a united mobilization of postmen and postwomen, users and population will permit to stop privatizers and de-regulators.

Fédération SUD-PTT  
December 2009

Foro  
Social  
Mundial

un otro mundo es posible

# The World Social Forum, a sustainable model?

After a period of remarkable expansion, the process of the World Social Forum (WSF) has stalled. The balance sheet of the most recent big assemblies turns out to be very contrasting – we can say, simplifying a lot, politically negative in the case of Nairobi (Kenya) in 2007 and positive in the case of Belem (Brazil) two years later.

The question that is raised is not primarily one of numbers: success does not depend (or does not only depend) on the number of participants, it is political: what is the point of the forums? The answer seemed obvious in the early 2000s, but that is not the case today.

In the past there was a lively interrelation between the Forum process, large anti-globalisation mobilisations, social struggles and international campaigns - a synergy that reached its peak with the mobilising and popularising role which the European forums (Florence, Italy) and global (Porto Alegre, Brazil) played in preparing the anti-war day of March 2003. The expansion of the WSF was phenomenal: in only a few years it had taken shape in Europe and Latin America, then in Asia, North America and Africa. It rooted itself in the national and local forums. The network and the Assembly of Social Movements played a dynamic role. The manifold expansion was driven by a dynamic combination of expansion and radicalisation. In the framework of the forums questions were raised which the traditional labour movement had not yet been able to answer. [1]

Today – with some exceptions – the Forum process is largely disconnected from struggles and international campaigns. Other frameworks have been formed to address the climate crisis or the so-called financial crisis, without functional articulation with the WSF. In Malmö (Sweden) in 2008, a large and dynamic anti-globalisation demonstration took place at the time of the ESF, but with no

synergy between the two events. In Europe, the ESF has not been able to play again the role of giving momentum that it had against the Bolkestein directive. [2] It is possible that the process retains its vitality in North America, but it has come to a standstill in Asia and has hardly been able to re-define itself in Europe. Even if the Assembly of the Social Movements still adopts policies whose content is important (Belém), the network is experiencing a protracted crisis of functioning.

Some new features have been tried out in recent years to ensure a more efficient process: meetings of thematic assemblies in the forums, the definition of “axes” around which the initiatives are grouped, proposals for the “clustering” of workshops to increase exchanges between constituents and improve the visibility of the programme, the call for “strategic” reflection, etc.. But interesting as these experiments are, a politics which has become out of date cannot be addressed solely by dealing with the operating procedures of the WSF. [3] The Forum process continues to provide the principal “common” space to a wide range of movements at a global level and in many countries. But for all that in what sense does the WSF provide a “sustainable model”? It has resisted the violent ideological offensive that followed the attacks of September 11 2001, which is not insignificant. But will it resist the impact of the capitalist crisis? Whether it succeeds or not, are there lessons from this experience that should be retained for the future?

The Forum process is not simply passing through a “downturn”. It is threatened by a combination of factors: a strong tendency to institutionalisation, “neutralisation” of activist groups, political differences, questioning of functioning by “dynamic consensus” ...

The WSF, seen from above The global process of the Social Forum is led by an international council (IC), originally formed by self-cooptation, and

then imperfectly expanded by co-option. Given the nature of the movement, it was difficult to elect it on a representative basis or to operate on a global scale in the form of an open assembly. But this mode of structuring was always subject to a separation between the “summit” and the grassroots of the WSF. The main measure designed to prevent this danger has been the limitation of the powers of the council: mainly it decides the date and place of the global forums and organises the framework (the commissions).

### ***The political significance of the debate within the IC on the rhythms***

The WSF began by meeting annually. The question of the rhythm of meetings was rapidly posed by proliferation of regional or thematic forums. Far from being narrowly “organisational”, this was a political question which concerns the relationship between the WSF and the social mobilisations. Thus Via Campesina was one of the first networks to demand that the global forums meet only every three years, if not every two years alternating with the regional forums. If too frequent they take up the time and financial resources of militants at the expense of preparing struggles, supporting national organisations and developing campaigns. From being a support they can become a brake on the activity of movements engaged in the process. [4] Of course, the FSM forums are not merely international conferences. Through the number of participants, the involvement of the movements and the continuity of the “process” they constitute a form of resistance to capitalist globalisation. But – also of course - they cannot substitute for the daily struggles taking place elsewhere.

The proposals of the Via Campesina and other movements aimed at preserving the dialectical link between forums and struggles. The argument made good sense, but it has not been understood by all. The decision in this area was blocked until the International Council of Parma (Italy, October 2006). A report was produced on the finances of the WSF, which noted that almost all the organisations surveyed wanted the global Forum to stop meeting annually. It became very difficult to ignore this demand. It was decided that in 2008 there would be a global day of action that would not be labelled “WSF”. [5] Although belated, the resolution of Parma recognised in fact that the global Forum should not necessarily meet every year and it opened itself up to organisations that still remained outside the established process.

Unfortunately, the decision of Parma has progressively unravelled. In the end the global day of January 2008 has again become an annual initiative of the World Social Forum. This day (or week) was a relative success, which reflected the commitment of the movements involved in the FSM to the continuation of the process. But the betrayal of the spirit and letter of the resolution of October 2006 signified that the needs of the militant movements that mobilised at the same time both within and outside the WSF were not taken into account by the IC – even though it is they who first and foremost give the WSF the character of a social forum, in touch with the struggles of the most exploited. The enlargement process was not thought through “from below” but rather “from above”. Who in reality wished to maintain a frenetic pace for the forums? Individuals and organisations for which the intensification of the “process” did not pose problems, either because the FSM had become their principal place of political recognition policy (individuals, small groups) or because they had at their disposal a budget and an apparatus of fulltimers which enabled them to take part without difficulty (“top level” union structures, large NGOs, funding agencies, church movements ...), without this necessarily implying a real commitment to build momentum.

The much vaunted functioning by consensus came to a dead end and was replaced by a unilateral war of attrition conducted by a “bloc of interests” at the top.

### **Parties and churches**

Political parties have not been admitted as “co-sponsors” of the WSF process (a decision which to me seems reasonable). However, for those parties involved in real life in the same mobilisations as the movements, the modalities of their presence in the forums has been defined according to the country (which also seems reasonable). The distinction is important: we are discussing here movements which equally take on a responsibility in the organisation of the forums and the representation of the process within the IC.

There have been extensive debates on the role of parties - but never on that of the (Christian) churches and their various organisations. However, they are not “social movements”, even in the wide definition of the IC of the WSF. Although Caritas is registered as an NGO, its statutes specify that it is under the direct authority of the Vatican (a religious

hierarchy and a... State!). The issue was raised at the International Council of Parma, taking account of rather alarming information on the weight of the churches in the preparation of the WSF in Nairobi. The World March of Women was concerned about the consequences this might have on the issue of women's rights or sexual preferences ... the Indian representatives recalled how they had carefully protected the Mumbai Forum from the religious conflicts that are rife in their country. However, the debate had barely begun when it was cut short: because organisations like the World Council of Churches and Caritas were members of the IC, the presence of their counterparts in the national committees could not be challenged.

The fears expressed in Parma were unfortunately justified to the extent that a formal declaration was signed by many movements to protest about how the rights of women and homosexuals were attacked within the forum by religious currents – that is to say, even within our own space of liberty. [6] Despite this and some other very serious problems posed by Nairobi, there has been virtually no critical discussion on the critical assessment of this experience at the IC of the WSF that followed in Berlin. "The churches have always been there, so ...". This is also true of the parties, which did not prevent their status being discussed. We can bet that if non-Christian religious hierarchies (Muslim, Hindu ...) asked to be members of the IC there would be a debate! If the (Christian) churches "are there" it is because the forum was born in Brazil and some Brazilian organizers wanted it. The involvement of religious organisations in unitary popular mobilisations varies according to the country (even more than the links between parties and movements). I do not prejudge what would be the conclusion of an international discussion on their place in the process nor deny the progressive commitment of some of them. But which religious organisations are we talking about?

We are no longer in the 1970s, with the currents of liberation theology in Latin America confronting their religious hierarchies, advancing political agendas clearly anchored on the left (except, generally, on issues such as reproductive rights or sexual preference), even joining the armed struggle like the Christians for National Liberation in the Philippines, apostles of the theology of struggle. Some orders and individuals are still involved in resistance. But the movements of which we speak here are not in open rupture with their hierarchies – and these latter are rarely progressive! They are at best in an ambiguous relationship of autonomy-dependence

vis-à-vis the church hierarchy. Many Protestant churches are very reactionary, as is the very reactionary Pope and his policy of asserting Catholicism, moral order and anti-atheism.

I do not question the participation in the forums of movements "defined as religious" engaged in mobilisations against the war and for social rights. But the co-opting of church organizations within the IC, which is obliged to organise the "non-confessional" space (to quote the Charter of the WSF) of the forums and ensure their "social" character seems very problematic.

### **The centre of gravity of the IC**

The composition of the IC is now less "mono-coloured" (whites from Latin America and Europe) than at the beginning. But the weight of the "hierarchical" organisations has continued to grow. We can mention, in addition to religious organisations, major NGOs and funding agencies which are not what they were in the 1980s. [7] The current mechanisms for controlling and allocating funds gives them significant power over grassroots organisations on the ground. A social movement is not a sub-contractor, a service provider or a consultancy – it pursues activities that require continuity. Funding by "projects" represents a totally different logic which places local organisations in a situation of permanent insecurity, and therefore of dependence.

Union representation has also changed. A number of national and international union leaderships have only entered into the WSF process reluctantly. They did not appreciate its radicalism, its unusual diversity and spontaneity. Their integration was a victory for the anti-globalisation movement. But with the weakening of its dynamism the bureaucratic union leaderships have taken over the initiative. They now outweigh the class struggle unions within the IC of the WSF.

### **The WSF seen from below**

Seen from below, the view is much more diverse than from above. Indeed, the annual forums reflect the political situation and the dynamic movements of the host country and region, as does the quality of the preparation ensured by the national organising committee.

### **Mumbai, Nairobi and Belém**

The comparison of the three forums of Mumbai (2004), Nairobi (2007) and Belém (2009) illumi-

nates this point. All have common features, starting with the large number of participants and the many militant meetings that these “spaces” enabled. All three illustrate the process of global expansion, from its original countries in Latin America and southern Europe to Asia and West Africa (Bamako, 2006) and East Africa (Nairobi).

More than any other global forum that at Mumbai has earned the name of social forum, because the movements made the space theirs, the collective participation was so great and the most oppressed were so visible. Meeting faced to a hostile city hall, without benefit of government support, with much more rigorously selected sources of international funding that was customary in the WSF, it was on an organisational level totally independent. Its success was made possible by the involvement of a wide range of organisations that often do not work together and by a long period of preparation which enabled trade unions and popular associations to come from every corner of this country-continent. [8]

We can say that the forum in Nairobi was in many ways the antithesis of that of Mumbai. The most institutionalised “entities” (including the churches) dominated the process. It was closely linked to state authorities. The organisation was partly run by large companies. The space was not designed for the poorest (entry costs, expensive food, little free clean water...). The market that we fight was omnipresent. The forum certainly provided a rare opportunity for African movements to meet - and for them to meet with international movements. But it represented a real political backward step. [9]

After Nairobi, the Belém forum appeared as a rebirth of the process. [10] The very strong Brazilian participation showed that it met a need. It raised the question of the immense problem of the fate of the Amazon rainforest. The link between ecological and social issues was more central than had been usual in the previous forums. The rights of indigenous peoples were brilliantly affirmed. It was the opportunity for fundamental debates for the Latin American left around the competing orientations of the governments of Lula and Chavez. However, Belém was far from being a replica of Mumbai. The weight of state financing was great and the presence of government authorities obvious. But the dynamism of the regional (Amazonia) and Latin-American movements fuelled the forum with a real militant political content.

The future of the WSF depends in part on the country where it meets, on how national and regional movements are involved, and on the political issues that are raised. In North America and the Middle East, for example, issues like the war and the impact of the global capitalist crisis arise with greater force today than in Brazil. The social forums are built “from below” more than “from above”. Contrasting political evolutions of the social **movement**

Nevertheless, certain global political events affect the dynamic of anti-globalisation. As long as the blows were struck from the outside - after September 11 2001, repression in Gothenburg (Sweden) and Genoa (Italy) - the radicalism of the movement has maintained itself on an international scale. But two major political turning points have undermined it from within.

The WSF activists were first divided in the key countries on the issue of social-liberal governments of the left or the centre-centre left. This was particularly the case in Italy vis-à-vis that of Prodi and the participation in government of the Party of Communist Refoundation. But it is also true for Brazil (Lula), South Africa (the ANC in power), and in West Bengal, an important Indian state ruled by the CPI-M.

The obvious failure of the Italian experience (return to power of Berlusconi, electoral defeat of the PRC) and the explosion of the financial crisis have not succeeded in restoring the dynamic unity of before. In part, this reflects the continuing weakened state of the social movement, but it also reveals that the differences we face are more profound than temporary disagreements about the policy of the “lesser evil” and support for Prodi against the Berlusconi right.

Anti-liberalism has split under the pressure of the financial crisis, one wing of the movement “globalising” its alternatives, another, in contrast, moderating its ambitions. For example, Peter Wahl, co-founder of ATTAC in Germany and member of the NGO Weed says that we can only choose between different varieties of capitalism. He places his hopes in the reformist sectors of the elites and calls on civil society to influence them so that the capitalism of tomorrow is fairer socially and more sustainable environmentally. He relies on a somewhat expanded G20, a G23, and the UN to lead the reform. [11]

Another example. France experienced a significant wave of radical mobilisations (sequestration of senior

executives ...) during the first half of 2009, ranging from universities to car factories, to the point that the elites were concerned about a Greek-style social explosion or a new May 68. It was possible, it was necessary, to take initiatives to facilitate the convergence of these struggles. The fear of it getting out of control, however, pushed the trade union confederations to act together (a fact without precedent in France for a long time) to organise ... a nationwide day of action every two months! After an undeniable initial success, participation in these repeated days obviously decreased. The desire for trade union unity was used to channel and defuse the movement. The government understood well that it needed to do nothing except wait for the lack of perspectives to demobilise the movement.

The French anti-globalisation movement should have supported the struggles, assisted their synergy. But it was paralysed. A violent controversy arose between the CGT trade union branches in the car factories in struggle and their confederation leadership, accused of inaction ... However, it is that same leadership which is represented in the executive committee of the Social Forums (CIFS) not the Continental factory workers.

Certainly we cannot simply counterpose the "base" to the "summit" to judge the choice of the federation leadership. [12] But to put it bluntly, left or union realpolitik often disguises processes of "neutralisation", of adaptation and social co-option. It must be noted that faced with the crisis the union bureaucracies and other more or less institutionalised movements put on the brakes of politicisation and militant developments. The crisis reinforces their fear of radicalism.

The brief period of unanimous anti-globalisation has closed. How in these conditions can we continue to build the broadest unity for struggle? The answer is not simple – and certainly not identical across countries or regions. It is even less simple because the "spaces" for discussion are sterilised and constrained.

From top to bottom – in the International Council as in many meetings of the anti-globalisation movement – many things are discussed, but not how to build struggles, even though that should be a major concern and that we need, in this area in particular, to exchange analyses and experiences! The IC of the WSF even gives itself the luxury of organising a "strategic" reflection where political disagreements are glossed over. An amazing depoliticisation of strategy ... without debate, a dynamic process (the

formation of a consensus) is replaced by an insidiously authoritarian way of functioning.

We can thus understand the development of the calls for a response after the capitalist crisis. One of the most radical is also one of the first: that of Beijing. [13]. Certain statements follow this line, like that of the assembly of movements at Belém [14] and elsewhere. [15] But in most cases they are bland, whereas one was entitled to expect a deepening of the initial momentum.

### Legacy and future

Is the WSF useful for the struggle? That was and that remains the key issue. The best of statements (and there are good ones!) are useless if they are not translated into mobilisations. The birth of the WSF represented a positive break vis-à-vis the routinised international conferences of NGOs. But the more it disconnects from the social struggles the more it in its turn becomes institutionalised. A process very advanced at the level of the international council, but still partially offset by the dynamism of the movements which participate in some of the forums. The experience of the forums is still usually rewarding for the (new) participants. But the WSF process is extremely costly in terms of financial resources and the energies of militants. These costs become unjustifiable if the struggles do not derive sufficient benefit from them.

Whatever becomes of the WSF, it expressed a historical experience whose positive lessons should not be forgotten. It opened a space of convergences where the whole range of resistance to the commodification of the world could be found. It aided the synergy of struggles when the labour movement or the political-military organisations were no longer playing the centralising role that they did in the last century. It has given shape to anti-globalisation, combining old solidarities (North-South ...) with new forms of solidarity ("horizontal"), restoring colour to an internationalism that had lost its lustre. The experience of the forums can thus help to overcome some strategic impasses. How, for example, improve the relationship of forces when massive strikes have not proved sufficient to permanently block the neoliberal counter-reforms? The space of convergences (including at the local level) allows us to envisage territorial mobilisation: the simultaneous action of an entire population in and outside the workplace (which goes well beyond the solidarity of people with a strike by employees). The "territorial strike" has been tried in many countries of the Third World,

but in few countries of the "first world". But it is not for nothing that "All together" (tous ensemble) became so popular a banner at the time of globalisation. The experience of the forums, a permanent crucible of multilateral solidarity, provides food for thought and concrete reflection on such questions, for the future.

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## Notes

[1] See Pierre Rousset, *La experiencia del FSM como un nuevo marco de solidaridades* », *El futuro del Foro social mundial. Retos y perspectivas después de Nairobi*, Icaria Mas Madera, Barcelona : 2008, and "El internacionalismo y su renovación en la era de la mundialización", *Viento Sur* numero 100, enero 2009. On ESSF website, see: *World Social Forums and L'internationalisme et son renouveau à l'heure de la mondialisation*

[2] On the le FSE, see especially Josep Maria Antentas et Esther Vivas, « FSE: Les défis du mouvement social européen », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>, and Josu Egireun, « Notes sur le FSE-Malmö », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[3] See especially Josep Maria Antentas, « FSM (2001-2007) : un balance général », Walden Bello, « El FSM en la encrucijada », Esther Vivas, « FSM : Adaptarse a los nuevos tiempos », Miguel Romero, « El FSM y la politica : el Riego de las extencion », *El futuro del Foro social mundial. Retos y perspectivas después de Nairobi*, op. cit. Available in English on ESSF: Walden Bello, *The Forum at the Crossroads*

[4] See João Pedro Stedile, « The WSF Has to Agree On Common Actions Against Common Enemies », IPS, 24 janvier 2008, <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[5] FSM, "Contribution au débat sur le processus du FSM dans son étape actuelle", ESSF, <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[6] See « Another World is Possible in Diversity: ...Affirming the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[7] See Michael Warschawski, « Grassroots Activism and NGOs », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[8] See Pierre Rousset, « Mumbai: Rien n'était joué d'avance ! », ESSF, <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/>

spi... Achin Vanaik, « Rendezvous at Mumbai », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...> Kamal Mitra Chenoy, « Making history: the future of the World Social Forum », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[9] See especially the collected texts on Nairobi in *El futuro del Foro Social Mundial*, op. cit.

[10] Eric Toussaint & Pauline Imbach, « A New Start with the 2009 World Social Forum », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...> Sophie Zafari, « Compte rendu sur le neuvième FSM à Belem (26 janvier-1er février 2009) », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[11] Peter Wahl, « With Realistic Radicalism: Which approach to the upcoming era of reforms? », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[12] Sophie Bérout et Karel Yon, « Face à la crise, que fait le mouvement syndical ? », *ContreTemps*, <http://contretemps.eu/interventions...> Available on ESSF.

[13] Beijing Call : « The global economic crisis: An historic opportunity for transformation », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[14] Social Movements, Declaration, Bélem, « We won't pay for the crisis. The rich have to pay for it ! », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[15] For example in the Philippines, « People Over Profits, Society Over The Market: The Balay Kalinaw People's Agenda to Respond to the Economic Crisis », <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

# BDS and the Peace Industry: Mutually Exclusive Paths

On 24-26 October 2009, the third international seminar initiated by the Alternative Information Center took place, this year in partnership with the Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI). Palestinian, Israeli and international activists—women and men—took an active part in this three day event. The presentations and primarily the discussions amongst the participants were for the most part interesting and directed toward strengthening the triangle composed of the Palestinian national movement, the international solidarity movement and the anti-colonial forces in Israel. As summarized by one of the moderators, it was a seminar of activists and action. The success of the seminar obligates the participants to preserve the dynamics that characterized it and to strengthen joint activism for promoting the rights of the Arab Palestinian people. Practical steps are being taken to ensure that this does indeed occur.

In parallel, Palestinian, Israeli and international organizations are organizing for another type of conference scheduled to take place in Madrid next spring, under the patronage of Javier Solana and Miguel Angel Moratinos, the goal of which is to promote the participation of civil society in the Middle East peace process. Several organizations are interested in taking part in both initiatives, some out of innocence and others out of the desire to simultaneously enjoy the forbidden fruits of this world and the promises of the next. This is by definition impossible, as both initiatives express two contradictory paths—the path of the uncompromising struggle for rights on the one hand, and what is dubbed the “peace channel” on the other.

As highlighted by the United in Struggle seminar, the path of struggle is today focused on the international campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel, a campaign that received a big push this year and which provides an opportunity to the international solidarity movement to combine protesting the occupation and colonization with a stage of attack, in which

Israel is required to pay a price for its systematic violations of international law.

The “peace channel,” on the other hand, is directed entirely at providing legitimacy to Israel and bending the Palestinian people so they accept Israeli conditions. One of the goals of the Moratinos-Solana gang is to destroy the BDS movement, which has already begun to bear fruit on both the levels of civil society and the international community.

A watershed passes through these two channels, that of BDS and that of the peace industry, and each organization claiming to struggle for the rights of the Palestinian people and to implement international law must decide between them. Those organizations which take part in the initiatives of Moratinos and partners and think they can keep their hands clean with slogans about one state are fooling themselves.

It is not by chance that the BDS movement does not take a position about the desired solution to the conflict in Palestine, and allows each one to promote her own solution. This is a question of rights, not solutions.

A last comment to those organizations who in the past took part in the “peace channel” of the international community, including the now infamous Madrid Conference for a Just Peace, in 2007. This time you know what you are getting into and you consciously chose to be part of the camp in which you are positioned. This is your right, just as it is our right to request that you stay away from the camp of those who are struggling—Palestinians, internationals and Israelis—for the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right not to accept the dictates of the international community.

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<http://www.alternativenews.org/michael-warchawski/2294-bds-and-the-peace-industry-mutually-exclusive-paths-.html>