

World Social Forum: what should it be when it grows up?

Teivo Teivainen

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The spectacular growth of the World Social Forum has outstripped its opaque structures of governance. How should it be reformed? To be effective, must it become a decision-making body, or instead reinvent itself as a smaller theatre for delegated representatives? Should it cut its shadow relationship to the World Economic Forum? These questions of governance reflect fundamental issues of political direction for movements seeking a way beyond the current globalisation model.

The concentration of power in transnational and global institutions was one of the most significant social processes of the 20th century. Despite this, democratic theory and practice have remained nation-state-centric. Examples of cosmopolitan democratic thinking and transnational democratic practice throughout the century were ignored by most analysts and politicians. The 1970s project of the New International Economic Order (NIEO), for example, was considered a failure by most commentators of the next two decades.

At the very end of the century, the public perception of the issues at stake seemed to be changing. In recent years we have seen substantial crowds of people marching on the streets against the undemocratic nature of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Global capitalism may be entering a serious legitimacy crisis.

Earlier attempts to democratise global power, such as the NIEO project, tended to see the problem more in terms of inter-state relations. But now, instead of

asking that a particular 'third world' state be given more decision-making power in global affairs, today's activists are beginning to seek more power in civil society groups that confront both governmental and corporate power all over the world. This trend holds many promising aspects. But we may need political structures that 'civil society', as it is generally conceived, is unlikely to deliver.

Uneven development

Since the late 1980s, many of the most visible civil society gatherings have been explicitly, and often antagonistically, related to events of the global elite: meetings of the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organisation (WTO), including the latter's predecessor the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The battle in Seattle during the WTO meeting in December 1999 boosted local, transnational and global protest against undemocratic sites of global power; spectacular demonstrations from Okinawa to Goteborg and Genoa have become prominent models of critical

civil society organising. In most, the main focus has been *against* something. However, concrete initiatives for transformation are more likely to emerge from *proactive* meetings.

Some observers, such as Camilo Guevara, characterise Seattle and other similar media events in the US and Europe as irrelevant for the great majorities of the world, expressions of the delusions of alienated western youth. While I do not fully agree with his observation, it is undoubtedly true that in the poorer regions of the world a lot was going on long before Seattle; middle-class youth protesting in a European or North American city are much more attractive to global media networks than impoverished peasants campaigning against structural adjustment programmes in the south.

Moreover, meetings of private, elite organisations like the Bilderberg Society, Trilateral Commission and Mont Pelerin Society have tended to attract less public attention than those of the Bretton Woods institutions and other semi-public multilateral organs. Yet in matters of global governance these groups constitute highly influential networks of transnational coordination.

One of the most influential and controversial of them is the World Economic Forum (WEF). The first informal business gathering in Davos, a Swiss mountain town, took place in January 1971. Since 1982 the Davos meeting has focused on bringing world economic leaders to its annual meetings, and in 1987 acquired its present name.

In January 1999, after years of preparation, various groups started organising a counter-event in Switzerland under the banners of “another Davos” and “anti-Davos”. These included the French journal *Le Monde Diplomatique* and Attac (founded in France in June 1998). In the first major anti-Davos event in 2000, groups ranging from the World Women’s March to the Brazilian MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, composed of landless rural workers) first had a seminar in Zurich and then some 150 of them marched to Davos to hold a press conference. The difficult geographical conditions and heavy police presence helped convince some of the key

organisers that it would be difficult to orchestrate a huge gathering in Davos itself.

Calls for a worldwide civil society event emerged in early 2000. A few individuals played a key role. First formulations of the idea are generally attributed to Oded Grajew, coordinator of the Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES).

In February 2000, Bernard Cassen, chair of Attac and director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, met in Paris with Grajew and Francisco Whitaker, of the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission (CBJP), to discuss the possibility of such a forum. They shared three ideas: it should be held in the south, in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre; it should be called the World Social Forum to target its adversary; and it should coincide with the staging of the WEF to attract global media attention.

With clear support from many other organisations influential within transnational activist networks, eight Brazilian civil society groups agreed to form the Organising Committee. In March 2000 they formally secured the support of the municipal government of Porto Alegre and the state government of Rio Grande do Sul, both controlled at the time by the Workers’ Party

(*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT).

The mayor of Porto Alegre, Raul Pont, was particularly enthusiastic in welcoming the idea, followed closely by the state government led by Olivio Dutra. In June 2000, the proposal for such an event was tabled internationally by Miguel Rossetto, vice-governor of Rio Grande do Sul, during an alternative UN meeting in Geneva.

Porto Alegre

Events conceived in transnational contexts often have relatively weak roots in their own locality. This was never the case in the WSF of Porto Alegre. Porto Alegre, the capital of the Rio Grande do Sul state in southern Brazil, is one of the most important strongholds of the Workers Party. Already during Brazil’s military rule, the city was a centre of resistance, with energetic neighbourhood associations. Founded in 1980, the PT has deep roots in these associations, trade unions, Catholic organisations,

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women's movements and other parts of a vibrant Brazilian civil society.

A smart choice for hosting the WSF, both municipal and state governments in Porto Alegre were willing to allocate significant material and human resources to the event, empowered by a 1988 Federal Constitution that increased resource transfer to local authorities and consequently their taxation powers. In 2002 the municipality provided approximately \$300,000 and the state \$1 million for the event. In 2003, there was some increase in the money invested by the municipal government and a substantial decrease in the investment by the state government, as a direct consequence of the electoral defeat of the PT in the October 2002 gubernatorial elections. The new state government led by Germano Rigotto, from the center-right PMPD party, decided to cut the money the preceding PT government had budgeted; but the new federal government of President Lula da Silva decided to compensate for this cut.

Most people calculate that the thousands of visitors filling local hotels, restaurants and other commercial establishments bring in much more money than whatever is spent by the local authorities in organising the forum: a major reason for municipal and state governments of different political backgrounds to have a welcoming attitude toward the WSF. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Brazil's president during the first two forums, however, has upbraided local authorities for misallocating taxpayers' resources.

Whereas in short-term commercial terms the WSF is considered a good deal by most locals, in ideological terms not everyone agrees. Two months after the WSF 2002, various business organisations and right-wing groups of Rio Grande do Sul organised what they christened a Forum of Liberties, with positions openly critical of the World Social Forum. And during WSF 2003, a bomb threat paralysed proceedings momentarily, until it was established that it was probably a "joke of bad taste" by some participant of the forum. Despite such marginal expressions of animosity, many seasoned international participants can testify to the warm welcome of Porto Alegre residents – one of the most pleasant aspects of the event.

Who governs?

Naomi Klein has characterised the structure of the first World Social Forum as "so opaque that it was nearly impossible to figure out how decisions were made".

Similar critical remarks have been raised by many others in every annual edition of the WSF event. According to the WSF Charter of Principles the forum "does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants". Nevertheless, disputes of power do exist. Formal decision-making power has been mainly in the hands of the Organising Committee (OC), consisting of the Central Trade Union Confederation CUT (*Central Única dos Trabalhadores*), the MST and six smaller Brazilian civil society organisations. In terms of sheer numbers of affiliates, there is a huge difference between the two big ones and the others.

In the decision-making process within the OC, CUT and MST have generally acted "generously" towards their smaller colleagues. In this sense, the disparity of resources has generally not translated into significant disparities in decision-making power. The disparity in resources should, moreover, not be exaggerated. Some of the smaller participating NGOs have better access to financial resources; for example, IBASE, a Rio-based research institute, has been an important fund-raiser for the WSF.

The other main organ of the WSF, the International Council (IC), was founded in São Paulo in June 2001. According to Cândido Grzybowski, director of IBASE, the idea emerged in Porto Alegre on the last day of the first WSF. During the months that followed, the OC made a list of organisations to invite to the founding meeting in São Paulo. As of June 2003 the Council nominally consists of 113 organisations, though in practice many of them have not actively participated. This number also includes the eight members of the OC. Most IC members come from the Americas and western Europe, though many also have activities in other parts of the world. Organisations based in Asia and Africa include the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), *Environnement et Développement du Tiers-Monde* (ENDA) and the Palestinian NGO network.

According to some definitions, IC members should be regional or global networks rather than purely national organisations, but this criterion has not been strictly followed. Instead, in the Miami meeting of the WSF International Council in June 2003, when some official procedures for incorporating new members were finally made, nationally-based organisations were not excluded. Apart from the proper members, there are fifteen observer organisations, mostly representatives of regional and thematic social forums in various parts of the world.

The division of labour between the IC and the Brazilian OC has been obscure. During the first WSF the former did not exist. When founded, the IC was assigned an essentially advisory role. Before the founding meeting in São Paulo, the OC referred to it as “International Advisory Council”. But already some of the invited delegates were questioning this title, and during the meeting, it was decided that the term “advisory” be deleted.

Even if some observers have characterised it as “barely a rubber stamp”, the IC has gained increasing importance on paper and, to a lesser extent, also in practice. For example, in at least two meetings the OC suggested that the WSF main event should be held bi-annually rather than annually, and in both cases the IC decided that the annual meetings should continue. One of its main initial roles was to give international legitimacy to the Brazilian organisers. Now that the decision has been taken to hold the main event in 2004 in India, the link between the IC and the organisers both in Brazil and India has become more complex.

A typical decision-making mechanism in IC meetings begins with the OC submitting a proposal. The IC debates the issue, presided over by the OC. (Other IC members have also been given responsibilities in the running of the council meetings.) If no clear consensus emerges, the OC will have a separate meeting and reconsider its original proposal. In some cases, it will then (typically on the second day of the two-day meeting) present a new proposal taking earlier discussion into account. Normally, the new proposal will carry the day with everyone agreeing, more or less.

The underlying assumption in this working method is that the World Social Forum is not a deliberative body or actor that would take political stands and that it therefore needs no rigorous decision-making procedures. Until now the system has worked relatively well, making decisions through what some Brazilian organisers call *construção*, constructing them in a critical debate and sometimes laborious consensus-building. The IC is not supposed to have mechanisms either for disputing representation, or for voting. The only vote ever taken was to decide whether the meeting following the first IC meeting would take place somewhere in Europe or in Dakar. The overwhelming majority voted for Dakar.

So far, the most difficult decision the IC has made was in January 2003 when it decided to organise WSF 2004 in India. A small, vociferous minority argued strongly against the decision until the very end – the strongest opposition being voiced by some Cuban delegates arguing that Latin America was the traditional stronghold of radical movements, and that the Forum would be removed from Porto Alegre at its peril.

In the future, there will be more groups interested in joining the IC, and more explicit selection procedures will probably have to be established. Already, there are indications that the question of fair WSF representation grows increasingly controversial. Meanwhile, following its own plan drafted in April 2002, the Brazilian Organising Committee has been transformed into the Secretariat.

Indian organisations have now constituted a new organising committee for the WSF 2004. Not much else is yet clear. The decision to organise WSF 2004 in India was made conditional on agreeing that WSF 2005 will return to Porto Alegre. It has not yet been defined whether this return will mean that the old organising committee consisting of the eight Brazilian groups will be reconstituted as the new committee.

Cyberspace and rapid growth

One aspect of decision-making somewhat neglected in the WSF process is the possibilities opened up by information technology. Of course, much of the informal decision-making and strategic planning of the forum takes place through e-mail. The organisers have, however, been reluctant to explore ways in which cyberspace could be used in organising more formal decision-making processes. Peter Waterman has argued insightfully and provocatively that the WSF “uses the media, culture and cyberspace but it does not *think* of itself in primarily cultural/communicational terms, nor does it *live* fully within this increasingly central and infinitely expanding universe”. He sees the WSF as “a shrine of the written and spoken word”

In the suggestions for the rules and procedures of the IC that were discussed in the IC meeting of June 2003 in Miami, the use of cyberspace in the decision-making was taken into account somewhat more seriously than before.

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Some people however, consider increasing cyberspace use can only play into the hands (and pockets) of Bill Gates and the like. Others feel that increased reliance on the internet could marginalise groups that have limited or no access. On the other hand, the costs for a poor organisation in the global south to fly someone into a meeting in another continent will almost certainly be higher than taking part in a cyber-meeting through the internet.

For many, however, the steadily increasing numbers of participants has been one of the most important assets of the WSF: numbers often used in the press to indicate the success of these events. The first World Social Forum in January 2001 attracted some 5,000 registered participants from 117 countries as well as thousands of Brazilian activists. For the second forum, the figures had grown significantly, rising to over 12,000 official delegates from 123 countries and tens of thousands of total participants, mostly from Brazil. The third forum in January 2003 was even more massive, with over 20,000 official delegates and roughly 100,000 total participants.

Others are already thinking that the number of participants and parallel events is too high for any strategically relevant debate on key issues. For Roberto Savio, long-time director of the Inter Press Service, holding 1714 panels and seminars in the WSF 2003 led to an atomisation of dialogue. Savio has proposed that in future there should be severe restrictions to the number of people allowed to participate in the event, although he has left it open who would decide.

Michael Albert has made a more concrete proposal that the annual WSF gathering should be made a delegate event. In Albert's vision, the WSF event would be attended by 5000 – 10,000 people "delegated to it from the major regional forums of the world".

It has become increasingly clear that the WSF is much more than a series of increasingly large annual events. Indeed the main mechanism for the globalisation of the WSF process has been the holding of regional and thematic forums in various parts of the world. Among the most impactful of these events was a forum on neoliberalism organised in Argentina in August 2002, the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002 and the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad in January 2003. These forums have formed part of the semi-official forum calendar, maintained and controlled jointly by the Organising Committee/Secretariat and the International Council.

Rifts and controversies

Unsurprisingly, tensions have sometimes emerged between leading WSF bodies and regional forum organisers. For example, Italian organisers of European Social Forum 2002 wanted to use a social movements declaration drafted by WSF participants as the foundation-stone of their own forum. The Brazilian Organising Committee objected that the Charter of Principles is the only official basis for such events organised within the WSF umbrella.

Further debate ensued in Bangkok in August 2002 when the Brazilians strongly opposed the plans of the Italians to invite political parties to take part officially in the European Social Forum. According to the Charter of Principles, the WSF process is "non-party", but the Italian delegates responded by accusing the Brazilian Organising Committee of hypocrisy, since the PT was so visibly present in all the Porto Alegre forums. The Italians claimed that the open violation of the Charter by the Brazilians had been always accepted by WSF participants and that therefore the Brazilians should not get upset when minor political parties play a small role in a regional forum.

Another controversy related to plans to organise a social forum event in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2002. The event was to focus on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), coinciding with a FTAA ministerial meeting. During early 2002 the Quito event made it onto the semi-official list of WSF events, but by mid-year it had been taken off. There was no visible public debate, but one of the main reasons was the insistence of some IC members that the Quito event would be too focused on one particular issue (FTAA) and with too narrow an organisational basis. Nevertheless, the event, and many of its slogans and other symbols spread the word throughout the WSF process, even if it was not in the semi-official list.

These controversies are examples of the growing pains of the WSF process. On the one hand, there are reasons to maintain coherence and some underlying rules in the process so that the WSF brand does not simply evaporate. On the other hand, too much control by the IC and the Secretariat is bound to constrain the creativity and motivation of those in charge of the decentralised events.

Apart from the semi-official list of regional and thematic forums, a myriad of local events have been organised under WSF banners. Many of these events have neither received, nor asked for official recognition

by the WSF governance bodies. Their proliferation is one of the most vital signs that the WSF process is indeed expanding. But the fact that they are often beyond the control of any centralised WSF body complicates the attempts to see the WSF as a movement of movements, with a more or less clearly defined political strategy.

How to be and not be political

The WSF provides a flexible space for actors who may wish to construct projects in very different contexts, local and global. Those organisers emphasising such flexibility urge the WSF to avoid issuing declarations of support for any one political process. As Cândido Grzybowski puts it, “political action is the responsibility of each individual and the coalitions they form, not an attribute of the forum”. Sensing a more pronounced dichotomy between forum as a *space* and forum as a *movement*, Chico Whitaker meanwhile has criticised the “self-nominated social movements” that “seek to put the forum inside their own mobilising dynamics, to serve their own objectives.”

Among the organisers and participants there have been different ways to approach these different identities. For some they are by no means incompatible: it is possible to be an arena and an actor simultaneously: a “movement of movements”. However, my impression is that there are increasing pressures to overcome the current reluctance to issue political statements.

One of the reasons for the reluctance to become an explicitly political actor is that the WSF does not have internal procedures for collective democratic will-formation. No one, therefore, can legitimately claim to represent the WSF’s multitude of movements. However, those who acknowledge this lack of a democratic mandate draw different conclusions. Many in its governing bodies would rather see the WSF avoid becoming a political actor. More critical voices argue that the correct way forward is to create mechanisms for democratic participation within the political architecture of the forum, as a driver for a collective movement.

Increased pressures for more explicit political will-formation are also expressed by and through the media. The press has tended to look at the WSF as a

(potential) political actor in itself, while many of the organisers have wanted to downplay this role, emphasising the facilitating function in simply providing a space for different groups to interact. These different conceptions of the event have clashed when the press has asked for “final statements”, considering the lack of such documents as a patent proof of weakness.

In at least two meetings of the WSF International Council there have been angry demands by some groups to issue a declaration on a particular topic, whether it be crises in Argentina, Palestine or Venezuela. In the Bangkok meeting in August 2002, Walden Bello and others argued that the council should produce a public statement encouraging movements around the world to take part in protests in Cancún in 2003. In the Porto Alegre meeting of the council in January 2003, various delegates argued strongly in favour of making a public statement against the imminent war in Iraq. In both cases, the apparently consensual decision of the council was not to issue any such statements. It is, however, likely that there will be more intense debates on this in the near future.

George Monbiot has suggested that the WSF process could contribute to the building of a “world parliament in exile”. Some others who locate the WSF more explicitly in the historical traditions of socialist movements have envisaged it as an “opposition party” or “radical international”. From this perspective, it is particularly important to modify its organisational design and the way its decision-making structure functions. The fear of many is that the politicisation involved in such a process could destroy the forum as a relatively neutral space that facilitates encounters between different kinds of civil society actors.

Until now, social movement declarations produced during the WSF events have not been circulated very widely and their impact has been relatively modest. The clearest exception is the call for anti-war demonstrations of 15 February 2003 that many movements gathered in the WSF 2003 in Porto Alegre made public. Nevertheless, they have created controversy among the organisers, with people like Chico Whitaker fearing that the media may consider them semi-official. One way to avoid political silence

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without violating the Charter of Principles may be for the organisers to facilitate their production and endorsement.

Inclusions and exclusions

Internal politics in the WSF has often been played out in the space different groups have been given during the main annual events. In the first forum, racial tensions created some internal conflict. Brazil may don the public face of racial harmony during Carnival or the (soccer) World Cup, but racism is present in most walks of life, including progressive intellectuals' ranks. For many observers, both forums have been surprisingly "white" events due not only to the lack of large delegations from Africa, Asia and other parts of Latin America, but also to the fact that the average Brazilian participating in the forum is clearly "whiter" than the average Brazilian. (Rio Grande do Sul is one of the rare parts of Brazil, Latin America and the whole 'third world' where many locals are light-skinned people of European, including Germanic, origin.)

Gender tensions have also been present in the WSF. Even though there exist no major gender differences in the numbers of overall participants, certainly the Brazilian OC consists predominantly of middle-aged men. In the IC, representatives of feminist organisations and other women have played a more visible role reflected in the programme, and struggles for sexual preference rights have played an increasing, though still somewhat marginal, role in the events.

There have also been other controversies on hierarchies and partial exclusions within the WSF, based for example on the celebrity status of some participants. During the first forum a group of young and angry participants assailed the VIP room through one of the busiest corridors of the main forum venue. The room (with glass ceilings) had become the most visible symbol of the forum's status differences.

The presence of representatives of the Cuban government and of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) raised mixed feelings in 2001. Open disapproval of Cuba's presence has come mostly from outside the meeting, particularly from the local press. In Rio Grande do Sul, however, during the electoral campaign of 2002 the opposition sometimes claimed that the PT state government wanted to transform the state into "another Cuba". For the electoral strategy of the PT it was important to create an image that would not dissuade potential moderate voters.

It was therefore not surprising that the Cuban representatives no longer had a prominent official role

in 2002, even though Cuba's delegation was more numerous than the year before. The island's political visibility has in the last two forums been clearest in the marches and the environs of the venue, where one could observe plenty of Che Guevara paraphernalia displayed by participating organisations.

During the first WSF, FARC guerrillas received a lot of sympathy from some participants. In Brazil, relatively strong anti-US sentiments are often reflected in solidarity attitudes towards Colombian rebels. Unofficial moves were even afoot to recruit internationalist brigades to travel to Colombia. Not all participants, however, were happy with the presence of a group accused of committing atrocities. For the second and third World Social Forum, FARC representatives were not officially allowed to register as participants. The WSF Charter of Principles, drafted between the first two forums and approved by the International Council in June 2001, excludes the participation of armed organisations. The mistaken endorsement of armed Basque registrations was also cancelled, as soon as their identity was discovered in 2002.

What is clear about the future of the WSF is that what is most precious is the myriad encounters between different groups and activists which take place within its confines. Geographically, most participants have come from the southern cone of Latin America (especially Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina) and southern Europe (especially Italy, France and Spain), but there has been a conscious effort to facilitate the participation of people from Asia, Africa and other parts of Latin America. Even though in numbers the Asian participation has been modest, the process has attracted increasing attention especially in India, where the WSF 2004 will take place. And participation by groups from the United States has been growing every year.

Limits of a pure civil society

According to its Charter of Principles, the WSF is "a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context". Even if the Brazilian media often portrays its events as almost directly organised by the PT, the party does not formally belong to the Organising Committee. Its importance stems from the fact that many of the key civil society organisations involved are somehow related to or sympathetic towards it, and that it controls the hosting municipal government. After the elections of 2002 it now controls the federal government.

The participation of Lula da Silva in WSF 2001 and 2002 was technically as the representative of an NGO he had once founded. Once elected as president of Brazil, his participation in WSF 2003 changed. The role of the host government, from municipal to federal levels, was given a special status in recent semi-official formulations of the WSF. It was on this basis that Lula was included in the official WSF programme, whereas Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez (who arrived unexpectedly in Porto Alegre during the forum) was not accorded a space within the official Forum. Participation of various ministers of the French government in WSF 2002 was criticised by many delegates, and the Belgian prime minister, who had announced a visit, was told not to come.

If in the past decisions on how to connect with governmental entities have suffered from a lack of coherence, the same must be said of intergovernmental organisations. Certain UN organs have been actively involved in activities related to women's issues, without any adjustment to the official line that intergovernmental bodies cannot participate.

In order to partially overcome such dilemmas, a new form of participation was attempted in 2002 when it was decided that the WSF would have a new category of events: roundtables of dialogue and controversy. Through these roundtables, representatives of institutions banned from the list of official delegates can be invited to debate and discuss. They played little part in WSF 2003, but may be more prominent in future WSF events. Who will be invited remains unclear, some organisers thinking that representatives of some UN bodies should be invited, while those of the World Bank and IMF should be kept at bay.

The question of how to relate to the WSF's original symbolic adversary has also been repeatedly debated and modified. One of the motivations for the naming and timing of the first WSF in Porto Alegre was to attract media attention. But this oppositional stance toward the World Economic Forum in Davos was always combined with a quest for critical dialogue, as reflected in the televised debate between Davos and Porto Alegre.

From Porto Alegre to Mumbai

The global media impact of the second and third Porto Alegre forum was significantly stronger than in 2001. If there were fewer attempts in the second and third year to interact with the WEF, this reflected a growing self-confidence of the organisers, some of whom liked to repeat that "from now onwards Davos will be the shadow event of Porto Alegre".

In the WSF 2003 there was, however, one particular issue that made the activists in Porto Alegre focus on Davos in passionate debate. The decision of Lula da Silva to travel to Davos immediately after the WSF 2003 in Porto Alegre raised plenty of criticism among the organisers. In his main public appearance in front

of tens of thousands of admirers during WSF 2003 Lula compared his decision to travel to Davos to his decision over twenty-five years ago to get involved in trade unions. Friends had then advised him against getting involved with "dirty trade union politics", but the fact that Brazil has a vibrant and progressive trade union movement today shows that he was right to act. Lula was, however, not explicit about whether he believed the WEF

could expect similarly progressive results. At least within the IC, many remained sceptical.

Meanwhile, it does seem as if within the WEF there is slightly more openness towards the issues discussed by critical social movements. But now, the movements are less willing to engage in dialogue. In January 2003 the International Council decided that in future, the main event of the WSF process would no longer take place simultaneously with the WEF.

WSF 2004 in India will be a crucial moment. On the one hand it offers the concrete possibility of giving the process a better geographical (and corresponding thematic) balance. On the other hand, it will be difficult to find local governments willing to dedicate as much energy to the process as was the case in Porto Alegre. The host city of Mumbai (Bombay) has a government that is far more distant from the WSF ideals than that of Porto Alegre.

Then there are the issues of funding. WSF events have received considerable funds from organisations such as Oxfam UK, the Ford Foundation and the Heinrich Böll

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Foundation. This support has not hitherto awakened any significant debates on the possible relations of dependence it could generate. But it should be taken into account, for example, that in order to get funding from the Ford Foundation, the organisers had to convince the foundation that the Workers Party was not involved in the process. Since autonomy from political parties has been important for the WSF organisers for various other reasons as well, the importance of funding conditionality should not be exaggerated. However, the organisation of WSF 2004 in India may imply more critical attitudes towards foreign funding.

From anti to alternative

Being anti-something can be politically useful, but only up to a point. Protesters in Seattle and at similar events have been very effective in exposing the authoritarianism of the capitalist world-system. But even if the various groups participating do have programmatic statements for alternative futures, the way these events have been staged has not been very conducive to bringing these futures to public attention. Not being able to show a credible alternative, or any alternative at all, has become a problem for the legitimacy of the protest movements.

In most events post-Seattle, protesters have often been labeled as “anti-globalisation”, and some of them have used the expression themselves. It would, however, be analytically faulty and politically unwise to simply define the movements as being against globalisation, if the term is to be understood as the increasing transgression of nation-state borders on a worldwide level.

Many of them are, I would claim, looking for a different *kind* of globalisation, though some may prefer to use the older term internationalism. From a democratic perspective, the problem in some anti-globalisation rhetoric is that one easily ends up with rather strange bedfellows. Professing anti-globalisation pure and simple is not very helpful in terms of making a distinction between regulating the cross-border movements of speculative capital and those of black immigrants. *Outra globalização* (another globalisation) is an expression that has been emphasised by some of the key players of the Porto Alegre meetings. Yet despite their insistence, the mass media in many parts of Latin America often speak of anti-globalisation activists when referring to both Porto Alegre and the events it has inspired.

For those who want to argue for the possibility of a different kind of globalisation, the risk of ending up with strange bedfellows is no more absent. It is not always easy to see the differences, if any, of the “alternative” globalisation proposals with the idea of many business leaders that some democratisation is necessary in order to make the global expansion of capitalism acceptable. Those who cling to anti-globalisation discourse are often right when they claim that the alternative globalisation strategies would only lead to very moderate changes. Often, but not always.

It is frequently assumed that in the anti/alternative divide of globalisation debates, being “anti” represents more radical and revolutionary options, whereas the “alternatives” are on the side of more superficial reforms. In terms of thinking about how to democratise the world, this assumption is not very helpful. While anti-globalisation people can be pro-capitalist, pro-globalisation people may be anti-capitalist. Some of the debate and divide between the “anti” and the “alternative” is due to confused semantics or distorted categorisations. In order to fundamentally democratise the world, people who have chosen to regard globalisation as a term that has been too polluted by its dominant usage and those who think it can still be given more progressive meanings can often work together. In principle, the World Social Forum offers many opportunities for this to happen.

Despite various references to the necessity of imagining and constructing a different world, the issue of democratic global order has not had a very high priority in the agenda of the WSF. There have been claims by intellectuals and groups working on issues of global democracy that the WSF process has been too much dominated by nationalists whose discourse is dominated by anti-globalisation themes. As noted by Michael Hardt, those who “advocate strengthening national sovereignty as a solution to the ills of contemporary globalisation” have dominated the representations of the Forum. More polemically, he also claims that while the “non-sovereign, alternative globalisation position” has not obtained a prominent place in the Forum, it may well have been the position of the majority of the participants.

Be this as it may, one of the intellectual problems the World Social Forum poses has been the surprising lack of one debate in particular – open debate between different visions of how the world should be concretely reorganised if, as WSF’s main slogan says, another world is to be possible.

Teivo Teivainen is a political scientist at the Renvall Institute, Helsinki University, Finland, and is currently visiting professor at the Catholic University in Lima, Peru. His most recent book is *Enter Economism, Exit Politics* (Zed, 2002), and his next (with Heikki Patomäki) is *Global Democracy Initiatives* (Zed, 2003). He represents the Network Institute for Global Democratisation (www.nigd.org) in the International Council of the World Social Forum.

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