

# Is WSF Belem 2009 facing crisis of repetition?

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The eighth edition of WSF 2009 was ended on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009 here in the Amazonian city of Belem. About 133,000 people from 4,000 social movements and civil society organizations of 150 countries participated in this Forum. Eighty thousands people from the state of Para (the capital of which is Belem), thirty thousands from Brazil and twenty thousands from other countries got together.

The venue was the campus of Federal Rural University of Amazon. During the 5-day activity about 2,000 workshops, seminars, conferences and meetings held where protesters, activists, intellectuals, campaigners, artists across the world talked about the crisis of capitalism and its horrific implications on the working classes, indigenous and marginalized people. In most of the debates and discussions different aspects of capitalist financial crisis remained dominant. The Forum was kicked off with a grand rally participated by over 80,000 people on 27<sup>th</sup> Jan. The colorful rally was a true reflection of Amazonian flare, marched on the major city roads. It took the participants about almost hours to cover the distance of about four kilometers to reach the center of the city. Over 3000 journalists across the world were also there to cover the event, held almost every year in response to the world Economic Forum. The participants comprising, activists, protesters, campaigners, with agendas ranging from land rights for the indigenous people to secure ecological future and social and economic equality were there to express once again their desire for a new world free of exploitation.

The activists of the Party of Socialism and Freedom of Brazil (PSOL) and Movement of Landless Peasants (MST) showed their strong presence in the rally as well in different forums. Thousands of their activists with their red flags flooded the streets of Belem in the opening rally. The prominent among the participants were President of PSOL, Helosia Helena and chairman of MST Joao Pedro Stedile. The media focused them much of the time. The cultural groups especially from Amazonian region were quite visible to convey the message of ecological threats to the Amazonian region, posed by the capitalist greed.

The second prominent show was the convention of MST where four presidents of Latin America, including Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Evo Morales of Bolivia and Fernando Lugo of Paraguay were specially invited. The most important thing about this convention was the absence of Brazilian President Lula. As a matter of fact MST did not invite Lula, because of his neo-liberal and anti-workers policies. Nevertheless, Lula was found present with the four presidents at another big public meeting, which obviously meant to dispel the large scale impression of his exclusion.

The convention also took a bit color of debate when MST leader Joao Pedro Stedile very tactically put the four presidents in a defensive position through his constructive, positive and friendly criticism regarding the not-so-active and enough implementation of anti-neo liberal assertions by these Latin America leaders in their respective countries and more crucially on the regional scale.

In most forums the two issues of international capitalist financial crisis and of climate change

dominated the debates and discussions. Besides this there were also well attended meetings on the issue of Gaza bombing by the Israelis. But there was little mention of issues of US-led war on terrorism, militarization and religious fundamentalism. The over all arrangements were good, enough security, well protected tents with sound systems and sitting arrangements as well as toilets (WC). Besides this hundreds of volunteers remained present at both the major venues to guide the participants. Free shuttle service between the two main venues, UFPA and UFRA (Federal Universities of Para and Rural of Amazon) was surely a good step by the organizers. Unlike WSF Nairobi the food at the venue was not much expensive and perhaps no incident of theft or stealing.

However, the WSF Belem 2009 was not without its limitations. Though as compare to WSF Nairobi, in Belem there was not much commercialization of eateries but one can see the some commercial activities around, especially stalls of consumer things like decoration pieces, local handicrafts and cosmetic items. The prices of these items were quite high especially for the participants from Third world. Just like WSF Nairobi the entry fee of 30 Brazilian reals was felt too high for local people. But in Nairobi after strong action by some social movements the organization committee was forced to withdraw the entry fee, enabling the local masses to be part of the process. So as a result many poor local people could not afford this and remained excluded of the process. The most important limitation with WSF Belem was the lack of translation arrangements. Four languages, including French, Spanish, Portuguese and English were needed to be translated here but at many forums there was no facility of any translation. The participants were found perplexed and looking for friends to do some translation. On occasions the forum organizers have to do on their own. This really hampered the real purpose of the WSF, i.e. the experience sharing. People were also talking about that the organizing committee initially asked Babel, an organization with thousands of volunteer translators, to do the service. Babel demanded 600,000 Euros for the whole event in advance but the organizing committee refused to give. Later on it was reported that they hired services of some other organization at much higher rate of about one million Euros. Anyway it is complete failure and a debacle for the WSF.

Last but not least, one important fact felt by many participants was the lack of any action. Only debates, debates and debates... no actions. Meaning by there that besides social dimension WSF process must assert its political dimension also. Participants really seemed thirsty for new viable, practical and radical alternatives to the degenerated capitalist system.

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\* From <http://www.cadtm.org>

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