

World Developments and “Alter-Globalism”

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World developments

1. There are currently three big issues that shape the world developments and impact upon the different levels of social transformation (i.e. global, regional, and national or local). I will start by assuming that we are facing a triple crisis: the crisis of the USA's hegemony, the crisis of neoliberalism, and the world environmental crisis, which has become obvious.

2. The environmental crisis is on. There is an increased awareness of the limits of the planet's ecosystem and the negative impacts our actions can have on future generations' rights. This more acute awareness goes hand in hand with the emergence of the so-called “alterglobalist” movement, started at the Rio Conference in 1992. However, despite strong voices and many activities doted around the world, the movement is still to jeopardise the capitalist mode of production in its productivist form. The consequences of productivism on the link between the environmental dimension and the social and democratic dimensions, and the inequality between the countries, form a recurring debate within the environmental movements and the alliances between citizens and social movements. This is one of the most crucial issues for the future of the “alterglobalist” movement.

3. Let us discuss the assumption of the **crisis of neoliberalism**. The neoliberal phase of globalisation is in crisis: a new phase may start; however the shape of this new phase has not yet been determined. Neoliberalism is a phase of capitalist globalisation, it is not its objective and there is no stable neoliberal scenario in the long run. The neoliberal phase might thus be a transition that started at the end of the 1970's. It represents a close link between a socio-economic option, the regulation of capital by the world market, and a politically conservative option. Mrs Thatcher was pushing neoliberal policies in order to destroy the British unions, but also wanted to destroy the unions in order to impose the neoliberal model. As of 1980, a reinforcement of the neo-conservative model sways through the world. From 1980 to 1989, it is a period of experimentation and power build-up, and from 1989, a return of “the social”. In 1995, an anti-systemic movement starts to organise and consolidate itself. It is the “alterglobalist” movement. In 2001, the 9-11 bombings accelerate the neo-con direction.

4. From an ideological point of view, the crisis of neoliberalism is closely interrelated to the growing importance taken by alterglobalism, which has reinforced the system's internal contradictions. This refusal to accept things as they are, expressed by the slogan “Another world is possible”, also goes against the ideological offensives that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989: “the End of History” and the “War of Civilisations”. Nevertheless, the crisis of neoliberalism does not mean it

will inevitably disappear. There are several middle-run possible scenarios: a) neoliberalism is strengthened, b) the neo-con ideology dominates, c) a neo-keynesian option. In the middle run, it is very unlikely that an "alterglobalist" option sees the day: the political conditions are far from being fulfilled. Nevertheless, a reinforcement of the alterglobalist movement will weigh on the possible developments.

5. There are uncertainties due to the economic situation of the next three years. The world economy is pulled by the Asian economies - mainly Chinese -, and remains dependent upon the Chinese economy's instabilities and its imbalance with the US economy. The US economy is very probably facing recession. The US deficit is financed by the global South, the Asian banks and the oil companies. The crisis of credit, that is striking the poorest strata of US society, is starting to spread to the middle classes; mortgages are starting to explode. The financial authorities have created a financial bubble which will be more difficult to deflate through a moderate recession than in 2002/2003. When will the bubble burst? The Bush administration will try to leave that for its successors. If they win, the Democrats will tend to begin with a crisis, at the start of their mandate, and take advantage of a recovery just before the next election. Both the US and Europe will suffer during the crisis. The emerging countries may be tempted not to bank everything on exports and to reduce the budgetary surplus that finances the deficit of the North. They may choose a type of development more oriented towards their home markets by trying to please the middle classes and stabilise their working classes. The choice between the inflationist option and recession will have to be made as of the end of 2008.

6. The crisis of US hegemony is quickly developing. Three years ago, Immanuel Wallerstein wrote in a ground-breaking article that the USA had lost their ideological, economical and political hegemony, whilst remaining dominant. He went on to say that the USA were left with the military hegemony and that they were definitely going to use it. If the evolution of the war in Iraq has destabilised the military hegemony, it has also served to reinforce it. The more the USA are getting stuck in Iraq, the more they are tempted to overdo it and go on a never-ending headlong rush to a general destabilisation through an endless war. Wallerstein also wrote that the USA's strength was its capacity to build on their own weaknesses; they remain the only functioning superpower; and the others (UE, Russia, China, etc.) cannot ignore them because the consequences for them would be much more serious. The difference between hegemony and domination and the success of certain offensives must be underlined: for instance the power to impose the idea of the so-called war of civilisations as an ideological basis to military domination and reinforced security policies that feed racism in all its forms. Fighting this idea of a so-called war of civilisations and the very real endless war is one of the priorities for the alterglobalist movement.

7. Despite facing growing discontent, the USA remain the dominant superpower. This situation has very important consequences for the international system. The crisis of hegemony prevents a consolidation of the institutional framework of neoliberalism, questions multilateralism and weakens international institutions. The World Bank is faced with a loss of credibility accelerated by the nomination of Wolfowicz as its president. The IMF has been weakened by anticipated reimbursements and is on the verge of bankruptcy, and losing ground. The WTO has been weakened by bilateral agreements, although it remains a reference and is consistent. There are more and more protests against financial and commercial institutions that are seen as a weak link within the international system. Protesting against these institutions must go hand in hand with a presentation of our conception of multilateralism, of the public regulation of the international system, and the international financial institutions that we want to push forward.

8. The big global companies remain main players in the world economy, although they still aren't able to directly run the world and need to go through governments and international institutions. The crisis of neoliberalism is made obvious through the hesitations and a certain confusion on the

part of the economic players. Although they state, again and again, their agreement with the Washington consensus and structural adjustment, trust is weakening. Davos is starting to join the Trilateral in a distant past. The G8 has become a space where disagreements between the dominant powers are sorted. The powers are still scary, but they are inspiring more lack of trust than adherence — even more so as their military actions are getting stuck, and Nato is being criticised. The United Nations remain criticised but have not disappeared. The debate on international law basically means a fight between business law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The alterglobalist movement should strengthen its protest against the G8 and Nato and restate its campaign for a radical reform of the United Nations, putting forward the primordial importance of an international law based upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

9. Regional developments vary, because each region reacts to the crisis of the USA's hegemony in a different way. Hence, the geopolitical map of the world is being defined along strong multi-polar lines. This is not about decolonisation anymore, or an anti-imperialist convergence. In South Asia, and more precisely in China and India, economic competition is a way of reacting to the crisis of American hegemony. It is not an anti-capitalist or anti-liberal reaction: it is anti-hegemonic. The situation is complex, as China is a competitor of the USA and relies on this competition. In the Middle-East, it is the military actions that are being questioned, in particular regarding access to energy resources, and through different wars. However, the USA may still modify and calibrate their military interventions — as suggested by the so-called Baker-Hamilton plan — and may retain their hegemony whilst changing the tactics of their interventions. The third reaction is that of Latin America; it is linked with the emergence of a “civic” continental movement that is a phase of democratisation and construction of regimes that reject American hegemony. As to Africa, it remains paralysed by wars, conflict, imposed regimes and competitive influences; but the African social movement is starting to appear and assert itself. Europe and Japan are stuck in their strategic alliance with the USA, which influences the internal contradictions of the situations in each country. The Alter-Inter network was built in order to group together non-governmental players within strategic regions.

10. The crisis of the USA's hegemony has led to competition between regional powers in all regions, aiming at building themselves a sphere of influence. Thus the conflict between India and Pakistan in Asia, the fight between Israel, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. The new nuclear race is a direct consequence: just like the former race had been a sign of post-war balance and led to permanent representation at the United Nations' Security Council. A refusal to consider generalised nuclear disarmament means that nuclear powers basically cannot prevent its access through international law. Competition for the status of regional power has exacerbated internal conflicts and the ruling classes of all countries and regions have all manipulated a call for ethnicism or tribalism as a political tool. This leads to asking ourselves the very difficult question of the relationship between the social and citizens' movements and the “islamist” movements, given the different situations. The fight against war is also a fight for peace and against discrimination, for conflict prevention and resolution. Just like social transformation is inseparable from reconstruction in post-conflict periods.

11. The national political developments linked to neoliberalism are varied. In many regions of the global South, in Latin America and in Asia — above all in India — the damage created by the neoliberal globalisation has led to openings towards alliances that combine policies that are capitalist but incorporate anti-hegemonic visions.

In Northern countries, the convergence of extreme right-wing and mainstream right-wing movements has led to a reinforcement of an extreme right. This alliance is a reaction to the 1990s movements (1994 in Italy, 1995 in France, 1996 in Germany and in the USA). The dominating, the possessing and the privileged have chosen the show-of-strength option in order to face social,

citizens' resistance and that of dominated people. Berlusconi's Italy is one example amongst others, a kind of premonition. The move of a big part of Europe (Austria, Holland, Denmark, etc.) towards the right proves its success that goes hand in hand with the USA developments under Bush. France is experimenting with a bonapartist regime that is the French version of populism.

Not to forget the same right-wing populist moves in Canada, Mexico, Indonesia and several other countries.

12. The success of the extreme right was built in two phases: 1) construction of an extreme right, 2) forcing the right to make an alliance with that extreme right. The extreme right has managed to displace the political scene towards the extreme right by placing the debate on insecurity, immigration and xenophobia. These are the grounds it has been preparing for the past 25 years. In the past 25 years, a battle of wits has allowed the construction of a fascistic alternative built on a call for order. The clubs that prepared the arrival of Thatcher then Reagan, such as the Club de l'Horloge in France, the evangelist right-wing ideas and the various strict religious movements launched a first offensive against equality through a genetic justification of differences, races and inequality. The second wave of the ideological offensive rejects upon the poor and the marginal the responsibility for their own situation and suggests a fight against insecurity and incivility through repression and a generalised genetic filing of the population. The main ideological struggle against this neo-con ideology is one that must be led on a philosophical, scientific, political and cultural level; this is one of the main tasks for the alterglobalist movement.

13. The traditional left has strengthened its position as government parties but not been able to impose itself. It has always preferred alternating to the construction of an alternative. Social democracy has lost its capacity to represent a real social transformation project. It remains in a stable position, however it is a "blairite" position, without caricaturing it and accepting that there can be a less atlantist option, or less "bushite" position, trying to combine a neoliberal acceptance with a reboosting of the public services. It is faced with an internal reconstruction that combines three movements walking alongside, with different ways of saying things, in all parties and left-wing movements. Let us make the difference between: a "blairite" trend, tempted by world neoliberalism, a regulatory and Keynesian trend, more attached to the welfare state, and an alterglobalist trend that is looking for a new alternative.

The alterglobalist trend

14. The alterglobalist movement has not stalled. It is fashionable to announce that the movement is losing ground, however it is constantly getting bigger and deeper. First, it is widening geographically, as is obvious through the world social forums in Porto Alegre, Mumbai or Nairobi, the polycentric forum in Bamako, Caracas or Karachi, the continental forums and the national forums of which that in the USA in June 2006 in Atlanta; plus the never-ending list of local forums. It is also widening socially, as is obvious through the openings to farmers' movements (for instance the landless movements), the trade unions, the "voiceless" movements (for instance the Dalits), the groups representing rough areas and slums, the migrants' forums, the women's global march, and the youth camps. Lastly, it is widening thematically, as shown by the organisation of thematic forums like those on education or water, and the forums where local authorities, members of parliament, judges, etc., meet.

The alterglobalist movement has been getting progressively more powerful over a very short period of time, in less than 10 years. However, it hasn't won. Winning in so little time would have been surprising; and in any case, what does "winning" mean? The alterglobalist movement is a long term

movement. Moreover, the forms of political expression within the alterglobalist movement are very varied. It is a movement of movements. This diversity – that is cacophony for some – has advantages and limitations. In many countries, the forums haven't helped to make changes because the movements were weak. The movement evolves according to the various situations; let us make a few assumptions that may shed light on the debate about our strategy.

15. First assumption: The alterglobalist movement is a historical long term movement. The movement follows three previous historical movements and is acting as their renewal: the historical decolonisation movement – alterglobalism has deeply modified the North-South representations and instead voiced a common project. The workers' struggle historical movement – a shift has been operated towards a social and citizens' world movement. The pro-democracy struggle movement of the 1960-1970s – the need for democracy is being renewed, after the implosion of the Soviets in 1989 and the regression brought by security-obsessed ideologies. Decolonisation, social struggle and pro-democracy and freedom campaigns are the historical cultural reference for the alterglobalist movement.

16. Second assumption: the alterglobalist movement must oppose neoliberalism, neoconservatism and their consequences. The dominant conception of growth, based on an adjustment to the world market and the regulation of capital by the world market, has led to a strengthening of inequalities and poverty, in each country and between countries. The social structure that follows infers discrimination and racism: the new mode of development must start with a fight against discrimination. The limits of the planet's ecosystem and the respect for future generations' rights negate the idea of productivism. Refusing neo-con ideas also means refusing the supremacy of the military and of permanent and preventive war. The democratic dimension and the defence of freedom mean refusing a security-obsessed ideology, identities closed up upon themselves to the exclusion of others, fundamentalism, zero tolerance and the criminalisation of movements. Our vision of social transformation presents five dimensions that we need to voice: economic, social, environmental, democratic and anti-war dimensions.

17. Third assumption: the alterglobalist movement has helped to make an alternative concrete. Starting with a protest against neoliberalism, the movement has expressed its refusal to accept things as there are and moved on from resistance to counter-offensive, putting forward alternatives. The strategic vision that imposed itself through the forums is the following: instead of an organisation of societies and the world through an adjustment to the world market and the authority of a world market of capital, we present an organisation of societies and the world around the principle of access to rights for all. This principle has already changed the nature of the movements which convergence is the main characteristic of alterglobalism; each movement has evolved interiorising the priority given to access to rights for all. We must insist on the fact that the alterglobalist movement still hasn't recovered from the historical defeat that was socialism. It still hasn't suggested the idea of building a world alternative in the same way as historical socialism was one.

18. Fourth assumption: the alterglobalist movement has enlarged. It remains based upon the convergence of social and citizens' movements, which combine struggles and resistances, campaigns and mobilisations, innovating social practices, elaboration, alternatives, proposals for negotiation. The movements promote the construction of a new political culture that goes hand in hand with the forums. The citizens' expertise negates the monopoly of dominant expertise and of a unique way of thinking: it makes concrete a move away from « TINA » (There Is No Alternative), that Mrs Thatcher loved, towards the possibility of thinking another world is possible.

19. Fifth assumption: the alterglobalist movement is entering a new period. We are at the end of a cycle of world social forums, started after Seattle. We must now define the elements of the

project that will correspond to the new period. Important political changes are brewing. Even more so as neoliberalism is in crisis and globalisation's neo-liberal phase is probably ending. We are reaching the limits of financial capital hegemony and of its short-term logic. The US economic hegemony is being fundamentally questioned. China, India and Brazil's increasing economic power also represent elements for change. Permanent war has led to new contradictions and the elections in the USA are introducing uncertainty on wars in the future. The situation in the different countries will evolve in periods of election and political reconstruction. The Latin American political movement is redefining new relations between movements and governments, in a variety of situations.

A new cycle of world social forums

20. The alterglobalist movement is not only the social forums. It is the process of the forums that is particularly important. Even more so for Alter-inter that built itself within this process. We have responsibilities that are particular, and this is why we need to pay a lot of attention on the contradictions of the forums' process.

The Nairobi WSF was one of the most interesting because it gave rise to many contradictions. The world dimension of the WSF was good. There were strong contingents from several continents (India, Pakistan, Brazil, Italy, France, etc.). Progress on the level of the debates was very obvious, as well as on the level of elaboration and construction of world networks. This progress was obvious on several issues, like for instance water, debt, food sovereignty, migration, etc. There was a widening of the networks present that were really involved.

The African dimension of the WSF was excellent. First regarding participation, but also because several big African contingents were composed of many ordinary people; they had mobilised popular movements and were prepared by national social forums. Africa is the continent on which there has been the most number of national social forums (more than 10 in 2006). One of the successes of the forum was also a strong union presence. After Bamako and Nairobi, and beyond problems and limitations, we may today talk of the emergence of an African social and citizens' movement on the whole continent, with all its diversity and contradictions.

The Kenyan dimension of the WSF was much less convincing. Let alone organisational problems, there were many fights within the Kenyan social movement. In terms of affluence, estimation went from 30,000 to 60,000 people. In a country like Kenya this is quite impressive. Whilst it remains too early to assess the local impact of the forum, one may however say that it might be playing a starting and training role, leading to real changes.

21. There are many issues relating to the social forum process. Criticisms against the organisation of the WSF and some of the choices made are legitimate. However, they should not occult the issues raised by the process and that were somehow already there in the previous forums.

Geographically, the forum has enlarged. We knew it wouldn't be easy to have a forum in Africa. Especially since South Africa had refused to organise it. There are not many African countries that can organise a WSF, because of the forum's size and the importance of the countries' social movement. Because of its current format, the WSF cannot be organised easily in many cities: especially because the crisis - even relative - of decolonisation remains important in Africa.

It is difficult to measure the impact of a WSF, because there is a difference between the impact of a forum event and the impact of the forums' process. The issue relating to the number of participants mustn't be played up. However, the media focus is on, and pushes to gigantism. The presence of the media itself is relative; but are we expecting a striking visibility or "sympathy" from the media? The

impact we are looking for first relates to quality: it is more about diversity and convergence than about standardisation. Evolution is obvious in that matter: for instance, the topics are discussed in a much deeper way than at the start of the WSF.

22. The widening of the social bases certainly isn't enough, but it is real. Trade unions, farmers' organisations and residents' associations have always been here; thus in Brazil with the CUT, the MST or the MNLN and in Nairobi with the African unions. The presence of poorest and excluded is more difficult. Participation of the No-Vox was a sign of change that consolidated itself, especially with the migrants in Bamako; in Mumbai the Dalits brought a qualitative change.

Participation of the poor and excluded means a special prolonged and difficult effort; in particular in order to make sure the representatives associations of these popular strata are present at the forum. For the NoVox, the Dalits in Mumbai and the fishermen in Karachi, access to the forum was possible thanks to their associations, they had organised. It is much harder to take part in the forum individually. In Nairobi, some really problematic choices had been made: the site was far away and no free shuttles had been planned, the entry price was very high for the poor, equalisation was insufficient, the opening for some of the slums' associations wasn't enough.

The issue of access for the poor goes hand in hand with higher ethical demands from the alterglobalist movement. Can the claim that another world is possible accept the continuation of a dominant behaviour it supposed to be fighting against? The forums must also be a window on the fact that another world is possible. Three big issues were raised as to an acceptable compromise: how can we ensure organisation and security at an event like the forum? What type of consuming is acceptable at the forums? How can we finance the forums?

23. It is also interesting to wonder about a political enlargement of the forum process. It is not abnormal that there are contradictions, or even disagreements, opposing the different components within the social and citizens' movement from one country or one region. Several times counter-forums were organised, as in London, Mumbai or Nairobi.

The question of a political enlargement also relates to the more and more important presence of certain movements, as the biggest NGOs, that defend more moderate positions and even sometimes backward stances (as on abortion in Nairobi, for instance). It is not enough to suggest the reinstatement of a balance by inviting other movements: we need to make sure that the more important means that big NGOs have does not allow them to influence or control the evolution of the forums.

Today, the main question is that of working with an enlargement and radicalism. The alterglobalist movement starts off by refusing the neoliberal globalisation and thinking that another world is possible, and that this implies a break from the dominant thought and neoliberal policies. Enlargement will mean success for the process if we avoid making the movement bland. Deepening the involvements is necessary, whilst avoiding exclusion and sectarianism. In the language of the forum, we speak of the link between convergence and juxtaposition, horizontality and the definition of priorities and axes of mobilisation, the ordering of agglutination (a Brazilian expression that recalls the call to group on a self-managed basis).

A attempt to converge was tried on the fourth day of the WSF: a proposal to group without giving up on self-managed activities, in the morning within networks or campaigns, and in the afternoon through identified themes (21 themes taken off the 1,100 activities registered) in order to define proposals and mobilisations. The step was deemed interesting but the results weren't conclusive because it hadn't been prepared enough before the forum and due to organisational problems.

24. The debate on enlarging and on radicalism, on the form taken by the forum and on the evolution of the process is related to a more fundamental debate, that of the horizon of social transformation. It depends whether one is more sensitive to the emergency of a situation or the need to define the objectives in the middle run, or whether the historical character of the alterglobalist movement is emphasized, or whether one situates oneself in the long run. It is from there that discussions are defined on whether the movement is losing ground or on its permanence. Thus, the movement's fundamental debate is the strategy, a strategic thought that allows to relate short term actions and long term objectives, the emergency of the reaction to unacceptable situations and the deep transformation of the societies and the world.