

# WSF: Draft Paper on Systematisation of Contributions to the Strategy Debate

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## **A) General Overview**

### **1) Capitalist/Imperialist System**

The debate on capitalism and imperialism, though not discussed in the texts that were sent, is quite polarised.

There are those that believe capitalism and the imperialist hegemony of North America and its allies is in decline. As indicators of the decline of the system they cite evidence like military problems in the USA; the financial question and growing dependence on/of China; because of the lies, unilateralism and bellicosity they are facing a crisis of legitimacy in their hegemonic discourse -that presupposes conviction; the inability to offer solutions to environmental problems, peace problems, social inclusion etc... In this context they state that it's in a state of decline, negated by those that refuse to accept the control and degradation of social conditions this system generates.

On the other hand there are those that do not see the situation with such clarity, stating that contradictions and crisis in the capitalist system are inherent in its own dynamic and it survives and expands from them. They recognise problems in the Middle East, China's increased dependency, but on the other hand they highlight that the hegemony of the American Way of Life characterised by its increased consumerism and individualism are present in the hearts and minds of the people more and more each day.

In any case, the turn of the century and especially 9/11 is cited by many as a key date that ushered in a new era. Many people attempt change by joining forces, but what the end result might be is not exactly known. Many people believe we are in a transition period.

### **2) Neo-Liberal Project**

Some textual typologies and characteristics of neo-liberalism in the current period: neo-liberalism seen as increased commoditisation of life where everything is sold or bought, increased individualism and consumerism, "financialisation", emergence in the last few years of traditionalism and moralism and a reduction of collective rights.

Within the general framework of previous classifications, the majority of works, the neo-liberal phase stands out, as a stage in the capitalist system. From this two analyses are derived. The first is that neo-liberalism is part of the capitalist system, that is, for it to be knocked down, we must knock down capitalism (or socialism or any other production method). The other is that it is possible to destroy neo-liberalism and humanise capitalism (something like a new Fordist Pact proposal), in which capitalism becomes more inclusive and humane.

Some believe that neo-liberalism and imperialism are re-inventing themselves trying to appropriate the movements' agenda whilst simultaneously become harder, more conservative and repressive in order to survive. As an example they cite that international financial institutions have lost credibility,

but their policies and speculation continue and that large polluting companies and the Davos Forum are taking over the ecology debate.

Others believe that neo-liberalism is in decline because of the legitimacy crisis. The emergence of social movements since the 1980s is involved in this, mainly those after the mid-1990s.

Once again, what was noted in these studies is that we are in an era of transition.

### **3) State of the struggles: a half-way house**

In general terms, one notes that the texts deal with the subject beginning with struggles in their region, but there is no general view of what is happening on other continents. Moreover, there are different ways of positioning the different fights and organisations (movements, networks, other-worldism, NGOs). They are part of the same struggles in some texts and not in others, almost appearing to the contrary. In others the terms are used without distinction.

Another question that in part reflects this is the date the otherworld movement/anti neo-liberal movement roughly began. Some people believe that it began with protests in Indonesia in the 1980s, under the dictatorship of Suharto. Many others think it was in the 1990s with struggles like the Zapatistas and the Seattle/Geneva protests. What most agree is that between these dates dozens of protests arose and that after the mid-90s they began to gain visibility and strength.

Given these determining factors, there is no joint vision regarding who is gaining strength or is in crisis, up to what point the proposed goals were reached, among other relevant questions. Although in many texts Latin America seems to be the region where the struggles are most advanced. Almost everyone believes that conditions on the continents are very different.

#### **? Europe:**

European movement in crisis, discord and difficult to mobilise

#### **? Latin America:**

Very strong movements in the region, but without the ability to expand globally. The ability to unite Social Movements and political leaderships was more important.

#### **? Arab World:**

One of the most important regions today for the demonstration of global conflicts in their area, the Arab world it is not properly integrated into the WSF process. If we want to be a true global movement, a global political agent, then we need counterparts in China, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. If we want to fulfil that role, we need a clear political alternative in our message. This important work requires much patience.

- This region receives the most military, diplomatic and economic attention. Need to integrate in Arab world, face up to difficulties like the prejudice of some actors, the necessary militarisation of the movement to be ready for war, to be against the Zionist project in league with imperialists.

#### **? Africa:?**

#### **? Asia:?**

Some people believe that neo-liberalism is in decline because of the greater and growing importance

of another-worldism. Furthermore, they cite the crisis of legitimacy, post-Afghanistan and Iraq, of the North American hegemony, that will limit Washington's ability to exercise its ideological power. These problems make it possible for resistance to develop anywhere.

On the other hand others believe that the struggles that began in the mid-90s are declining. After the mobilisations of the Iraq war that unified struggles world-wide, at the moment, movements are more preoccupied with national realities and are turning towards other local and regional problems.

Perhaps we should create continental commissions to carry out more effective analyses, trying to establish a general, minimum, conceptual framework. This would help us to understand regional dynamics better; creating a common conceptual framework that would favour a more conclusive balance and convergence.

#### **4) Challenges and Important questions:**

- Struggles are worldwide in the sense that they develop in the world space, but fail to construct convergence in diversity and world scale, going from the defensive to the offensive. A step towards the offensive was begun in Latin America that points to what may come afterwards. Africa as the most vulnerable continent and decline in mobilisations in Europe.
- Last few years fall in visibility and decline in ability to unify and unite. From its peak and the proliferation of specific struggles in the face of neo-liberalism to more sectorial and national dispersion of the movements.
- Movements are far from damaging the capitalist method of production.
- Challenge to combine democratic combat with social progress and on this basis reconstruct internationalism of the people in the face of capitalism.
- However, we are still far from seeing a turnaround in the global situation; the era ushered in by 9/11 has not been overcome. Together with the weakening of the other-world youth movement, even though in South America the impulse of new political scenarios favourable to popular forces is reaching a crossroad and a new limit, and has been challenging them for some time to come up with new strategies.
- Reconstructing a front of countries and social movements in the Southern Hemisphere is a fundamental condition for the emergence of another world that is not imperialist, but requires the cooperation between organisations from both north and south.
- People in all parts of the world aspire to radical change.
- Beyond and alongside forums, other organisations develop ways of converging struggle movements, with emphasis on convergence and diversity, but with a more objective vision, crystallising common strategies.
- Capitalism is linked to patriarchy, racism/colonialism; resistance to integrate these areas is seen even in progressive circles and social movements, when members of these circles refuse to examine their own behaviour or question the privileges they enjoy owing to their gender, race, ethnicity or class.
- Necessity for movements and organisations to become aware that they must join a coherent other-worldism project that involves a political vision and overcome individual surroundings.
- The national question, as changes and political clarifications and the definition of political cultures

exist at this level. But we must focus on the world perspective as capital becomes globalised. Need for a fifth international.

- We must regularly evaluate and measure our progress, our strong points, our weaknesses, so as to focus on the struggle for "another possible world". The main thing now is to adapt the organisation and the WSF's methods of action to the evaluation of the anti neo-liberal struggle and against the imperial hegemony of the world, in the internal phases of its execution.
- Incorporation of other actors rising from social movements into international dynamics or with wide participation of groups like MAS, PSUV, ALIANZA PAIS, that succeeded in transforming the force of resistance to neo-liberalism into hegemonic political force.
- Need to discuss a post neo-liberal agenda that might contribute to a new alternative paradigm to that of development.

## **B) Questions, proposals, and positioning on the WSF debate and its future.**

### **1. Should the WSF specify its strategies to continue being a space in the service of struggles?**

Some people think that to have a major impact we should clearly establish our objectives and strategies, taking on greater intentionality in the constructive sense (convergence) of struggles with the WSF process and greater effectiveness of the events serving it. In this sense, it is necessary that the WSF is not considered an end in itself. The WSF will have to assume an increase in its contributions (new political culture) in the social movements throughout the world.

- Advance with this transformation towards greater inclusion, respecting the diversity and complexity of social movements.

The goal should be to reinforce the struggle process and generate a great capacity for global mobilisation.

Our goal is to consolidate the WSF as a process, favouring the synergy between political agendas and the diverse organising cultures contributing to construct and motivate the struggles. This is how to organise resistance against neo-liberalism and imperialist militarism.

A suggestion with respect to serving the struggle can be specified in the following cycle:

? 1. In the first year we celebrate the Day of Mobilisation and Global Action, coordinated, interconnected, self-managed and decentralised. In the second year struggles and regional, sub regional and thematic organisations meet up. In the third year a global get-together based on previous results takes place.

? 2. Another proposal is to alternate the celebration of the WSF event every two years with local, regional and thematic forums, with day and world and/or regional campaigns on specific topics that can generate large-scale consensus and mobilisation.

? 3. Another proposal involves considering the Global Action Day as part of the WSF in the future. The Global Action Day can be designed to globally accompany what happens in the WSF world event. The central event can be every two or three years, but the Global Action Day can be annual.

### **2. Is it possible to achieve goals from the consensus reached in a series of basic demands,**

**not to mention more fundamental, radical goals? Is it possible to make another world possible within the limits of capitalism's predatory logic?**

This idea does not enjoy unanimity in the World Social Forum other-worldist movement, but there are many of us who believe that socialism needs to be reinvented in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**3. Is the WSF really connected to the basic struggles, its mobilisations, campaigns and political struggles? How do we reach people who are excluded to find out what they think about the state of the world today?**

Some believe that these meetings take place with the spokespeople of the victims of the system, but very rarely with the victims themselves and that the WSF does not represent all global resistance movements. There are many movements excluded from the WSF process and the event itself because they have no means of attending the WSF and have no access to the internet to take part in the forum process.

One of the most important regions today for the demonstration of global conflicts in their area, the Arab world, is not properly integrated into the WSF process. If we want to be a true global movement, a global political agent, then we need counterparts in China, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The Forum will have to carry on its expansion work in order to increase both geographical and thematic participation.

Another view is that the WSF only makes sense where there are local or national struggles, places of basic alternative construction. This would require serious and responsible dialogue between global movements, the WSF's spaces of coordination and facilitation and of the regional, sub regional, thematic and national forums.

As a consequence, we must be careful not to fall between two stools (neither as exploiters or worse victims) inclined to find accommodations in the predominant economic system, giving priority to the individual, underrating both theory and political action. We cannot fall into autocratic rule; we must capture the hearts and minds of the people in the movement.

Given the political diversity of the WSF, we could aim to make diversity not a source of dispersion but a force that also allows us to think of the current political agenda. The concept of convergence that was inadequately dealt with in Nairobi is an indication of the response to this demand.

In that search, a hidden demand is to achieve spaces within the WSF to combine the 'methodology' of self-organisation, with full horizontality and respect for diversity that it demands and, at the same time, organise meeting points on topics that help us to display some common features in the different struggles and alternative proposals. The only way to progress is to take our common interests as a base. The achievement of these two objectives (diversity and communal agenda) requires us to seek collective actions that allow us to respect our plurality, and on which we can agree without endangering the identity and opinions of each person.

The way the WSF is currently constructed makes us all compete to display our own struggle, and this prevents us from debating a joint agenda.

The solidarity of the movements that the WSF historically participates in is essential for its members.

One proposal for greater connection with the various struggles is to have Thematic World Forums. The theme would be chosen by political positioning established by consensus. Each group, movement or organisation would be free to organise their actions, present their opinions and

proposals on the chosen theme. No one would assume any one else's positions.

#### **4. Is it necessary to have a common reason to campaign?**

Some of many possible reasons and subjects put forward: reasonable working conditions, looming ecological disaster and its close links with capitalist logic, war, connections between governments with progressive agendas and social movements, the problem of political power and its role in relation to change in the creation of another possible world, systematic criminalization of social protests north, south, east and west and its relation to the upkeep of Forums, participatory democracy as a constant element in our organizations and its application to government structures, the scope of the WSF and its struggles in the areas of power and mass media and communication, defence of public services, pardoning of foreign debt of poor countries, relationships with political parties, multilateral and governmental institutions, gay and lesbian rights, reactions against repression, manipulation of ethnic conflicts or military occupation, world economic crisis, religious exclusion, sustainable development, cultural diversity, the future of "altermondialism", democracy, individual and collective human rights, public policies and uses of public space, sustainable development and effective pro-peace and anti-war policies...among others.

An issue raised forcefully was the relative concern in relation to the feminist presence in WSF dynamics. We hope that all movements recognise the patriarchal analysis at the core of neo-liberal and imperialist investigation. The WSF's achievements to date are insufficient to face sexist domination. We must not allow this issue to become peripheral or isolated.

With regard the fixing of subjects, the last day of the Forum may be devoted to the convergence of different topics. If such different subjects are well-prepared and outlined, this should be possible. The format used on the fourth day in Nairobi may be used again. Future collaboration between WSF meetings and the Global Day of Action may be a solution.

#### **5. What is the future of the WSF: an open space, a movement of movements or the coexistence of both?**

Seeing the WSF as, above all else, a historic acquisition, important to preserve and project in the face of new challenges and realities, though it be only as a space for the interchange of ideas. New initiatives/dynamics have emerged which seek to go beyond the self-imposed limits of the WSF. Forums must be open to other indispensable steps in order to make necessary transformations: analytical, theoretical, open and constructive, but also critical thought that supersedes a purely academic environment.

Such thought must also relate to important issues outside the remit of the WSF. To oppose such widening of scope would suggest the end of the Forum and betray its antihegemonic struggle. However, while the Forum must remain an open space, it should never be a neutral one.

Putting in place both types of action [Forum organization and specific mobilization] as mutually exclusive alternatives within the WSF process is to confuse the means with the end: both are essential.

The WSF should be seen as a tool, as opposed to an end in itself. Methodology must also be evaluated and revised in terms of expected outcomes.

The WSF is seen as a space; however we must see its emergence as a moment, part of the trajectory known as global justice movements.

From an open space for negotiation, the WSF should become an essential space for inclusive mobilization across the world in a great struggle of our time.

The WSF should continue to be a space for convergence, debate, networking and the presentation of experiences to defeat imperialism on many levels. To institutionalise this would be a grave mistake and would constitute the end of such a space.

The WSF is a space for debate, exchange and reflection. It would be naïve or unrealistic to believe it possible to make more practical resolutions or shape ideologically coherent platforms from here. This would divert energy or leave us with ideological debate alone. We are certain this would turn the WSF into little more than a supermarket of ideas. It is so important in this historical period, of decline of mobilization in the world, that we have spaces for exchange and discussion to at least, consolidate common neo-liberal and anti-imperialist aspirations.

## **6. Should the WSF make political decisions?**

The WSF needs to consider its return to politics as central to international conflict analysis. At present, there are those who consider that, without a political foothold, the Forum has no future, since it would be unable to introduce a counter-establishment policy that would allow it to radically transform the global agenda. The future of the Forum depends on its capacity to maintain its open space and dare to position itself politically. To this end, mutual understanding and respect are a must amongst Forum participants.

The WSF should not adopt a single programme for the entire movement, but rather adopt political positions in relation to happenings on the global stage and with respect to analysis responsible for internalising global realities.

It is understandable that the WSF and the International Council [IC] avoid tensions in ideological debates; however, it is not understandable that they should want to avoid all types of discussion or political positioning.

Objectives such as what we want the WSF to be or to do need to be defined. We prefer an alternative but these should be alternatives that allow us to win social and political battles.

## **7. Should this discussion forum set the stage for collective action?**

For some, the Forum should take political action, which implies innovative forms of action, such as articulation [convergence] between social and political movements and the role of such movements in new institutions [for example, ALBA].

The WSF may communicate with other transnational initiatives and learn from them. Such an example of this is the large movement for universal education and the Mexican neo-Zapatista “The Other Campaign”.

In order to act collectively, the WSF needs to, from the discussion of its participants, agree upon a group of common themes which will allow for such action.

The challenge is for social movements and the various forms of popular organization to take advantage of such an opportunity to communicate mass action. It is of the utmost importance that sectors with a social basis, as well as influence in society, move to the next level, taking mass action, as a whole internationally. For some, this may take the form of organising actions against transnational firms and multilateral organisms such as the WTO, the IMF and free trade agreements.

## **8. Are substantial changes needed in the Charter of Principles to allow the WSF to take a stand on major global problems?**

Opinions on this matter are wide-ranging. On the one hand, it is clear that this document gives ample scope for possibilities in order to accomplish many of the objectives of the campaigns that



come together in the WSF.

On the other, it has been shown that the Charter, in its wide scope, is contradictory in that it allows for the union of groups with opposing ideological points of view, for example, in the case of abortion. We cannot hope to build a better world while at the same time, giving space to homophobic or lesbian prejudices or misogyny within the WSF. We propose an amendment to the Charter to add this principle which should help to guide the organization.

For others, the Charter has become a dogmatic foundation as opposed to a dynamic, “work-in-process” document. When differences appear as more than just inspired diversity, the process falls into internal friction with no mechanism for resolving it.

The Charter does not establish that the WSF must remain permanently neutral in relation to a number of diverse political issues. On the contrary, it allows for a position to be taken in favour of greater social justice and respect for human rights. In this respect, the Charter need not be changed.

Should a new global situation present itself, we should reflect on whether Davos should continue to be the reference point and counter-point for the WSF and with this, the need to revise the WSF Charter of Principles.

The movement which is at present, the expression of an alliance of different, somewhat radical, movements can be divided on the basis of the Charter of Principles.

The charter stipulates that in Forums, those that fight against neo-liberalism, global capital hegemony [globalization] and in search of alternatives are to be found. This is quite clear and could be recalled and applied in more coherent manner.

## **9. Will the IC need to readapt its functions and methodology?**

The IC will face the challenge of finding a mechanism for larger or enhanced representative inclusion in social struggles. There is always a danger of bureaucratization or institutionalization; however, its total absence could go against its smooth functioning, creating unclear power relations. Structures must be reorganised for there to be more clarity in relation to responsibility. A challenge confronting the Charter is the real incorporation of feminist analysis and demands, such as the assertion that women are active subjects in the fight against globalization. There is no recognition within the WSF International Council, nor in the WSF methodology, of existing patriarchal power relations or any promise to change them.

Carrying out such reforms and expansion of the Charter depend on our ability to strengthen the Charter itself. A large assembly of women, expressing the contents and forms of feminist action, organised within the WSF, and possibly putting forward an agenda beyond the WSF will contribute to this.

The work of the IC, the sole deliberative body, centres more on methodological and logistical questions as opposed to taking political decisions. It is only if we begin political discussion in a common language, that we can alter and evaluate real scope and real transformation within our diversity.

There is a need to analyse or perhaps change the relationship between the IC, the WSF process and the Forum participants. Participants have no way of influencing the direction of the process. The IC, a simple and useful coordinating body, finds itself actually guiding the process without meeting the minimum necessary credentials for such a task. We must avoid a real colonization of the WSF.

We reject the idea that the WSF is controlled by just anybody, not trade unions, nor NGOs that play an indispensable part in Forums, but not that of protagonists, despite their resources. The concept of centralism is alien to the Forum.

The Assembly of Social Movements [ASM] is the key of the WSF's contribution in developing a representative democracy, yet it has not been used strategically by the WSF. The ASM should have more organic representation within the IC. At the same time, and from within, the Assembly of Social Movements should engage in strategic debates which take place in the IC. This could be the space to create a link between the WSF and a platform for action.

The ASM should itself constitute a forum for political action. Were this to be the case, it would remain independent of the WSF, not merely meeting in its forums.

## **10. What to do in relation to communication?**

In terms of communication media, the instrumental opinion has been prioritised: event coverage, with technological and media-related solutions. This is a strategic matter for the process of the Forum. As we access major communication media, our messages are swallowed up in the avalanche of messages from the opposite side. However, it will not be with 50 or 100 or 1,000 mentions of the WSF in such media that will effect a change, but rather through campaigns to establish public policies, democratic legislation and raising awareness among the general public that the current media situation is antidemocratic. Of all the social struggles that go hand in hand with the Forum, one of the most direct is that of making the media more democratic.

A first step is to break with the tradition of thinking of the media as untouchable and stop thinking of alternatives as small and scattered, but rather as a potentially far-reaching and interconnected system. However, we cannot believe that lack of media coverage will be resolved simply by a PR operation.

On the other hand, it is now time to begin an economic and psychological investment in the internet as a tool capable of furthering the expansion of the WSF process, while at the same time, strengthening its values and practices. This does not substitute other tools such as radio, video and printed media; however, it offers greater possibilities for those involved in the process.

Other problems and proposals raised:

- The Belem Forum could be a space for raising greater awareness about looming ecological disaster and its close links with capitalist logic. Besides, it could be the moment to put in practice decisions adopted since the discussion of strategies.
- Independent financing to aid WSF self-determination and independence should be suggested as a strategy. In the beginning, the WSF was almost self-sufficient in terms of financial support. We should discuss the reasons for the WSF being currently so financially dependent upon external bodies and the need for a budget of almost \$10m.
- There is a blatant lack of coherence between WSF organisation and our objectives for social transformation. Commercialization of events, the presence of "pro-life" groups etc, are obstacles to building alternatives and should be faced up to. The proposal for an organizing guide should be adopted and distributed to organizing committees in diverse social forums.

### **4) Challenges and Important Questions identified:**

- There are many existing movements which are excluded from the WSF process and event due to a

lack of access to necessary transport and media resources to be a part of the forum process. Today, one of the most important regions, due to the manifestation of global conflicts there, is not adequately integrated into the WSF process: the Arab world. If we really wish to be a global movement, a global political agent, then we need counterparts in China, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

- The WSF must respond to imperialism with alternative answers, shedding light on distinct State and social projects arising worldwide; recognise the need for the existence of a new internationalism based on diversity, but in the convergence of certain principles and objectives; having in common the need to discuss a post-neoliberal agenda that will contribute to a new alternative paradigm for development.
- The size of the Forum has come to be its worst enemy. We have noted an increase in WSF participation, from a few thousand, to tens of thousands, to hundreds of thousands. The success of the WSF should be assessed in terms of its capacity to mobilize and adapt to realities and the struggles of local movements in the country where it is held and not in its perpetual growth. A proposal to connect more with diverse campaigns is to take the form of Global Themed Forums.
- The WSF's achievements are insufficient to face sexist domination. We must not allow this issue to become peripheral or isolated.
- It is understandable that the WSF and the International Council [IC] avoid tensions in ideological debates; however, it is not understandable that they should want to avoid all types of discussion or political positioning.
- The IC will face the challenge of finding a mechanism for larger or enhanced representative inclusion in social struggles. There is always a danger of bureaucratization or institutionalization; however, its total absence could go against its smooth functioning, creating unclear power relations. Structures must be reorganised for there to be more clarity in relation to responsibility. The IC, a simple and useful coordinating body, finds itself actually guiding the process without meeting the minimum necessary credentials for such a task. We must avoid a real colonization of the WSF.
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\* Translation: Marian Vieyra / Emma Kiely.