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World Social Forum

# A triple triumph

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**THE 2002 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre was a triumph on three levels: in terms of participation, much bigger than in 2001, depth of political and theoretical reflection on the main problems of our epoch and definition of forthcoming events and future objectives.**

Those who, following September 11, had anticipated, if not a swift disappearance, a slowing down or decline of the movement, have had to admit that their hopes or fears were unjustified. That fact is made even clearer by the contrast with the Davos-New York World Economic Forum, which met at almost the same time in an atmosphere of gloom. The Financial Times (February 5) concluded that 'unless he [WEF founder Klaus Schwab] can rework his formula, the world may no longer be listening.'

The broad and many-faceted nature of the lectures, debates, demonstrations and meetings over these unforgettable days, meant that even the most active participants, those most ready to go without sleep, found it hard to get an overall view. Even more so inasmuch as the Forum was marked by a 'coexistence' of three components: the social movements, youth and assemblies of parliamentarians.

Nobody could forget that the social movements have played the central role in the genesis and growth of the global justice movement and remain its spinal column. By their composition and participation in sectoral struggles at many levels, by their more direct confrontation with the realities of the world today, they represent tendentially the most radical component, if one can put it thus, of the Porto Alegre left. It is not by chance that in both 2001 and 2002 they adopted the most rigorous and advanced declarations.

Of course, youth have been involved in these movements from the beginning. However, it seems justified to consider them as a relatively autonomous component on this occasion, from the very fact of the unprecedented breadth of their participation and the presence of a great number of youth who were here for the first time.

The uninterrupted debates which took place on many subjects - from discussions on youth radicalisation at key moments of the 20th century to the Argentine events - reveals a thirst to learn and an encouraging tendency to involvement in the struggles which lie before us.

It was predictable that problems would be posed in the Parliamentary Forum. Indeed, this was the favoured framework for the efforts of some traditional political currents, above all the social democrats, to insert themselves in the Porto Alegre movement. These neophytes, often veterans of inglorious past battles, did not show a great deal of self-restraint, some involving themselves in manoeuvres inside the PT, [\[1\]](#) others indulging in veritable blackmail by exploiting the unitary will prevalent at Porto Alegre.

As shown by the other articles in this issue, there were confrontations, above all on the question of the war in Afghanistan. It was hard to draw up common declarations with parliamentary representatives of parties that had supported the Gulf and Balkan wars as well as the one underway in Afghanistan. Finally, two parallel motions were adopted. One, fairly general in character, was adopted unanimously. The other, which did not contain an explicit condemnation of the war, was opposed by the PRC parliamentarians present and the LCR's MEPs. In this forum, moreover, despite numerous interventions from different parties or movements, several representatives of the Latin American CPs, four members of the French PS and a German social democrat, the war in Afghanistan had not been condemned nor even mentioned before the intervention of two representatives of the PRC. [\[2\]](#)

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It is probable that the problem of the relationship with the social democratic currents will be posed anew at other meetings and at the 2003 Forum; this is still more the case with those parties which, after electoral defeats, will no longer be in government and will feel the need to get a little fresh air in their lungs. Reactions of pure and simple rejection, although understandable given the heavy responsibilities of the social democrats and others, would be wrong.

In fact, nobody suggested such a course of action at Porto Alegre: we do not fear debate with anybody but all the same, there are limits to the area of eventual integration. We cannot consider those who do not oppose neo-liberalism and war as an integral part of the movement, but punctual convergences may be possible on a case-by-case basis.

It is still more important that any sectarian reflex is avoided in relations with the trade union organizations. Whatever the current relationship of forces and whatever the current orientations of the unions, the problem of the relationship between new movements and the traditional workers' and popular movements remains significant. The Italian global justice movement has in general understood this well, participating actively in the strikes and demonstrations launched by the unions.

Nobody can say now in what international or indeed Brazilian context the 2003 Forum will take place. Whatever happens, the huge demonstration on March 16, 2002 in Barcelona indicates that the movement continues to grow and will play a crucial role in the struggles of the coming years.

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[1] At the beginning of the Forum a daily newspaper in Porto Alegre published a communiqué signed by, among others, DS leaders and Italian intellectuals, accusing Trotskyists and others in Italy of having hijacked the idea of the participatory budget by presenting it in an arbitrary fashion, which the said DS members had correctly reacted to by creating an ad hoc association (which nobody in Italy knows anything about). In fact, this was an attack on the PRC, which was alone in distributing information on the participatory budget by reproducing the Brazilian texts.

[2] The chair of the Sao Paulo Forum allowed speaking rights to about 20 people, including the five social democrats mentioned, before Gennaro Migliore, international officer of the PRC and myself were allowed to speak, although we had our names down from the beginning. Remember that the PRC has participated in the Forum since its formation.