

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article703>



World Social Forum

Porto Alegre World Social Forum

- IV Online magazine - 2001 - IV328 - February 2001 -

Publication date: Saturday 10 February 2001

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

It was an audacious gamble: bringing together hundreds of representatives of movements opposed to neo-liberal globalisation from all over the planet in a big city in southern Brazil.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/porto_alegre.jpg]

March at the WSF

The aim was to map out alternative paths and agree on a timetable of priority mobilisations at the very time when those who aim to push the world still further towards commodification and the domination of capital were meeting in Davos. In short, to oppose to the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos a World Social Forum (WSF) which affirms that another world is possible.

The gamble paid off from all points of view: a high participation of representatives from a very wide scale of movements opposed to neo-liberal globalisation; manifest convergence between the different platforms; a high quality of debate; adoption of three complementary declarations from the social movements, the parliamentary representatives and the local government representatives. Finally, widespread media coverage on a planetary level to the extent that the WEF at Davos and the WSF at Porto Alegre were systematically presented as symbolising two basic choices facing humanity.

The World Social Forum is the culmination of more than a year's careful preparation by a Brazilian organising committee composed of social movements (the MST movement of the landless, the CUT trade union federation, and so on) and non governmental organisations. This committee worked systematically in liaison with movements from other continents like ATTAC, Focus on global South, the CADTM, Jubilé Sud, as well as the French journal *Le Monde diplomatique*.

The initiative was supported by the state government of Rio Grande do Sul (10 million inhabitants) and the city council of its capital, Porto Alegre (1.3 million inhabitants), both of them led by the Workers' Party (PT).

On January 25, 2001, the Forum opened with nearly 4,000 participants. Radical speeches (like that of the governor, former trade union leader Olivo Dutra) and high quality cultural production - presenting the indigenous and African roots of today's struggles in terms of the extraordinary struggle of Black slaves for emancipation - set the tone for a 5 day race against time.

After the opening, the participants of the FSM met in the city centre for a big demonstration of around 10,000 people on the theme "March for life, another world is possible" which ended with an open air concert.

From January 26-29, each morning was taken up by four major debates which took place simultaneously with an attendance of between 400 and 900 people according to the debate. In total then, 16 debates devoted to the big social themes and oriented towards the mapping out of alternatives.

This was followed each afternoon by workshops - nearly 360 of them in four days, organised by the movements themselves. Following this, there were "conference-testimonies" involving personalities like Lula (leader of the PT), Cuautémoc Cardénas (leader of the Mexican PRD) or José Bové (Confédération paysanne, France).

In addition, there was a world parliamentary forum (in which 350 elected representatives participated) and a world municipal forum led by the new mayor of Porto Alegre, Tarso Genro.

There was also an international youth camp with more than 1,000 participants as well as a camp of indigenous peoples and many activities involving the Movement of the Landless.

The WSF ended on January 30 with the decision to meet again in Porto Alegre on the same date as the WEF in Davos in 2002.

Convergence between movements

After the defeat of the MAI (Multilateral Accord on Investment) in October 1998, the defeat of the WTO in Seattle in December 1999, the fiasco of the annual meeting of the World Bank and the IMF in Prague in September 2000, the WSF in Porto Alegre constituted another step towards an accentuation of convergence between the very numerous movements seeking to satisfy the basic demands of humanity. This meeting was preceded by a dozen very significant initiatives of mobilisation in the year 2000 in the course of which these movements have systematically acted together: Bangkok in February 2000 (the 10th UN Conference on Trade and Development); Washington in April 2000 (Spring meeting of the IMF and World Bank); Geneva in June 2000 (Evaluation of the UN Summit on Social development); Okinawa in July 2000 (G7); Prague in September 2000; Brussels, New York and Washington in October 2000 (World Women's March); Seoul the same month (3rd Asia-Europe Conference); Nice in December 2000 (EU summit); Dakar in December 2000 ("From resistances to alternatives").

All these actions allowed the drawing up of common positions between powerful social movements (trade unions like the CUT in Brazil, KCTU in South Korea, CTA in Argentina, COSATU in South Africa, and so on), peasant movements, citizen's movements like ATTAC; indigenous movements (CONAIE from Ecuador, the Zapatistas from Mexico); the World Women's March; international networks (Focus on global south, ATTAC, CADTM, European Marches); movements of those "without" (without papers, homes, jobs, land); ecologist and pacifist movement, the radical left; coalitions around precise themes like:

- the cancellation of the third world debt (Jubilee 2000, Jubilé Sud,...);
- opposition to the neo-liberal offensive in trade;
- support for the Tobin tax.

Points of convergence

One can try to sum up the points of agreement between these movements as follows.

The necessity of a democratic and internationalist alternative to neo-liberal capitalist globalisation; the necessity of realising equality between women and men; the necessity of deepening the crisis of legitimacy of the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, the Davos Forum, the G7 and the big multinationals; support for the cancellation of the Third World Debt and the abandonment of structural adjustment policies; support for an end to the deregulation of trade, opposition to certain uses of genetically modified organisms and rejection of the current definition of intellectual property rights in relation to trade; opposition to militarist policies (for example, Plan Colombia); support for the right of peoples to an endogenous development; financing on the basis of the taxation of capital through a Tobin type tax; support for the rights of indigenous peoples; the necessity of agrarian reform and a generalised reduction of working

hours; the necessity of a common North/South and East/West struggle; the promotion of democratic experiences like the participatory budget practised at Porto Alegre.

These main elements are all, or almost all, to be found in the declaration that the social movements adopted at the WSF in Porto Alegre (see the websites www.forumsocialmundial.org or attac.org - available only in Spanish, Portuguese and English at the moment). They are found already in the Bangkok appeal (February 2000) and in the declaration of Geneva (June 2000). It is a very encouraging sign.

Some big questions remain the subject of debate: is it necessary to "abolish" the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO or can they be reformed? Should we fight in the countries of the periphery for the suspension of the payment of the debt or rely on negotiations without recourse to this measure?

Davos surrounded by barbed wire and protected by hundreds of police and soldiers. Porto Alegre open to all who put humanity before profit. In Davos, luxury; in Porto Alegre, dignity. In Davos the crisis of legitimacy; in Porto Alegre, the alternatives.

The meeting at Porto Alegre attracted extraordinary media coverage: nearly 500 journalists were present (more than at Davos...). The media, including the most fervent defenders of the rule of capital (CNN for example) sensed that a turning point in public opinion had been reached: an increasingly significant number of citizens of the planet are opposing the neo-liberal offensive. Those who mobilised at Porto Alegre were in permanent contact via the alternative media (Indymedia for example) with the anti-Davos mobilisations in Switzerland and expressed their solidarity with the Swiss demonstration.