

Global Civil-society Movements: What the World Social Forum Can do to Change the World's Situation

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Abstract

About 155,000 people from different global movements participated in the 5th annual meeting of the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2005. Apparently, participants had one thing in common: they saw the neo-liberal trend of globalization as an obstacle to achieving social justice and a better world. This paper argues that (1) neo-liberal globalization is not the only obstacle to social justice, human rights, and economic development in the majority of developing societies; and (2) the alternative the WSF suggests to change the capitalist world-system is not realistic and feasible. Also, with a ten-fold increase over the past five years, the WSF could move toward a new stage of its global role by not only advocating for the economic needs of the poor but also echoing the voices of people calling for democracy and human rights in different parts of the world. In the era of globalization, the WSF has the potential to be transformed from "an open meeting space for reflective thinking" into an established body that represents civil societies instead of governments, thus becoming a global entity parallel to the United Nations. In other words, it would be a permanent global NGO forum capable of bridging local and global civil-society movements based on the common objectives of achieving economic, political, and religious reforms. At the end, this paper presents some policy recommendations and specific mechanisms for exerting pressure on governments and global capitalist entities to follow the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other common goals.

Keywords: Civil society; Global movements; Neo-liberal globalization; Quadruple alliance; World social forum; World congress

Introduction

Today's civil society, the post-ideological era of the late capitalist universal system of globalization, still denies basic human rights to a large majority of the world's population and thus requires a pragmatic, post-ideological approach to social reality. Not all social problems can be attributed to capitalism and global economic agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is a fact, however, that the global accumulation of capital in certain relations has adverse effects, including "alienation," or estrangement of producers from their products. Yet, this does not negate the fact that many of the world's people are still deprived of opportunities to accumulate the capital necessary for economic growth and development, as well as cyber technology, and so they are unable to enjoy the possible benefits of participating in liberal democracy. Because of this, many talented, motivated, and educated people in developing societies migrate to the West, even though their own native countries gravely need them. The main push factor in their migration is political and social repression, and the pull factors are freedom and the types of opportunities that they cannot find at home. Iran is a good example, due to human rights abuses, discrimination, repression, and state corruption, Iran has "the highest brain-drain rate in the world." [1] Reza Faraji Dana, Iran's Minister of Higher Education, puts the economic loss at some \$150 billion a year.² This gloomy situation occurs under the anti-neo-liberal globalization policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Before the Cold War, a number of the least-developed countries, such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Algeria, and Cambodia,

were forcefully and violently dragged into "socialism." Such imposed projects of "modernization," however, often caused human catastrophes such as the rise of religious fanaticism, corrupt capitalism, and civil, tribal, and sectarian wars. If our sincere concern is social justice, it cannot be achieved in absence of gradual development, freedom, and democracy. These significant aspects of modern human achievements could be eradicated without the constant protection of civil society organizations in both developed and developing nations. For this reason, the emphasis in this article is on the creation of a global civil society.

No viable alternative has been developed since the demise of the former socialist states, except the decentralization of world power into scattered and growing sub-continental and regional co-dependent powers that are challenging the unbalanced political and financial situation in the world today. New regional powers such as China, Brazil, and India have emerged through reciprocal relations with the developed West and through internal structural modification, and they have advanced by benefiting from world capitalist amenities such as capital, technology, and open markets. "For the first time in 150 years, the combined output of the developing world's three leading economies—Brazil, China, and India—is about equal to the combined GDP of the long-standing industrial powers of the north—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

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¹ This paper was initially written in 2006, after my participation in the 5th WSF annual conference in 2005. It has been revised and updated for publication in 2014. In terms of the number of attendees, the 2005 gathering was the largest in WSF history. Gradual declining of attendance in following annual conferences could be explained by the people in charge in the WSF.

² Ibid

This represents a dramatic rebalancing of global economic power.”³ [2]. Despite this reality, critics of globalization, such as Samir Amir, note that globalization requires the management of crises at the world level, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) have been made to serve this purpose, “so that the economies of the South and the East are subordinated to these imperatives” [3]. Amin did not consider the codependency of the countries in the world. The outbreak of the 1973-4 oil crisis, over Israel/Palestine conflict, which eventually caused the New York Stock Exchange's Dow Jones Industrial Average benchmark lost over 45% of its value, and the London Stock Exchange's FT 30, lost 73% of its value during the crash explain the realities that there is no solo management for the world economy. The crash came after the collapse of the Bretton Woods system on the US dollar devaluation under the Smithsonian Agreement [4].

The politics of the global capitalist system needs to be modified through a pragmatic approach to functional change within a society, with globally enforced inclusion of all universal principles of human rights and legal equality for all. This means that people have to be empowered to play a role in the global economy through participating in domestic politics.

Naomi Klein writes:

Politics had to be less about trusting well-meaning leaders, and more about empowering people to make their own decisions; democracy had to be less representative and more participatory. The ideas flying around included neighborhood councils, participatory budgets, stronger city governments, land reform, and cooperative farming—a vision of politicized communities that could be networked internationally to resist further assaults from the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. For a left that had tended to look to centralized state solutions to solve almost every problem, this emphasis on decentralization and direct participation was a breakthrough [5].

This paper aims to show how an approach of localization and democratization of politics can be implemented on a global scale. Global problems are diverse and dissimilar, and their roots and causes vary widely, so there is no one solution. Obstacles to development in many developing societies are mostly related to internal domestic and political factors. If these obstacles could be removed, people could discover how to turn globalization to their own advantage. The world has changed and will continue to change in reciprocal and interactive ways at various political levels. Many scholars, including Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, “share an emphasis on the interaction of societies as major sources of social change.” [5] Their world-system theory in its basic form provides an account of the dynamics of social change both at the level of the whole system and within its component parts [6].

Social change is not one-directional from top to bottom or from the core nations to the peripheries—it is multi-directional and dialectical. Changes are made locally and regionally through the organizing of civil-society movements in participatory democracies. Such movements, as social capital, could create alliances with international capital, local elites, and political states to achieve manageable macro policy and democratic change, and the WSF could act as a political platform to support public demands.

This paper contains two parts. First, it tries to present a more realistic picture of the world's socioeconomic inequalities, and second it proposes things that civil-society movements, including the WSF, may do to modify the status quo to create a more equitable world.

³UNDP Bureau Posted online: Friday, March 15, 2013.

Part I

The world-system, as a unit of analysis, will not compel us to ignore the vital differences among its components. The world's problems vary greatly and have no unified solutions, and there is no a single social theory that can explain the complexities of societies. The varieties of objectives of global movements are due to these facts. While social movements in developed societies (also called core nations) try to create more equitable social and political situations, people in developing societies (semi-peripheries) and in less-developed and poor nations struggle for economic growth, democracy, and the protection of human dignity.

In the past few decades, globalization and neo-liberalism (i.e., “free trade”), two new aspects of the world economy and politics, have drastically changed the world-system in favor of the rich in all nations, particularly in the West. Meanwhile, the gap between the rich and poor countries continues to grow. “Two hundred years ago, the income ratio between the world's rich and poor countries was 1.5:1; in 1960 it was 20:1; in 1980 it went up to 46:1; and in 1989 the ratio was 60:1” [7]. However, just as there was no conspiracy behind the emergence of capitalism in the West and its further development and social consequences after the invention of new technologies such as electric power generation and microchips, the current situation should not be seen as a conspiracy among the world's financial institutions. Rather, it is the outcome of world capitalism in the age of information technology, and therefore neither street violence by opponents of globalization nor arousal of the moral consciences of capitalism's beneficiaries can stop this trend, just as destruction of machinery by angry workers in 18th century could not stop the development of industrialization. With this lesson in mind, as Joseph Stiglitz writes that today's challengers of globalization should discover how to turn it to their own benefit, to make it more humane and equitable, and to reduce the pain imposed by neo-liberalism on the poorer nations [8].

Poor nations continue to endure poverty, war, unemployment, human rights abuses, political repression, corruption, widespread crime, and genocide. These problems, however, are not all economic, and they are not all created by, or rooted in, the capitalist world-system. On the contrary, some of these problems continue to exist because capitalism did not develop in some societies. Domestic, historical, socioeconomic, class, tribal, religious, cultural, and political obstacles are involved in these problems. At the same time, world capitalism is generally in conflict with “traditional” cultures in developing societies, and it gradually uproots them to create a more homogeneous system so that it can benefit from the countries' markets and labor forces. Less-developed nations cannot benefit equally from globalization unless their primary domestic problems are more or less resolved and people establish an independent voice through civil-society movements.

The role of Civil Society

Civil society is paradoxically defined as a range. At one end of the spectrum, civil society produces civility among the citizens in a democratic society. At the other end, civil society is created to stand against authoritarianism [9]. In this study, both functions are considered.

Structural changes in Eastern and Central Europe took place peacefully, through so-called “velvet revolutions,” mainly because these nations had developed civil societies. For example, the right-wing coup attempt in Venezuela in 2004 failed due to the presence of a civil society, and recent changes in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan ended with

no major violence because political parties, which are a part of civil society, were legally recognized. In contrast, civil and tribal wars in Africa take the lives of millions of innocent people every year, partially because civil society has not developed yet in many places across the continent. Political repression and human rights abuses in the Middle East continue to survive because political parties are either outlawed or aborted and because civil society is weak in this region or limited to charitable organizations⁴. Approximately two decades ago, nearly 100 countries worldwide entered into a democratization process or a “transitional paradigm” leading to democracy [10], but of these, about 80 failed to pass from the first stage of *political opening* to the second and third stages of consolidation of democracy. Some of these countries, such as those in Central Asia, even returned to authoritarian regimes. Political leaders in these countries simply changed the “clothing” and gave their parties new names [11]. Only 20, with dominant civil societies, are clearly en route to becoming successful democracies⁵.

In other words, democracy cannot survive without strong civil society, by which we mean not only the association of various interest groups but also the development of citizenship, a culture of tolerance, and a system of legal and rational relations that provides substantive social capital to create a balance of power between society and the state and keeps people aware of their rights and “on the lookout” for possible misconduct by those with political, social, or economic power⁶ [12]. With the establishment of civil society, the state cannot rule arbitrarily, and social changes can take place relatively smoothly through negotiation and communication and with less violence. Civil society can also protect national interests against the collaboration of the state and international financial agencies

With regard to the relationship between development and civil society, I would like to refer to Robert Putnam's 20 years of empirical studies in Italy. Putnam concludes that it is civic associations that have made the difference between development and underdevelopment, as well as democratic and non-democratic practices in society [13]. Civil society is also responsible for encouraging the development various types of organizations such as labor unions, social and cultural associations, independent media, and economic and religious organizations. It restricts the state through legally defined authority and defends social equity. Society needs strong watchdog groups of various types to keep the state honest and fair within the existing legal framework. For example, oil revenues in OPEC countries are still being misused by authoritarian states that do not allow their people to know how the oil revenue is spent. Only nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), with the support of global civil society, has the potential to create watchdog groups to monitor such financial transactions, and the WSE, in particular, has the potential to play a role in this process.

Primary needs of developing societies and the WSF

In addition to strong civil society, developing countries need economic growth in order to achieve democracy and the rule of law, and democracy and economic growth are interconnected in developing and less-developed societies [14]. Of course, as Przeworski has written,

“economic development does not tend to generate democracies, but democracies are much more likely to survive in wealthy societies⁷.” To achieve this, several major steps need to be taken, as follows. (1) Global investment. While politics may be called “local,” global capital, technology, and markets are needed for national economic growth. Examples are China and Vietnam, which, after decades of condemning world capitalism, have now invited international investors to participate in their economic ventures. Foreign investment in China, particularly, has increased 12-fold in less than ten years [15]. (2) The rule of law and separation of state and religion. (3) Decentralization of power. (4) Monitored privatization of some state functions, particularly in oil-rich rentier states, which is often a base for the monopolization of political power by a few. (5) Elimination of bureaucratic corruption⁸ [16]. (6) Employment opportunities for women. (7) Public access to knowledge, which is often monopolized by the state and its allies. (8) Free education for all. (9) Freedom of expression, and free elections. And (10) civic involvement. The latter is central and essential to empower the public against state monopoly of power and the economy.

It is naïve to think that a state economy equals a “national” economy or that a state always protects the welfare of the people. In many developing countries, the state economy is the main obstacle to development and a source of political and economic corruption⁹. This situation leads to less security for internal and external investment in the industrial sector and to capital circulation in trading and speculation rather than in productive ventures. If, as Burawoy has stated, in developed societies civil society “has been invaded by state and market,” [17] in less-developed societies the state has invaded both civil society and the market. In these cases, civil society is usually absent or weak, and NGOs are controlled by the state. Labor unions, if they exist, are government-sponsored organizations and are used as tools for implementing the government's policies¹⁰ [18]. In such situations, the WSF needs to work with supportive global organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) to stop government violence against workers.

Building democratic civil society is a fundamental step toward economic, political, and human rights development in developing societies. The WSF can be a role player in the transformation of this situation to make it better, though it cannot solve the world's overall structural problem. The WSF could evolve into a true, global civil-society organization, creating a political platform from which to encourage local and national NGOs in opposition to authoritarian states and global financial abuses. Movements must form locally, and people have to participate in social movements and political protest. Pressure from the WSF could be important if movements exist at the local level, but local problems in the poorest nations cannot be removed merely by challenging the world financial institutions because these institutions are not the causes of the problems. According to Human Rights Watch, approximately 300,000 children are serving as soldiers

⁴By expansion of liberal globalization and financial aid of the WB, thousands of NGOs have emerged in these countries. According to estimates, Egypt now has 15,000; Turkey 13,000; Jordan 8,000; and Iran 10,000 (these countries are at the top of the list).

⁵Carothers, Thomas, op cit.

⁶Robert Putnam subdivides the social participation component of social capital into political participation, civic participation, religious participation, workplace connections, formal social ties, and philanthropy and voting.

⁷See Przeworski, Adam, et al. op cit., p.1.

⁸For the role of bureaucratic obstacles to development

⁹In a critical and analytical statement, 120 economists in Iran, where the state controls about 80% of the economy, concluded that: wherever state capitalism has developed, corruption, bribery, anti-competition, monopoly, discrimination, and poverty have expanded. *Eqbal Daily* (2005). [<http://eqbal.ir/economic/news/1/last/843882554.php>]

¹⁰According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) Islamic labor unions in Iran created by the government are physically used to prevent the creation of any independent labor unions. Recently, government-related workers interrupted the meeting of an independent union in Tehran, Iran.

in current armed conflicts in more than thirty countries around the world. "As society breaks down during such conflicts, children have no access to education, are driven from their homes or separated from their families, and many perceive armed groups as their best chance for survival. Others seek escape from poverty or join military forces to avenge family members who have been killed" [19]. It is doubtful that global financial institutions have any interest in these violent problems, which are the direct products of social backwardness, poverty, and dictatorial rule. Even in a situation like Iraq, there was no excuse for the U.S. invasion as long as civil society and democracy ruled the country. Authoritarian rule and human rights abuses in countries like China, Iran—and indeed the entire Middle East—and civil and tribal wars and human atrocities in some African nations are not caused by neo-liberal globalization. As M. Kamrava writes, "Despite significant historical and structural differences that separate them, Middle Eastern states have uniformly been able to withstand popular pressures for political liberalization." [20] According to Amnesty International, China and Iran, although they are less influenced by neo-liberalism, are among the states with the worst human rights records [21]. Ironically, Hugo Chavez, the populist president of Venezuela, who opposed the neo-liberal system, is a frequent guest speaker at meetings of the WSF and has cheered anti-Western sentiments in Iran, ignoring its terrible human-rights record.

What world is possible?

Item 2 of the Charter of Principles of the WSF reads: "The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localised in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that 'another world is possible,' it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it" [22].

With regard to the WSF's concerns, Immanuel Wallerstein writes that its proposals are all useful, but none is enough to change the fundamental structure of the world-system [23]. He adds:

What the forces of Porto Alegre need to do more clearly is (1) analyze where the capitalist world economy is going structurally, and what identify its inherent weaknesses; and (2) begin to outline an alternative world order. In a sense, the world political left is back to where it was in the middle of the nineteenth century, with this one advantage. It has the experience of the wisdom and the errors of the past 150 years behind it. So, another world is possible. But it is by no means certain¹¹.

Wallerstein is right, but is not enough to merely analyze the weaknesses of capitalism—comparatively, anti-capitalist forces need to present their possible alternatives and discover their own weaknesses, too. It can be concluded that no one is truly certain that "another world is possible" and that no one knows what that other world may look like. Therefore, the option to bring about change within the existing world-system still remains—not because it is ideal, but because there is no other achievable alternative. The world-system does not remain the same, just as today's world is not the same as it was in 19th century or even a decade ago. More than two thirds of the nation-states in existence today have emerged since WWII. Prior to that, they were either colonies or tribal nations, and the British Empire alone had control over 80% of the world's territory. Colonialism officially ended in 1975 after three remained colonized countries of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola achieved their independency; however, liberated societies entered into another stage of internal struggle.

I cannot agree with those who reduce the world to its economy and see no difference between different societies, but in reviewing the world situation we may conclude that capitalism has consolidated and expanded itself and that more nations have adapted this system to their needs. The Charter of the WSF (Item 10) also opposes "reductionist views of economy, development, and history," but it really reduces the source of all the world's problems to capitalism, imperialism, the WTO, the IMF, and the WB, all of which are fundamentally economic entities. However, in the history of how the WSF was originated we read the following statement: "the beginnings of the World Social Forum originated in the "Battle for Seattle" in November 1999, where anti-globalization activists protested a meeting of the WTO's latest trade negotiations" [24]. In this paper I refer to several world social problems, such as tribalism, Female genital mutilation (FGM), diseases, and unemployment, for which the WTO is not responsible, but for which economic activities could help to provide remedies.

Wallerstein, in his article on the future of the WSF, writes, "The conflict between Davos [World Economic Forum] and Porto Alegre is not about the virtues and vices of neo-liberal globalization, although this how it is often portrayed, even by the participants in both groups. It is not about capitalism as a world-system, since capitalism as a world-system is in structural crisis and will disappear in the next 20–50 years" [25]. The world-system might be in a structural crisis, but first, since no viable alternative has been presented, the challenge and change will continue within the current world-system, and no prediction can be substantiated at this stage. Second, it does not appear that capitalism will disappear by itself and leave a vacuum because of its structural crisis. Capitalism as a "rational" system always has had crisis, but it has continued to exist since 16th century, and the socialist alternative in 20th century could not stop this trend. For the industrialization of the West, "The bourgeoisie historically has played a most revolutionary part." [26]. How undeveloped countries could catch up with this development, if not use world capitalist amenities such as the capital, technology, and the global market, remains uncertain.

Since the late 19th century, many social theorists have predicted the collapse of capitalism, but none of these predictions proved to be correct. Most of them were published when a socialist system as an alternative was advocated by the left, or when state socialism was already established. People could witness an alternative model, and millions advocated that system through violent revolutions. Now, neither of these two forces exists, violent revolutions are unpopular, and the major former socialist states have joined capitalism. This reality convinced some post-Marxist scholars and activists to think about a third alternative, "social democracy," which is a modified form of capitalism, as a viable substitute [27-30].

It is an unrealistic and unscientific perception to believe that the world capitalist system will diminish all over the world and be replaced by an unknown system. The destruction of capitalism by itself would create chaos, and such an outcome could only be explained by chaos theory, meaning it is too complex to be predicted. Whether we like it or not, capitalism is not merely an economic structure to be replaced by another economic structure, but it also involves human relations, culture, ideology, religion, media, and education—i.e., it is about people's lives in the world and about what our children are absorbing and learning in it. Nothing is left untouched.

As Patomaki and Teivainen state, "after four annual social forums, however, simply repeating that another world is possible is no longer enough. An increasing number of participants and observers of the WSF process have started to ask what the other world(s) might look

¹¹Ibdi

like” [31]. To avoid empty slogans, opponents of the current world-system will need to outline their practical proposals within the limits of the possible and avoid inflated ideals and wishful thinking.

We should face reality

In 1847, Fredrich Engels wrote on free trade as follows:

Under the freedom of trade the whole severity of the laws of political economy will be applied to the working classes. Is that to say that we are against Free Trade? No, we are for Free Trade, because by Free Trade all economical laws, with their most astounding contradictions, will act upon a larger scale, upon a greater extent of territory, upon the territory of the whole earth; and because from the uniting of all these contradictions into a single group, where they stand face to face, will result in the struggle which will itself eventuate in the emancipation of the proletarians [32].

Globalization and neo-liberalism are two aspects of the present world-system. Along with other aspects, they transfer the characteristics of modern civilization to developing societies. Thus, political liberalism in the developing world should follow the current economic liberalism, which is based on the foundation of democracy, citizenship, individual liberty, and human rights, most of which are missing in poor nations. World society becomes more homogeneous—though still with a diversity of cultures—within the unity of modern civilization. No society can function in isolation any more. By using new technologies, new opportunities will arise for social movements and civil-society organizations in developing nations to pressure the state to restructure the distribution of power. Along with all system changes, world society needs a revolution of consciousness to precede gradual, non-violent reforms. Even for this much change, the majority of people must be organized and prepared to negotiate at the top, while exerting pressure from the bottom. This strategy has always been used by trade unions to achieve their goals—i.e., they never desire to shut down the economic enterprises they work for. Now, such efforts should be globally organized, but once again they should work within the system, not from without.

According to Havemann, “In 2000, as part of their goals for the new millennium, leaders of the richest countries pledged to guarantee free primary school education for every boy and girl in the world by 2015. Five years later [i.e., in 2005], the effort has registered some success” [33]. According to an estimate, the 22 donor countries reserve some percentage of their national incomes for foreign aid. In terms of the GDP contributed, Norway, with 0.92%, and the U.S., with 0.15%, are on the highest and lowest lists, respectively. Global organizations such as the WSF can monitor, push, negotiate, and accelerate the process, as well as ask for more financial aid, technical support, and human resources. Education is a key for development and transition to democracy, but it is a long-term, gradual process [34]. Havemann states, “According to World Bank figures, more than 100 million children of primary school age—about 10% of the worldwide total—did not attend school in 2001¹²”.

Situations in the less-developed and poor countries are also different. In the past decade alone, millions in Africa, particularly women and children, have been the victims of civil, tribal, religious, and sectarian wars, as well as diseases, and starvation. About 1.5 million young girls are victims of female genital mutilation (FGM)

every year in 29 countries, [35] and over 125 million women and girls have experienced FGM in Africa, Yemen, and Iraqi Kurdistan, with half of them living in Egypt and Ethiopia¹³ [36]. Evidently, neo-liberal globalization has had no impact on this tradition. People involved in progressive movements should think about the causes and solutions of these human catastrophes that are older than globalization and neo-liberalism.

Limiting my assessment to the Middle Eastern societies, where I focus my study, the younger generation in each society wants a better life for themselves, not to resolve global problems [37]. They look for possibilities, not ideals—which the political left unsuccessfully and tragically pursued in the past and still continues to do in some places. The younger generation does not want to live like their parents did. Instead, they want to know how to manipulate the current situation to reap benefits from globalization, not to push it away. Thus, in a sense, they are pragmatists, not ideologues. However, the question remains as to whether they will benefit or suffer under globalization.

Instead of outlining an uncertain, unknown, alternative “other world,” we should find out what may modify the trend of the world-system in favor of the people who are suffering the most

Part II

With consideration of the world reality and the limits of the WSF, all movements should focus on creating and strengthening civil society at the local, national, and global levels to meet people's concerns around the world. Accordingly, this paper proposes a paradigm to meet the diverse objectives of various movements in different societies. In less-developed and developing countries, NGOs over the long term should be allowed to participate in a “quadruple alliance,” along with the state, international capital, and elite local capital to secure a voice for unprotected people in the decision-making process. This quadruple alliance is a modified version of the “triple alliance” analysis of Peter Evans (explained below). At the global level, I suggest that the WSF should establish a Global Congress of Civil Society Organizations (GCCOS) to integrate with local NGOs for common objectives. This is also explained below.

The triple alliance

The triple alliance analysis of Peter Evans, explained in his book *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil*, is a base model for many semi-peripheral countries¹⁴. For example, Guillermo O'Donnell calls the partnership “interdependency” [38]. Evans has analyzed how the triple alliance became a force to lead development in a few “semi-peripheral” nations like Brazil: “a triple alliance between elite local capital, international capital, and state capital assures that all members of the alliance will benefit from the accumulation of industrial capital within Brazil.”¹⁵ This alliance was formed for economic growth, not to build democracy or create an equitable society. The core in this alliance “revolves around the inter-relationship of foreign capital, local capital, and the state in building an industrialized economy.”¹⁶ In Brazil, this was not a direct challenge to an authoritarian state, but economic growth, global change, and a neo-liberal strategy, as well as a people's movement, helped the country and others like it, to develop relative democracy as well. Despite economic growth and later democracy, equitable relations to cover the needs of the majority, and particularly the suffering people, were not

¹³UIICEF

¹⁴Peter Evans. (1979) op cit.

¹⁵Peter Evans (1979), op cit., p. 11.

¹⁶Ibid. p. 5.

¹²Havemann, Joel, op. cited.

achieved in these cases. Now, the question is whether this alliance can be a model for a new coalition involving the participation of NGOs (social capital) both in developing and less-developed societies in order to achieve greater social fairness. My answer is: yes¹⁷. How can the three elements of the “alliance” be convinced to include NGOs? Like a labor union, negotiation from the top, along with mounting pressure from the bottom, is the means of achieving this goal.

One factor is that local and global social pressures should be gradually mounted behind this demand. NGOs must be encouraged to form, and the ruling class should be warned about the dangers a divided world faces. The WSF should actively participate in these negotiations, and supportive states, particularly in Europe, must be encouraged to contribute and play parts. They should be told that with the formation of the quadruple alliance, the tension between world financial institutions and NGOs will be reduced in the interest of creating a better world. Hostility against globalization will gradually diminish as rich nations meet their pledges to help mitigate problems in less-developed societies.

Recognition and Legitimacy of NGOs

It is true, as Biagiotti states, that “nongovernmental actors are not recognized by states as partners in defining the international political agenda, the assessment of problems, and the implementation of solutions”¹⁸ [39]. Their role in controlling the circulation of capital is marginal and very much restricted to observers and mere consultation. Biagiotti, in her assessment of “participatory spaces,” adds:

By the last years of the twentieth century, these processes seemed institutionalized. The series of major world conferences organized by the United Nations during the 1990s gave nongovernmental actors an unprecedented platform and generated the hope that world democracy might be achieved. Nevertheless, at the very same moment, strategies to circumvent these processes emerged. States now again question the legitimacy of the actors of world civil society, on the one hand by downgrading their participation in many discussions to mere consultation, and on the other hand by resorting to forms of coordination that exclude them. The shift of trade negotiations from institutions with known rules and fixed decision processes, such as the WTO, to “clubs” such as the G-8, or to bilateral negotiations, has largely reduced civil society’s capacity for deliberative protest.¹⁹

To change this unfavorable situation, mobilizing greater popular support at the global level is essential. In doing so, first, a direct connection between local and global NGOs and the WSF needs to be established. Second, the WSF has to ask the world community, beginning at the more sympathetic local level such as in Scandinavian countries, to allocate an independent budget so that global civil-society networks can hire professional staff. Also, at the local level, with the support of the WSF, social movements must actively participate in political and civic associations. These objectives can be achieved only if the WSF structurally emerges as a global force representing thousands of civil-society movements and NGOs. Having access to social media, and with the support of thousands of knowledgeable peace and freedom activists and concerned people around the world, the objectives could be widely publicized and achievable.

Biagiotti also raises the question of the “legitimacy” of world civil-

society organizations challenged by states, and this issue cannot be easily dismissed. The world civil-society movement should establish itself as a recognized world institution with a legal and legitimate budget independent from states or the financial contributions of multinational corporations—or even the United Nations. The legitimacy of NGOs can be achieved only when the official bodies of these organizations are elected or are “accepted by a significant part of the populace” [40]. The existing NGOs usually are not elected, and most operate by receiving financial aid from world institutions. Thus, they cannot easily act against the grantors’ policies. Legal elections, the transparency of their activities, and independent budgets are three important factors in establishing the legitimacy of NGOs.

The quadruple alliance

In emphasizing the objectives of development in the triple alliance or bureaucratic authoritarianism, Guillermo O’Donnell ended his book *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* with the following statement. “Although the goal is a more equitable society that generates more and better-allocated resources, the best that could be achieved in our present circumstances would be a political democracy open to the demands of all political actors” [41]. Forty years later, despite development of relative democracy in some developing societies, equitable societies are still a remote reality. The consolidation of civil society is fundamental for the institutionalization of democracy wherever and whenever it can be achieved, and the creation of civil society is a prerequisite for the participation of people in stable political changes.

However, development in poor countries, as stated before, is dependent upon the participation of international capital, the import of technology, and having access to the global market. The concern is that neo-liberal globalization may take advantage of the subordinate position of less-developed societies. This concern can be reduced if civil-society organizations are included in the alliance as watchdogs to monitor and survey the economic activities and participate in the decision-making process. Civil society (including NGOs), like democracy, is weak or absent in developing societies. The political society (i.e., the state) often has exclusive power over all social institutions, and “government” NGOs (GNGOs) usually operates under the disguise of NGOs. Building independent civil-society organizations is crucial to changing this situation. In order to stop the interference of the state, local NGOs need global support as well, which could be provided by the Global Congress of Civil Society Organizations (GCCSO) as NGOs register to be its members. The bridge between the local and global NGOs would solidify their positions in negotiation with states and global financial institutions.

The assumption I am operating under is that if the triple alliance worked for Brazil’s industrial economy, a new alliance could be significant in deepening democracy and creating more equitable societies in the developing world. Civil-society organizations such as labor unions, particularly in Latin America, lost their initial power as states favored foreign investors vs. labor unions for purposes of job creation [42]. Labor unions in the West with anti-globalization tendencies protest against the exporting of jobs to developing societies, where these jobs are badly needed. Foreign investors benefit from cheap labor and flexible labor laws. Unlike environmentalists, who are also active in the WSF, workers care mostly about job availability, not protection of the environment, and thus the WSF should strive to develop a policy that will benefit all of these constituencies.

¹⁷I have written a series of articles in my native language, Persian, based on the “Triple Alliance.” Also, the theoretical chapter of my first book: “Why Iran Lagged Behind, and the West Moved Forward,” published 18 times in Iran, covers various development theories.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 530.

The WSF's fuzzy structure

The WSF should either modify its goal of “another world” or adopt an appropriate structure, and in that vein the participants in the WSF are being cautious so as not to repeat the failed past experiments of the left. Thus, among many changes, they have accepted a drastic shift from a vertical structure of customary political organizations to an “open space.” That means that they favor a loose, horizontal, non-ideological, and decentralized power structure that all opponents of neo-liberal globalization and imperialism can embrace. However, two points need to be realized. First, the failure of the left in the past was not all due to structural problems. Part of the problem was rooted in idealization (i.e., proletarianization) and purification of human beings, which were partly rooted in Marx's extreme optimism about human nature. This must end. Temptations to abuse power must be legally and routinely checked and monitored because we all have tendencies to be both good and evil. Second, on the other side, people can only protect their common interests and rights through organizations, particularly against rivals and opponents that are themselves firmly organized. The current fuzzy structure²⁰ of the WSF does not fit well with its objectives of transformation of the current world-system to “another world.” If the WSF wants any change at the local, national, or global levels, an appropriate structure must be adopted, and direct relationships with local civil-society movements must be established. Civil society enjoys a relatively horizontal structure and has a participatory nature, and therefore it meets the concerns of the WSF.²¹

The WSF is already composed of several thousand civil-society movements focused on specific issues, themes, and problems. Wallerstein writes, “The WSF is not a movement. It is not even a movement of movements. It is more properly conceived of as a family of movements.”²² This is true, but the WSF may organize these movements into clusters of working groups based on their interests and expertise. Each should have representatives in the GCCSO who are rotated every year. If the WSF wants to play a role at the global level, it has to move beyond its present stage.

Links between the Quadruple Alliance and the WSF

The link between civil society in the quadruple alliance and the WSF is the link between local and global movements. It was very clever to begin and continue the WSF as an “open space” for organizations and movements of civil society from all of the countries in the world, [43] but the question remains: will this be enough to meet the slogan of “another world is possible” and to respond to the numerous complex problems of the world?

Civil society in the quadruple alliance provides the means of negotiation at the local level, while the GCCSO negotiates with the World Economic Forum (WEF) and its international financial institutions such as the WB, the IMF, and the WTO, as well as states on the top, and exerts social pressures through public opinion from the bottom. The WSF has provided an open space for the exchange of ideas.

Why not hold dialogue with those who control the world, such as political and economic authorities and celebrities as social capital who have large constituencies and audiences in every community? According to its Charter of Principles, the WSF has no intention of launching a revolution or toppling any government. However, the WSF

should indicate how it wants to change the world. It needs to adopt any means of gradual change toward their objectives, and to accomplish this it needs at least an around-the-clock TV and radio broadcasting system in multiple languages. People of the world should be informed and educated about what the WSF and NGOs want to achieve and how.

Several speakers at the WEF meeting in Davos (2005) echoed the concerns of participants in Porte Alegre, indicating that millions of people in the world have no reason to believe that life for their children will be better than life is for them today, and former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said, “if we do not act, we do not have the right to be forgiven by future generations” [44]. French President Jacques Chirac added that “the advance of democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption measures are priorities for economic development,” and he warned of the “risk of revolt by the youth of the developing world if they are not given a future.”²³ Debt relief is the only hope for economic development in Africa, said Brown, who called for the cancellation of multilateral debt to the most impoverished African nations. “I don't think 6,000 people dying every day from AIDS is a cause—it's an emergency,” Bono Vox (Paul Hewson, singer, and a long-time crusader for the relief of Third World debt), told almost 2,000 business, cultural, religious, and political leaders in Davos, “and 3,000 people dying every day from a mosquito bite is not a cause—it's an emergency.”²⁴ A rare solution to these problems was offered by President Chirac, who suggested that participation of the corporate sector was “crucial” in order to battle poverty. He also proposed a voluntary tax as part of a call for more financial resources to be allocated to the battle against AIDS²⁵. The WSF should keep the gate open for a constructive dialogue with other people such as these, as well.

The WSF should broaden its “open space” to include all concerned people at any level, particularly those who share a common apprehension and a willingness to act in their capacities. Item 9 of the WSF Charter states that “Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.”

Negotiation at the top will help establish cooperation at the local level in the quadruple alliance, and public opinion will help to provide support. The NGOs in the quadruple alliance represent agencies of connection between the local civil-society movement and the GCCSO. To establish a legal framework for its action, the GCCSO may adopt the Declaration of Human Rights (DHR) as its operational document because all UN member states have endorsed the DHR and are officially obligated to act within DHR framework.

To achieve world democracy and a more equitable world, the WSF needs to act and move on to transform itself from the arena of talk to a house of advocacy, composed of rotating delegates with accountability and limited power. The GCCSO could also be made into a permanent congress working year-round toward establishing itself as an effective and recognized worldwide institution of NGOs and movements [45].

The principle question, however, is about the legitimacy of the GCCSO. In general, the legitimacy of an organization—such as a government in modern times—is obtained from the people's support, nominally by their votes. The GCCSO could receive its legitimacy by having its members elected from civil-society organizations and

²⁰Wallerstein, I. Op cit.

²¹Klein, Naomi. Op cit.

²²Wallerstein, I. Op. cit., p. 634.

²³Chirac, Jacques.

²⁴Vox, Bono.

²⁵Chirac Jacques. Op cit.

popular social movements, through the transparency of its actions, and by its operation based on the DHR. Enhancing the Forum to achieve this level of quality would encourage more people in the world to organize themselves into NGOs and join the WSF, which is essential for local, national, and eventually international democracy. Such an organization could represent at-risk people at the global level and act on behalf of millions of people around the globe. This type of development matches many aspects of the Charter of Principles of the WSF and truly embodies the seeds of global citizenship and international democracy.

Budget

The WSF and all local NGOs need budgets to operate legally and professionally, and these budgets could be provided by the international community. Similar to what the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens (ATTAC) suggests, or the Tobin Tax (the proposed tax on international currency transactions), the WSF could negotiate for a fixed percentage of international trades on strategic and widely consumed commodities such as oil and weapons, or portions of military budgets could be allocated to civil-society movements around the world. Sellers of these commodities could spare 0.1% of their transactions with NGOs, and this proposal could be introduced to the public in each local society for legal endorsement. The budget resources will be allocated to local, national, and international NGOs and to the operation of a permanent institution of the GCCSO. Details remain to be drawn in a separate study.

Conclusion

This study on the activities and goals of the WSF questions whether the slogan of "another world is possible" has any valid subjective and objective bases. No one is truly certain whether another world is indeed possible, and no one knows what that other world might look like. It has to be considered that after the failures of the former socialist states, as well as the challenges, changes, and continued socioeconomic growth since then, have continued within the world capitalist system. Advocates of the WSF's slogan may not like this, but if not they should propose practical alternatives for what they wish to achieve. Creating open space is not sufficient to achieve its goals. Domestic obstacles such as traditionalism, tribalism, religious extremism, sectarian confrontations, political repression, illiteracy, high unemployment, fatal diseases, discrimination against women, female genital mutilation, and honor killings have been creating more serious and fundamental problems for the world than have neo-liberalism and globalization. These aged structural problems, which are responsible for the deaths of millions of people each year, are not caused by the recent neo-liberal globalization. On the contrary, world capitalism and globalization, by their natures and interests, are designed to remove these obstacles and replace the old, closed societies and social relations with modern ones, thus opening the gates to civil society and democracy without which social justice is not attainable. Furthermore, the younger generations seem eager to benefit from globalization and its achievements rather than wanting to join a struggle against it.

However, progressive forces should actively watch and intervene in the world's socioeconomic trajectory. The WSF, with more than 150,000 projected annual participants, has the potential to become a transnational network for creating a Global Congress of Civil Society Organizations (GCCSO); establishing a political platform that can resist any assaults from international institutions such as the IMF, the WB, and the WTO; and waging a globally orchestrated effort to alleviate poverty, change authoritarian regimes, and confront other local and domestic problems in less-developed societies. At the local level, this

study proposes a model of a "quadruple alliance" composed of civil-society organizations, the state, and local and international capital for a fair monitoring of domestic development. The WSF can also provide global support for local civil-society organizations through the quadruple alliance. The link between the two with common concerns could constitute a stronger and more representative network for provisional organization of the GCCSO. A well-developed and well-budgeted GCCSO could act in parallel with and as a complement to the UN. While the UN is composed of the nations, the GCCSO will be structured by the delegates directly elected by the people as a network of global NGOs to monitor all agents of global affairs, including economic activities and political decision making at both the local and global levels.

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