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World Social Forum

# An international for humanity

- IV Online magazine - 2002 - IV339 - April 2002 -

Publication date: Monday 15 April 2002

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**"THIS is an International that isn't controlled by anyone". That's how the Peruvian Trotskyist and veteran peasant leader Hugo Blanco described the World Social Forum held for a second time in Porto Alegre, Brazil from January 31 to February 5, 2002.**

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/pavista.jpg>]

The World Social Forum not only consolidated itself as the "anti-Davos" (referring to the World Economic Forum, held this year in New York). It also gave a huge boost to the building of a broad world social alliance of resistance and alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation. In an atmosphere of festive militancy, more than 60,000 people from 131 countries (including 15,000 young people at the Youth Camp and 1,500 peasants from Via Campesina) held dozens of talks and seminars, more than 700 workshops, demonstrations, debates and book launches. "We are diverse... The expression of this diversity is our strength and the basis of our unity", stated the social movements in their final declaration.

Porto Alegre II showed that "another world is possible" and, as the Rio Grande do Sul Governor, Olivio Dutra, put it, "urgent and necessary" as well. The Social Forum represents today a project for an alternative civilization to that of globalised barbarism. It is a political movement and a space that is under construction - a space for ideas, for mobilization, for organizing the struggle - that is radically democratic and rebellious. It would be quite wrong to reduce it to a media event counter-posed to that of the World Economic Forum of the rich and powerful (which had the wind taken out of its sail this year by the collapse of Argentina and Enron).

## Space

The World Social Forum is also a space for education and participation, where it is possible to learn about and take part in the struggles of others, experience the cultural protests and affirmations of identity of the exploited and oppressed from across the globe.

This second edition showed that this process of collective reflection has clearly matured. Some of these ideas need to be at the heart of the strategy for the globalisation of humanity and solidarity that we are trying to construct. They include:

- the preservation of certain inalienable aspects of humanity which cannot be allowed to fall prey to the domination of the market (health, education, water, culture, non-renewable resources, etc);
- the cancellation of Third World debts, along with the regulation of financial markets and controls over international capital movements, including taxes levied on these going into public funds aimed at tackling the most dramatic social problems facing humanity, like hunger and absolute poverty;
- the promotion of genuine processes of participatory democracy like the successful Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre.

The II WSF set out to develop alternatives of peace and social justice to the unacceptable logic of imperialist war and neo-liberal exclusion which afflicts so much of humanity. As the Vice-Governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Miguel Rosetto, put it, the war and terror that characterize the US attempt to dominate the world "have no place in the ethical and civilizing dreams of humanity, which draw their strength from life, not from death and destruction". Or as the US linguist and activist Noam Chomsky pointed out: "Either we have a world without wars, or we simply won't have a

world at all".

## Internationalism

The II World Social Forum in Porto Alegre is the bearer of a genuine project of globalised solidarity and democracy, because it has revived the historic notion of internationalism - uniting and drawing together peoples and nations at the same time as it points towards generous alternatives to the neo-liberal vision of the world. Whilst the World Public Assembly of the Participatory Budget was voting to redirect the world's military spending towards firstly eliminating hunger, then eradicating illiteracy and child labour, the US government was adding US\$36 billion onto its military budget for the current year. In the same way, the II WSF stood up against the recolonisation of the American continent through the introduction of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) - it launched a call for a continent-wide people's referendum on the issue later this year. And through the Tribunal on Debt, it proposed cancelling the illegal and illegitimate debts of third world countries.

Porto Alegre II consolidated the anti neo-liberal content of the movement, and the hegemony of the militant, radical wing within it. The political expression of this is the Call of the Social Movements. The attempts by European social-democratic parties to co-opt the movement were not successful - the autonomy and combativity of the World Social Forum is growing stronger and stronger. In the words of Immanuel Wallerstein, this second edition showed that the elaboration and organisation of a general alternative programme to that of Davos and the Washington Consensus is a process that is well underway.

The II WSF opened with a march 'Against War and for Peace; Another World is Possible'. It ended with another march, 'Against the FTAA'. Both were more than 50,000 strong. Porto Alegre thus refuted, in practice, those neo-liberal ideologues who had predicted that the movement opposed to capitalist globalisation would be weakened in the wake of September 11. The World Social Forum has won recognition as the annual event at which the global movement can meet, discuss, learn from each other's experiences, win support for its multiple struggles and agree a common set of mobilizations against its enemies. The international spread of the Forum was assured with the agreement to hold various regional and continental forums (Italy, Ecuador, India) in the run-up to the next World Forum in Porto Alegre at the beginning of 2003.

## Fundamental contribution

Finally, Porto Alegre made a fundamental contribution to developing processes of convergence. It established a common calendar of mobilizations for the next two years, providing the many struggles with a shared horizon and pushing forward the international linkage between social movements. It achieved qualitative leaps, politically and organizationally, in the campaigns against the FTAA, the WTO and GM products, and for the cancellation of dependent countries' debts and the taxation of international financial transactions. It also lent a new dynamic to the coming together of different sectors of struggle, not only youth and labour, but also the black movement, the women's movement, indigenous peoples and the movement for free choice of sexual orientation. All these came to the Forum and developed their own initiatives, with full recognition and full participation.

The Forum was also a great political victory for the democratic and popular local governments of Rio Grande do Sul state and Porto Alegre city. Both are led by the Workers' Party (PT), which has a real chance of achieving victory in next October's presidential elections for its candidate Lula and a programme of change for Brazil.