

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2435>



Global Justice

Part I: Looking back on the movements that preceded the Arab Spring, the Indignados, and Occupy Wall Street

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV444 - January 2012 -
Publication date: Tuesday 3 January 2012

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

In 2011, social and political rebellion has re-emerged in the streets and on squares all over the world. It has appeared in new forms and been given new names: the Arab Spring, the Indignados, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. The main regions affected are North Africa and the Middle East (including Israel), Europe and North America. Not all countries in those areas have been equally affected by this new wave of mobilizations and new forms of organization, but everybody has heard about the movement.

In the countries in which it has not been massive, active minorities have attempted to give it wider legitimacy with varying results. [1] In the Southern hemisphere, only Chile has experienced a movement that can be compared to that of the Indignados in 2011. [2]

If we try to sum up what has been achieved by the alterglobalist movement over the past two decades, we can distinguish between different phases related to the overall developments in the world.

From 1999 to 2005, in response to a heightening of the neoliberal offensive in Northern countries, large-scale mobilizations occurred against the WTO (Seattle in November 1999), the World Bank, the IMF, and the G8 (Washington in April 2000, Prague in September 2000, Genoa in July 2001). The World Social Forum emerged in that context in Porto Alegre in January 2001. Over the following years the movement spread to several continents (Latin America, Europe, Africa, South Asia, and North America). New international networks were created: Jubilee South (on the issue of debt), ATTAC (against the dictatorship of financial markets), the World March of Women, Our World Is Not for Sale, and others. Older networks (dating back to the first half of the 1990s) such as Via Campesina, CADTM (North/South network that focuses on the debt, the WB and the IMF) were strengthened. The antiglobalization movement developed in these years, mainly within the context of the WSF.

Key dates in the creation of the alterglobalist movement

The mobilizations that occurred in 1999-2000 were prepared for by other actions, such as

- the mobilization against the G7 in Paris in July 1989 on the occasion of the bicentenary of the French Revolution, which led to the Appel de la Bastille (Bastille Call) for canceling third world debt (the [CADTM's founding text](#));
- the (neo)Zapatista uprising that irrupted on 1 January 1994 and had a major international impact for several years, particularly during an international meeting in the Chiapas in 1996 with the Surrealist name 'Intergalactic meeting in defense of humankind' (in which many international movements participated including the CADTM).

The 50th anniversary of the World Bank and IMF was commemorated by a huge protest in Madrid in 1994. This demonstration inspired the French when they founded 'Les autres voix de la planète' (the other voices of the planet) collectives during the mobilization against the G7 in Lyon in 1996. The Spanish initiative brought together NGOs, the CADTM Belgium and movements such as the 0.7 % platform in which young people struggled to convince their country to devote 0.7 % of the GDP to public aid to development, and also trade unions, feminist and environmental movements (Ecologistas en Accion). Already at the counter-summit in Spain an alliance of movements emerged that would later converge on Seattle in 1999, then on Porto Alegre in 2001, and so on. In 1997, European

Marches against unemployment, job insecurity, and social exclusion played a decisive role in Amsterdam, during an EU counter-summit.

See CADTM [Les manifestes du possible \(Manifestoes of what is possible\)](#), *Syllepse-CADTM, 2004*.

After 20 years of neoliberal domination in South America, massive uprisings in several countries proved to be successful: the water war in Bolivia in 2000, the Indian uprising in Ecuador that overturned the neoliberal president (2000), the rebellion that overruled Argentine's neoliberal president (end of 2001) and opened onto a prerevolutionary crisis in December 2001 and on into 2002, the popular uprising in Venezuela in April 2002 to bring Hugo Chavez back to the presidency after a coup (11-13 April 2002), the gas war in Bolivia in 2003 with the pro-Washington neoliberal president being overruled, and similarly the overruling of the pro-US neoliberal president in Ecuador in 2005... In the wake of such mobilizations, governments that at least partly broke off with neoliberalism and opposed the US domination, launched political reforms and partly restored public control over natural resources (Venezuela from 1999, Bolivia in 2006, Ecuador in 2007). [3] Yielding to popular pressure, the Argentine government, which was not particularly left-wing, implemented heterodox measures that contrasted with those taken by the PT government in Brazil and by the Uruguayan Broad Front, which paradoxically carried on with the same policies of their neoliberal predecessors while adding a significant amount of 'assistencialism' that improved the condition of the poorer classes and thus consolidated their voter base. The free trade area of the Americas that Washington wanted to set up was abandoned in 2005 thanks to the opposition of a majority of South American governments and social mobilization.

Meanwhile 9/11 2001 led to a new US war offensive in Afghanistan and Iraq that reeked of oil grabbing and military positioning. The offensive was accompanied by a restriction of democratic liberties, especially in the US and the UK: war on terror was the perfect excuse. Faced with such hard-line imperialism, the alterglobalization movement managed to bring out 12 to 13 million people to march against war all over the world in February 2003, but was unable to prevent the invasion of Iraq one month later. The decline of the WSF started in 2005. One of the reasons was the International Council's refusal to allow the forum to develop from a forum where activists could meet and exchange ideas to an open and democratic instrument for political action. We should add the institutionalization of the process, dominated as it was by NGOs and leaders of social movements that were all too closely aligned with social liberal governments, such as the Lula government in Brazil and Prodi's in Italy.

After 2004 there were no more large-scale international mobilizations against the IMF, the WB, the G8, NATO, the WTO, or imperialist wars. The alterglobalization movement was obviously losing momentum though WSFs may have been quite successful, as in Belém (Brazil) in 2009, and to a lesser extent in Dakar in February 2011.

In 2005, when they adopted the EU constitutional treaty against the will of the people, the European ruling classes and governments reinforced the neoliberal capitalist orientation of an integrated Europe within the context of the EU and the euro zone that gradually extended to 17 countries. Industrialized capitalist countries as well as China and commodity exporting countries still seemed quite healthy. The ruling classes led their offensive by imposing more precarious working conditions and greater imbalance in the distribution of wealth, but consumption sustained through credit and the real estate bubble produced a misleading sense of abundance and well-being in countries such as the US, the UK, Spain, Ireland, Greece, and several central European countries that were new EU members. On the other hand, the perceptible effects of climate change triggered a growing awareness of the deleterious consequences of productivist capitalism.

Translated by Christine Pagnoulle in collaboration with Charles La Via

[1] In sub-Saharan Africa, there were students' mobilizations in Burkina Faso in March-April 2011, in Togo in May-June 2011, and a movement called Y'en a marre (Fed up) against the authoritarian rule of President A. Wade in Senegal in June 2011. They made explicit reference to the Arab spring. In Senegal, the World Social Forum, which convened in February 2011, ten years after its first meeting, was greatly successful particularly because of the uprisings taking place in Tunisia and Egypt at that time (see Olivier Bonfond <http://www.cadtm.org/Dakar-2011-WSF...>).

[2] See Franck Gaudichaud, ["When triumphant liberalism begins to crack. Reflexions on the awakening of social movements and the Chilean May"](#).

[3] See Franck Gaudichaud (ed.), [Le volcan latino-américain. Gauches, mouvements sociaux et néolibéralisme en Amérique latine \(The Latin American Volcano : Social Movements and Neoliberalism in Latin America\)](#), Textuel, 2008., and on developments in 2008-2009, Eric Toussaint ["Series: Bolivarian Venezuela at the crossroads. Venezuela: Nationalization, workers' control: achievements and limitations"](#) or ["Venezuela, Equateur et Bolivie : la roue de l'histoire en marche" \(Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia : the Wheel of History Turns\)](#), November 2009, (in French).