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Globalisation

Prague - Mobilising against Third World Debt

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Interview carried out by Bernard Demonty for Le Soir, Brussels.

You participated in the meetings preparatory to the demonstrations in Prague and you are active yourself against institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. What are the demands of the demonstrators?

There is no single demand. There are rather some big themes around which the demonstrators focus. Among these figures a hostility to the IMF and the World Bank. But there are some nuances. Some are favourable to a suppression pure and simple of these two institutions, others believe that they should be reformed.

The cancellation of the Third World debt constitutes also a motif of mobilisation. But there also, there are some nuances between the demonstrators. Some are favourable to the cancellation of the debt of the poorest countries (sub-Saharan Africa, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Vietnam), others wish to extend this to all the public foreign debt of the Third World (India, Pakistan, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico included).

What is the dominant profile of the people who make up the movement?

The dominant component is a generation of youth between 18 and 27. It is a youth with a particular sensibility: it has lived all its life in a world dominated by the market. These youth have not known the Communist regime, but they know from their parents that this existed and that it did not bring good solutions. They are no longer influenced by events like May 68 or the Vietnam War. It amounts then to a new mobilisation. These youth live in a world which does not convince them. They want a world where the environment is respected, where North-South relations are egalitarian and where the institutions are democratic. It is for this reason that they contest the IMF or the World Bank. They believe that these institutions are not democratic. And they contest certain effects of economic globalisation.

Do they reject this movement of globalisation? In other words, should these militants be qualified as 'anti-globalisation' as they often are?

No. It is an error to characterise them in this way. What they want is a non-exclusionary globalisation which satisfies the basic needs of each. In speaking of "anti-globalisation", one gives the impression that it amounts to a turning inwards and this is not at all the case. This is not an identity-based, nationalist response or something like that. They oppose neo-liberal globalisation, an economy of profit.

Has this movement a future? Are we witnessing the birth of a groundswell which could resemble that of May 68?

It is a question that is difficult to answer. But I think that this movement is massive and does not relate to a conjunctural event. When I see a mobilisation like that in Seattle in 1999, or Millau for the Bové trial this summer, then now in Prague, I believe that we are witnessing a phenomenon which is here to stay. This movement is beginning quietly to define itself and increasingly strengthen itself. A co-ordination is being established and numerous demonstrations are already envisaged for the future. In three big cities of the Third World there will soon be some very important meetings promoting an alternative to neo-liberal globalisation. In Asia, in Seoul from 17 to 20 October; in Africa, in Dakar from 11 to 17 December; in Latin America in Porto Alegre from 25 to 30 January.

But can the movement really structure itself and make advances when its members make demands which are

sometimes so different?

I think so. The fact that there are different positions does not bother me. This is not a proof of weakness but of pluralism. We have moreover already obtained significant advances in a certain number of areas. Let us take the example of the Tobin tax (a tax on capital flows). Some years ago, its opponents rejected it with a wave of the hand, without explanation. Today, some countries like Belgium, France, Canada or Norway are discussing it.

Those who have said that it was not feasible now have to explain themselves. On the cancellation of the Third World debt, some significant advances have also been realised. I believe then that this movement is not something to neglect, that it will amplify itself and that it has begun to have some influence.