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World Social Forum

A great leap forward

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A great leap forward was made between the first World Social Forum (WSF) last year and the second, which took place in Brazil from January 31 to February 5, 2002. A new international solidarity was developed at Porto Alegre at a time when the Argentine crisis shows the bankruptcy of the neo-liberal model and Washington is engaging in a policy of 'permanent war'.

[<https://npa31.org/IMG/gif/wsf1.gif>]

With 700 workshops, dozens of meetings, two major demonstrations, youth and peasant rallies and a multitude of initiatives, the numerical success of the Forum was patent. The mobilization proved to be four times larger than last year's, with a big increase in the Brazilian and international participation. The biggest foreign delegations came from Argentina and Italy, followed by France (more than 800), the USA (420), the Spanish state, Chile, Uruguay and Canada.

Many Brazilians had feared the effects of the events of September 11, but the evidence is that resistance to capitalist globalisation continues to grow. Even in the US, the holding of the World Economic Forum in New York was met with street demonstrations called by the AFL-CIO trade union federation and other bodies.

The call of the social organizations (see following pages) reflects this advance. As last year, this denounces the terrible social and ecological effects of neo-liberal globalisation and reaffirms some traditional demands (like the cancellation of the Third World debt). But it also affirms its opposition to the war and its solidarity with the Argentine and Palestinian people. It ends with an international calendar of 'collective mobilizations' for 2002 and 2003.

Bush's warlike discourse is unpopular in Brazil, where in recent months seven prominent trade union and political leaders have been assassinated, two of them Workers' Party mayors. In São Paulo, a branch office of the CUT trade union federation was attacked by a group of armed men during the WSF. That did not stop the new US Secretary of State for Latin America from denouncing three 'major risks': Colombia, Argentina and a possible victory for Lula (the Workers' Party candidate) at the next presidential election. It amounts to a green light for the Brazilian death squads!

In this context, the work of the World Parliamentary Forum, meeting inside the WSF, was dominated by the question of war. A great part of the Italian delegation in particular demanded a condemnation of war in general accompanied by an explicit disavowal of the Afghanistan war. Social democracy (the French in particular) rejected any such allusion. Finally, two resolutions were adopted on this subject, of which one mentions Afghanistan. Other declarations related to Argentina, the lifting of the blockade of Cuba, rejection of Plan Colombia and the Free Trade Area of the Americas that Washington wants to impose on the continent. This second Forum initiated the structuring of the International Parliamentary Network which had been accepted in principle in 2001.

The second international youth camp was a great success, with more than 15,000 participants from around 40 countries. The quality of the discussions in the workshops reflected a real convergence of themes in the movement of youth against capitalist globalisation: forms of action, the struggle against insecure employment, renewal of a trade unionism of direct action and so on.

The massive participation of Latin Americans (Brazil, Argentina) and the presence of diverse sectors (students, NGOs, movements for another globalisation or political organizations) are also promising signs of the unification of the struggles of youth on an international scale. The challenge for the next camp in 2003 will be to build a real

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international representation including Africa and Asia. The holding of regional forums at the end of 2002 will help here.

Women's demands were a theme throughout the Forum. The Brazilians involved with the World March of Women have done remarkable work to popularize demands against violence and poverty. Thus the World March organized a seminar, 'A feminist alternative for another world' and a conference on violence against women.

A debate on the place of women in the struggle in Argentina was presented by activists in the Mujeres argentinas en lucha network while a representative of the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association was invited to the WSF to report on the situation in Afghanistan.

The participation of the feminist movements in the Forum and their presence during the demonstrations the day it opened and against the FTAA was very significant. The World March participated in drafting the final declaration of the social movements. and ensured that demands for women's rights like equal wages and the denunciation of sexual exploitation were included in the text

While the third WSF will be held once again in Porto Alegre, the following one will meet in India and in 2005 the venue will be Africa. From next autumn regional forums will begin to be held, in Italy in the case of Europe

Porto Alegre is a crucible where a new internationalism is taking shape. The World Social Forum is becoming a genuine process.