

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article597>



Globalisation

After Genoa, after September

- IV Online magazine - 2001 - IV335 - November 2001 -

Publication date: Friday 16 November 2001

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

If Genoa will remain a significant moment in the history of mobilization and struggle it is not simply because of the violence of the repression and the extent of the demonstrations, but also because of the enormous difference between the expectations of public opinion and the demonstrators and the decisions taken by the G-8 meeting.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/genoa1.jpg>]

This latter was only able to note the disagreements between the United States and the other big powers on the Kyoto protocol, a text which had in any case been considered by the majority of environmentalist groups as wholly inadequate in countering the greenhouse effect.

On institutions and governments

As for the only decision taken, the creation of funding around health questions, the sums announced (US\$1.3 billion) are regarded as ridiculous by all the movements working in this field. This breakdown of the G-8 stems from the divergences and contradictions between the big powers, divergences that moreover have appeared in a recurring manner, which is one of the explanations for the failure of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle. However, the breakdown of the G-8 takes on a particular dimension from the weak legitimacy of this body. Lionel Jospin went public with his doubts about the utility of such meetings, and François Holland hammered the point home by announcing the "political death of G-8".

Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum and of the annual meetings at Davos (also losing legitimacy) estimates for his part that the G-8 is not the best-suited body to discuss the "big questions relating to globalisation". In spite of the disarray among the great powers, the voice of the countries of the South was hardly expressed in Genoa.

Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade acknowledged the extent of the [global justice-Ed.] movement, even forecasting that, as in 1968, it would spread to Senegal; but he was no more able than his counterparts present in Genoa to formulate an alternative policy, nor to lay the bases for an advance towards an alliance of the poor countries able to provide a counterpart to the agenda of the rich countries.

The reasons for this weakness are well known. The countries of the South are also confronted with a breakdown of strategic orientation - the third worldist models based on autarchic development have revealed their limits. The elites of these countries have massively adhered to the neo-liberal creed while cherishing the illusion that they could play a role in the "new world order" while benefiting from competition between the great powers. The emergence of an opposition to neo-liberal globalisation, supported by the states of the South, would however be a decisive element in the international relationship of forces.

In Genoa two types of orientation took shape. The first, supported by George Bush and Tony Blair, clearly assumes the choice of neo-liberal globalisation, which is presented as the only solution, including for the poor of the planet.

This orientation will be supported only by a minority fraction of the public, which is increasingly expressing its worries about "neo-liberal globalisation". Attempting to rally the conservative electorate, George Bush and Tony Blair condemned the "wreckers" with great firmness. However, here too the outcome of Genoa shows the limits of such an

orientation: the Berlusconi government, a faithful supporter of the neo-liberal line of the Bush administration, is now paying the political price for its repressive policy.

The second orientation was expressed only on an apparently tactical question: Jacques Chirac, quickly joined by Lionel Jospin, expressed his "understanding" for the demonstrators. The French political leaders were only following Bill Clinton who had made similar remarks in Seattle.

An understanding that has its limits: the French authorities, to this date, have not condemned the repression unleashed by the Italian authorities. Beyond their obvious electoral concerns, Chirac and Jospin are trying to formulate a response to the concerns of public opinion. They are not the only ones to think that it will be necessary to embark on a process of reform in one way or another - in its leading article on August 11 the Financial Times supported such a course.

Today, there are no concrete signs that this route is actually being taken: to achieve that, a consensus between the great powers would be needed, with, in the first place, the approval of the United States.

However, this debate is only beginning and it will exacerbate contradictions between the various states and the international institutions, the WTO, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Organization (UNO).

The movement after Genoa

Before entering an assessment of the mobilization, it is worth focusing on the acronym chosen by the Italian movements to indicate their unitary framework: the GSF, the 'Genoa Social Forum', based on the 'World Social Forum' held at Porto Alegre earlier this year. This choice is indicative of a short but rich genealogy.

The success of the international meetings organized through ATTAC and the CCC-OMC in Paris in June 1999 indicated the emergence of a movement that clearly appeared in November of that year in Seattle. A few months later in Bangkok the first "international alliance" began to be formalized, comprising not only ATTAC but also various coalitions for the cancellation of the Third World debt, Via Campesina, Focus on the Global South and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

In Geneva, in June 2000, the 'Swiss Committee on the Bangkok Appeal' organized a conference which would be very significant both for mobilizations like that in Prague and also for the construction of the movement: it was here that the appeal for the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre was launched. Porto Alegre represented a watershed at which the various movements could coordinate to prepare the mobilizations to come; Buenos Aires, Quebec and, of course, Genoa.

The purpose of this short resume is not only to summarize the history of a movement which includes many other stages and affiliations. The big mobilizations would certainly have taken place, with or without this series of conferences and meetings. Nevertheless, the framework built was determinant in creating a network of confidence and solidarity between those leading the social and activist movements of the various continents. Above all a framework was laid down, combining unyielding defence of the demands of these movements and a permanent will for unity, which made it possible for the movement to extend itself without fragmenting. This is an asset that we must preserve through the initiatives and meetings to come.

Genoa represented a turning point in terms of the number of the demonstrators, but that was only possible because the alliance of forces in the GSF was completely new. The end of the 1970s, the rise of autonomy and then the "years of lead" had accelerated the fragmentation of activist networks, including those of the radical left. The beginning of the 1990s saw a revival of working class struggles (leading to the fall of the first Berlusconi government), a political re-composition on the Italian left with the split between the DS and Communist Refoundation and the growth of independent trade unions through the rise of the COBAS. The emergence of the "social centres" (based in former industrial premises occupied by activists often from the autonomous currents) was a significant development, offering young people space for recreation and activism. However, these new activist frameworks did not work together much.

Genoa marked a turning point in this aspect, as a new activist generation made its presence felt by linking these radical structures to the particularly active and established Italian associative world (ManiTese, Lega Ambiente, ARCI and so on). The success of ATTAC-Italy since its official creation in June is indicative of this revival of activism.

Although there is nothing automatic about it, Genoa could well be a starting point for a revival of struggle in Italy within a framework of re-composition which is much more favourable than that of the 1990s. A more difficult question is posed by the place of the trade unions in this re-composition. The three Italian confederations (the CGIL, which was linked to the PCI, the CISL, in the past close to Christian Democracy and the UIL, linked to the Socialists) have been outside the process.

On July 19, the international and European trade unions (the ICFTU and ETUC) had organized a debate on globalisation with several hundred participants, the majority of them playing leading roles in Italian trade unions. Vittorio Agnoletto, the spokesman of the GSF had been invited and his intervention was extremely well received, except by the union notables present. The secretary-general of the CGIL, Cofferatti, told *Corriere de la Serra* the next day that the demonstrations at Genoa should not be supported: they did not make enough positive proposals, which a trade union, because it is there to negotiate, must first take into account!

This confederal absence leaves space for the sectors of the trade-union left, whether they are members of the confederations or not (the COBAS and the CUB are independent, and in the CGIL the left tendency *Alternativa Sindacale* had called for demonstrations with the FIOM, the powerful metalworkers' federation). It is to be hoped that this pushes the confederations into the battle against neo-liberal globalisation, like the AFL-CIO in the United States. The example of Barcelona, where the CC.OO and the UGT (the two principal trade union confederations in the Spanish state) called for demonstrations against the conference of the World Bank together with the anarcho-syndicalist CGT shows that that is possible.

The social democratic parties could react more quickly than the union confederations that are linked to them. That in any case is what has happened in Italy and France. In Italy, the leadership of DS (Socialist Democracy), the party that until a few months ago headed the government that prepared the G-8 meeting, is split over the Genoa demonstrations.

In France Socialist Party spokesperson Vincent Peillon has regretted the absence of the PS in Genoa and, in an article published in *Le Monde* and signed also by government minister Christian Paul, has clearly supported the movement against neo-liberal globalisation.

On violence

The Italians showed at Genoa that they were masters in the management of unity in diversity. The difficulty was not

so much bringing together components of varied origin, but to hold together a structure whose components had very different goals and strategies. The GSF stretched from the "debt" campaign, very moderate and heavily influenced by the weight of the Church in Italy, to the COBAS and Tute Bianche. The alliance thus created made it possible to integrate completely peaceful protestors and those practicing "symbolic violence" within a common framework.

At the end of the day, the balance sheet of the GSF is completely positive. It was legitimated, in Italy and well beyond, by its capacity to dissociate itself from the violence carried out by certain groups of demonstrators while firmly denouncing the Italian authorities who were really responsible for the incredible outburst of violence in Genoa on July 20 and 21. The GSF's unitary functioning and its capacity of integration are an example for the mobilizations to come. However, Genoa, coming after Gothenburg, obliges some thought on the violence that is likely to accompany demonstrations.

At Genoa, the distinction between the GSF and what was called the "black block" was clear. Without criminalizing the latter (there were among them, it appears, provocateurs, police agents, even far right militants, but the majority of the thousands of participants in this "black block" [1] were young radicals, overwhelmingly Italians), its orientation was clearly different from that of the GSF.

That was clear on the ideological level, with the GSF being accused of "reformism" and on the political level: the "black bloc" did not intend to encircle the red zone or even penetrate it, but wanted to attack the "symbols of capitalism": banks, "luxury" cars and so on. If in Genoa the responsibility for violence falls, primarily and above all, on the Italian authorities which carried out, or allowed to happen, acts which one could not believe possible in a democratic country, the clear separation between the demonstrators of the GSF and its European allies and those of the black block facilitated the public demonstration of it. The attacks against the peaceful processions, the violence wrought against demonstrators whose passage had been blocked and the beatings administered to activists in the Diaz school moved the whole world. On a more general level, if it is very important to point out the non-violent motives of the very large majority of the demonstrators, the delimitation with those who reject this orientation will not always be easy.

Indeed an understandable rage against a system which produces, on a large scale, inequalities, misery and violence against the poorest will be mixed up with the idea that the movement can be built in spite of or with violence. In support of this idea, it can be argued that neither Prague nor Gothenburg have led to the movement being isolated or marginalized by violence.

That may be so, but on an international scale it will be necessary more to examine reality more closely after these demonstrations. In Prague, for example, the assessment is not convincing. That is probably explained by the fact - a unique case - that the demonstrators came, in their overwhelming majority, from other countries. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to await the assessment made by the Swedish activists to draw the more general lessons. And there is undoubtedly a danger of the movement losing public support with, as an obvious consequence the withdrawal of the most reticent forces engaging in the fight against neo-liberal globalisation, to start with the trade-union confederations.

In Genoa, the attitude of the Italian authorities was such that public opinion will make them take responsibility for the violence, but that will not be always the case and the public support for the demonstrators is one of the keys to the success of the movement. The example of the GSF has a more general importance, however. It shows that it is possible to reject violence while accepting determined processions with the militants being protected from the police charges by passive means (helmets, plastic shields and so on). Another tactic developed by some US activists has the advantage of expressing still more clearly the determination but also the non-violence of the movement; it involves helping the demonstrators, organized in "affinity groups", to resist, the police peacefully for the longest possible period of time, but in this case without helmets or other personal means of defence.

After September 11

The world movement that was expressed from Seattle to Genoa had as its symbolic adversary Wall Street, which represented the power of the financial markets and the Pentagon, representative of imperial domination and US militarism. With a sinister parallelism, these were the targets aimed at by the authors of the murderous terrorist attacks in Washington and New York. This relationship does not obviously make any sense to those involved in the movement against neo-liberal globalisation who know that the strength of this movement and its capacity to transform the world depends above all on its mass nature, on the support of public opinion and the democratic involvement of the social movements which form its base and its roots.

A particularly significant movement exists in the United States itself, where the trade unions and NGOs had prepared a very broad demonstration for September 30 in Washington to coincide with the general meeting of the IMF and the World Bank. Nonetheless this coincidence is used by those who will grasp at any possible arguments to defend neo-liberal globalisation and the current system.

On the contrary, the movement against neo-liberal globalisation carries within it the elements of a response to such atrocities.

The Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas, January 1, 1994 is probably the founding event of the movement that erupted on the world scene after Seattle. And the strength of Zapatism was to defend the identity and the specific claims of the Indians of Chiapas at the same time as it launched a universal appeal against neo-liberalism and for the creation of a world movement that was concretised in the first "intergalactic" meeting in summer of 1996. This capacity to defend the identities and specificities of the movements while developing alternatives on a world level is one of the essential characteristics of the movement that is being built, from Seattle to Genoa.

In its extension to every continent, this movement offers an internationalist response to all those who revolt and fight against a system which deepens inequality and exclusion. That was the case in Porto Alegre for all the movements of defence of the indigenous people in Latin America. In Genoa, the presence of a delegation of 50 representatives of Russian and Ukrainian trade unions and movements made it possible to make many contacts and to initiate the integration of Russian activists into the "world movement". Moreover, the mobilization against the new cycle of negotiations within the framework of the WTO that is due to be held in Qatar is a chance to link up with the movements that exist in the Arab world, thanks to counter-conferences and initiatives taking place in Cairo and Beirut.

The development of the movement world-wide, like that of the social and democratic struggles, makes it possible to offer another framework of response to those of the nationalists, fundamentalists or reactionaries. Thus, in France, the development of the struggles in the 1990s precipitated the crisis and the decline of the [far right-Ed.] Front National, which had based itself on the popular layers hit by the economic crisis.

The attacks of September 11 can only reinforce our conviction of the importance and the urgency of developing this global, democratic and non-violent movement, which alone is capable of offering global alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation.

We will see in the weeks and the months to come what the US policy will be, but the first declarations by George Bush, the "fight of good against evil" or the desire to get Bin Laden "dead or alive" are reminiscent of the cold war.

The most probable assumption is that of the militarist and repressive option. An innovation in the situation: beyond the alliances considered to be necessary by the United States in their fight against terrorism, the continuation of

globalisation makes national or cultural stigmatisation difficult. More than the "clash of civilizations" foreseen by Samuel P. Huntington, [2] the "war" that the US leaders intend to carry out could well be a civil war. [3]

Terrorism will be the first target, but in this new crusade, the "enemy within" - radical forces, social movements and movements fighting neo-liberal globalisation - can be quickly criminalized at the same time as measures restricting freedoms are introduced.

Such an orientation can be the source of new contradictions between the big countries, and in this aspect the situation is different from that which prevailed at the time of the Gulf War. In Europe, several government notables have entered a slightly different note. After expressing their solidarity with the US people, they insisted on responses to deal with the basic political problems, in particular in the Middle East, and on the need for regulation at a world level.

This European desire for autonomy is consolidated by the result of two international conferences; that of Bonn, where the Kyoto protocol was signed by many countries, including European ones, but not the United States and that of the UN at Durban where an anti-racist resolution was adopted with the support of Europeans, while the United States left the meeting. These contradictions could open spaces in the movements, as was the case with the MAI or the general assembly of the WTO in Seattle. This question however will remain open, the pressures being strong for the continuation of Western solidarity.

The next cycle of negotiations on trade that should open in Qatar on November 9, within the framework of the WTO, can allow an international mobilization that changes the given conditions at a world level.

It is, however, in a more serious and more difficult context that the mobilizations will develop and that the movement against neo-liberal globalisation will be built. A situation which will require of these movements a greater attention to democratic problems and the question of peace and security for the people: for the peoples of the South, increasing in inequality is compounded by the fear of military intervention, whether by the Western powers or local governments which will use the situation to settle conflicts which had remained latent.

Nonetheless, it is in this "other globalisation" that the hope of a fairer and more secure world for all the peoples of the planet resides.

[1] In order to justify itself the Italian police had claimed there was a great number of "black bloc" demonstrators in Genoa; however, under questioning from the Italian parliamentary commission of inquiry a police official had to admit that there were no more than 500 demonstrators who fell into this category.

[2] Samuel P. Huntington argues in his book, *The clash of civilizations*, the idea that the 19th century saw the confrontation between nations and the 20th century that of ideologies while the 21st will be that of the confrontation between civilizations.

[3] This opinion is advanced by Alain Touraine in an article published in the French daily newspaper *Libération* on September 14, 2001.