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# WORLD SOCIAL FORUM CHALLENGING EMPIRES

*Jai Sen, Peter Waterman, editors*

This comprehensive volume provides a glimpse into the wide-ranging discussions, debates and arguments which have gone into making the World Social Forum (WSF) one of the more prominent platforms of alternative ideas and practices in the present world. Building on the First Edition, this Second Edition has been revised and updated to include coverage of those Social Forums that took place as recently as the summer of 2007.

A useful array of writings on the entire WSF process—the global context in which it emerged, the manner in which different movements and ideologies have interacted and shaped this process and the manner in which it has itself grown in the past years.

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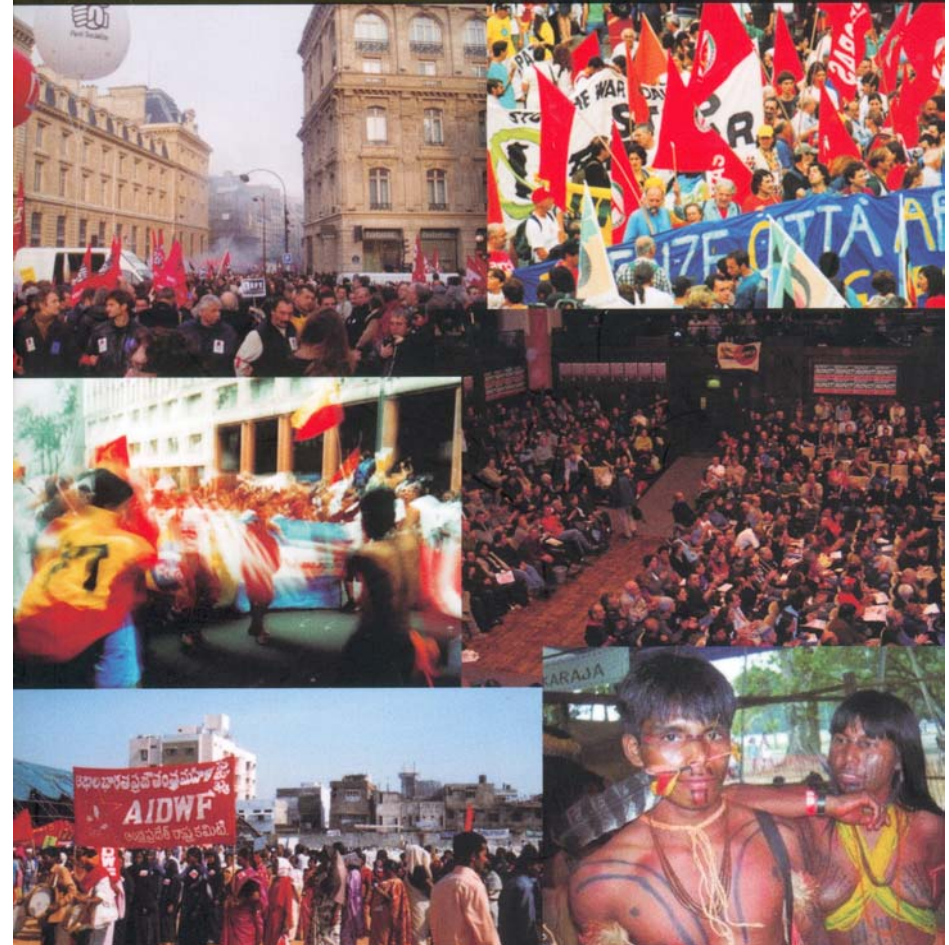
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Second Edition

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# WORLD SOCIAL FORUM CHALLENGING EMPIRES

*Jai Sen, Peter Waterman, editors*



## Citizen Mobilisation In The Americas And The Birth Of The World Social Forum<sup>1</sup>

*Dorval Brunelle*

The World Social Forum (WSF) is undoubtedly the most important social phenomenon of the new millennium. Analysts have identified a number of factors that have played a significant role in its emergence as well as in the proliferation of social forums at the local, national, and continental levels all over the world.

These forums establish “novel forms of political organisation”<sup>2</sup> on the part of social movements that have set up the WSF process as “a form of polycentric governance, or a transborder political body with an organisational architecture that remains fluid, decentralised, and ever evolving.”<sup>3</sup> In turn, “the WSF process offers a fresh start for struggles *for* social justice and *against* neoliberal capitalism.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, the WSF *as process* would seem to answer to calls for more democracy and more social justice in a way that formal elections cannot hope to achieve. This is because the militants and activists involved in these movements direct their actions and strategies at global institutions and in transnational space as opposed to directing it against only their own national states.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, such a conclusion also does not seem to entirely fit with what is going on presently in Latin America where, in parallel to the social movements’ involvement with the WSF process and in transnational campaigns, we have seen the dramatic emergence of a series of left-leaning governments on that continent over the past decade or so. Even if the mobilisation may not be alone responsible for these major changes at the state level, these changes also cannot be seen in isolation from the extensive and sustained mobilisation process that has been going on all over Latin America.

In this context, this essay argues that organisations and movements in Latin America framed their actions, strategies, and protests differently from what was done by others in other parts of the world, with the result that they did indeed achieve a measure of political impact that has not so far been seen elsewhere.

In the following section, I list four factors that according to some authors, have had an important influence on the setting up of the WSF process.<sup>6</sup> I then go on to introduce my own take on the fourth of these, which is the roles played by social mobilisation in the Americas as a whole—North, Central, and

South America. This factor deserves closer scrutiny for two reasons: first, because, as I will show, intense social organisation and mobilisation in the Americas acted as important forerunners of the WSF process itself; and second, because their continued involvement served to enhance their own organising and politicising capabilities, even as they induced a marked shift to the left in the political spectrum of South America.

### Factors That Set The WSF Process In motion

The first factor that stands out is the mobilisation of the protests against the World Economic Forum (WEF), whose annual meeting takes place each January in Davos, Switzerland. This initiative, known as ‘the Other Davos’ (*l’Autre Davos*, in French), was launched in Zurich in 1999, and has been convened ever since at the same time as the WEF. This mobilisation called attention to two salient features of the new neoliberal global order coming out of the post-Cold War era: one, that this was an order founded on the alliance of governments with international organisations and big business; and two, that this alliance was deliberately being forged in a remote area, shielded from any open debate and public scrutiny—in short, in an undemocratic way that challenged all previous norms of governance.

Opposition to not only the political economic ideology of the order but also to its increasingly private and unaccountable culture, and the advocacy of the opposite, became the central characteristics of the WSF that took shape in time.

The second factor that is given a prominent role in the literature is the decisive emergence at the turn of the century of popular movements that challenged and successfully disrupted international institutions and processes that had seemed invincible. One of the strongest expressions of the new movement was in the protest that emerged in 1998 against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), negotiations for which were being held at the time under the aegis of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris. This was soon followed by a series of mobilisations and actions, which included the celebrated action against the third Ministers’ Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in November 1999, in Seattle; the mobilisation against the joint annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 2000 and 2001; protests against the annual meetings of heads of states of the European Union and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); as well as annual mobilisations against the G-7, later to become the G-8.

On the one hand, this series of actions led over time to a sense within the movements of a growing power and the emergence of a 'movement of movements'; and on the other, many authors have seen the creation of the WSF as an initiative to allow all these various different movements a space and opportunity to meet and exchange notes, and perhaps even to build alliances.

To these two seemingly more immediate factors, some authors add a third one which was the growing dissatisfaction on the part of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the United Nations system and its incapacity to overhaul the prevailing practices concerning NGO involvement in international affairs.<sup>7</sup> Dissatisfaction soon took the form of mounting disillusionment after the world conferences on the environment (the second Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992), on women (the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995), and on social development (the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, in March 1995). This was further deepened by the many setbacks experienced during the five-year review processes of these Summits that were held in 1997 and in 2000, respectively. Even if these disillusionments cannot be tied to the setting up of the WSF as such, the disillusioned themselves—such as those involved in setting up the World March of Women, initiated from Canada—were quite ready to come on board a new and different process.<sup>8</sup>

#### Latin America and the Fourth Factor: The Importance of Multiple Framing

Finally, there is a fourth factor that I want to look at here, separately from the previous ones. This is the very nature of the mobilisation undertaken by the social movements of the Americas, where a clear consciousness emerged, particularly during the campaigns against inter-state negotiations around the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA), that struggles at the national level against one's own government's involvement in these negotiations must go hand in hand with mobilisation on a transnational scale; and vice versa.

In Latin America, in particular, it is important to note that organisations and coalitions were already in place in the nineties to protest against a host of measures, economic plans, and other 'structural adjustments' imposed from above, under the so-called *Washington Consensus*. In addition, organisations from each and every country on the continent were already directly concerned by the actions of the World Bank, the IMF, and others, and involved in actions against them. So there was a kind of a 'piling up' effect at play here, of layers of experience in resistance, which was not the case for the organisations from the North and where organisations from the other continents of the South—Africa

and Asia—were newer to the practice of transnationalising on a scale comparable to that in the Latin Americas.

So, somewhat contrary to what was going on elsewhere within the global social movement, here the movements did not neglect the national state or the national scene during the process of transnational coalition building at the regional and hemispherical levels; they worked simultaneously at both levels.<sup>9</sup>

This *multiple framing*, I would like to contend, was necessitated by the nature of the agreements themselves that were sought to be put into place. I aim to show how a particular model of economic integration based on a so-called *free trade* agreement exacted such major 'structural adjustments' from other countries in the hemisphere that it led to convergence between opponents to the deals both at the national *and* at the transnational level.<sup>10</sup>

The connection between the two levels is important here, and I will argue that it is precisely this frontal attack against state sovereignty and its ability to promote the common good that led to the emergence of a new practice of mobilisation. It also explains the *extent of the transnationalisation* that emerged among major social organisations in Latin America, which it did not to a comparable extent elsewhere. It also points to the scope and depth of the *impact of this new kind of social mobilisation* on the political sphere at the national level, most evidently in South America.

It is important also to underline that these mobilisations in the hemisphere eventually led to the demise of the FTAA. In this regard, the 'FTAA victory'—a bracketing which will be made clear in a moment—represents a momentous event that should be ascribed concurrently to the mobilisations in the Americas and to the WSF itself, which in turn had a determinant impact on the positions taken by some governments in the region on this issue.

The significance of these developments lies at several levels. Both in turn explain the large presence and visibility of organisations from Latin America at the first WSF while the better known world organisations—Amnesty International, Oxfam, Greenpeace—only came on board later and at a much slower pace. And even if geographical proximity facilitated Latin American organisations being there, the somewhat more sparse showing on the part of organisations from the USA is probably more attributable to the strategy that prevailed there of concentrating struggles either on the national or at the international and global levels, and where both were to the detriment of struggle at the hemispheric one. This is all the more striking since, as noted above, the mobilisation in Seattle in November 1999, is widely seen as having played the part



of being a distant forerunner of the WSF process. But many organisations in the USA tended to concentrate their actions against their own government and within their own political institutions, such as concentrating their energies on lobbying Congress and, in some cases, throwing their support behind the Democratic Party, while others carried on their struggles against the IMF and the G-8 as before. One notable exception however, is the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), which played a significant role both in the mobilisation against NAFTA and against the FTAA.

I start with a discussion of the campaign in the Americas around NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) and move on to look at the mobilisations in the hemisphere against the FTAA, a project spearheaded by the USA from late 1994 onward. This is not a particularly original starting point since many authors before me have pointed to the emergence of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN, or Zapatista National Liberation Army), on 1 January 1994, the very day NAFTA—which was the forerunner of the FTAA—came into force, as *the* momentous event that ushered in a new type of mobilisation against neoliberal economic integration on a grand scale.<sup>11</sup>

But my own take on this argument, as indicated earlier, will be somewhat different. I will concentrate my attention on the features of the agreements themselves before moving on to the protest movements that were set up to oppose them.

### NAFTA: New Modes of Hegemony and of Mobilisation

The main reason why I use NAFTA as a starting point is because this agreement was in itself a milestone in the establishment of a neoliberal agenda, which in turn triggered new modes of citizen mobilisation. From this point on, free trade agreements would be argued to be—and would prove to be—the most efficient way to implement structural adjustment programmes since they now, instead of being imposed on countries from the outside by the IMF and others, are agreed to by a consenting party.

Beyond this, it was the first so-called ‘free trade’ agreement that involved two totally asymmetrical partners: The U.S., which was the imperial power par excellence, and Mexico. (In actuality, although NAFTA is called a trilateral agreement between Canada, Mexico, and the USA, it is essentially bilateral, because by that time Canada had already signed its own bilateral trade deal with the USA in 1989, CANUSFTA, and thus had nothing to offer to the new treaty.)

In a sense, NAFTA is both a concentrate of the *Washington Consensus* and its requirements and also a plan of action incorporating what the WEF, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and the G-8 had been demanding for years. Furthermore, NAFTA is much more efficient than any measures by the likes of the IMF or the World Bank. As a *treaty* between supposedly consenting nation-states it pretends to be a consensual agreement between *equal* parties. NAFTA therefore achieved what no single agreement had ever achieved before this: it imposed ‘structural adjustments’ on a grand scale, it established complete transborder mobility for capital, goods, and services—the so-called *three freedoms*<sup>12</sup>—and it liberalised internal public and private markets, including the agricultural sector. The latter is an objective that, to this day, the WTO has been unable to accomplish. It also implemented what was termed an *evolutionary approach*—as opposed to the traditional one-time agreement—which implied that the negotiation process was and would remain open-ended and continuous, thanks to the setting up of thirty odd Working Groups which in turn answer directly to the NAFTA Commission set up under chapters 19 and 20 of the agreement.<sup>13</sup>

The implementation of a NAFTA-type strategy and approach goes far beyond the terms of any previous free trade agreement, and one of the most telling indicators of this is the fact that the two countries involved with the U.S. had to undergo major *constitutional* amendments in order to bring the basic institutions and the basic norms of the state in line with the requirements of the agreement. The fact that the enforcement of norms and institutions coming out of NAFTA required prior constitutional amendments is a telling indicator of its importance as an agreement. There was, however, another, deeper significance, since NAFTA would now be used as a template for each and every subsequent free trade negotiation and, in many instances, at the same constitutional cost.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, some provisions of NAFTA, notably chapter 11 on the liberalisation of investments and investor rights, in time proved so appealing to neoliberal-minded power brokers that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) took it upon itself in 1998 to set up negotiations for a *Multilateral Agreement on Investment* (MAI) among its member states. This was however an initiative that collapsed over the following year because of the major campaign that came to be launched against it and mounting social opposition to the deal in many of the countries involved.<sup>15</sup>

To sum up, there are several reasons why NAFTA provides a crucial starting point. First, because of its contractual nature, where any government that enters into such an agreement does so voluntarily, a situation arises that is markedly different from the one that prevails when the same requirements come out of the IMF, the World Bank, or the G-8. A central aspect of this is that national governments became directly and openly accountable and responsible themselves, and not just the institutions of which they were members.

Second, because the sheer extent of these requirements—which cut right across a host of issues from constitutional revision to collective versus individual rights, the survival of agriculture, the equality of women, the status of indigenous peoples, and the environment, among many others—it aroused public debates and provoked large scale mobilisation. And third, NAFTA therefore not only acted as a template for many other neoliberal international treaties (and attempts at treaties) but also precipitated the forging of a new mode of social response, one that came to maturity in the course of fighting NAFTA, MAI, and then the FTAA.

Looked at from the perspective of citizen action, the requirements and exigencies coming out of a so-called *free trade treaty* crystallised a new multidimensional and multifaceted onslaught against the common good. This challenge called for the critical examination of past practices on the part of social organisations operating on the national scene, and the reaching out towards other organisations in the other countries involved. Previously, coalition building against issues of importance had led to the creation of temporary coalitions that were soon dissolved once the issue in question dropped out of view, whereas this time around the coalitions set up to confront NAFTA were set up on a permanent basis, and are still very much active to this day. In this case, all four coalitions—including one from Quebec—were built around the same model of a confluence of seemingly diverse causes, with the union movement playing an important role in each case, in conjunction with other social organisations, such as the women’s movement, First Nations (in some cases, not all), the environmental movement, social justice organisations, and research groups.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, national cooperation between organisations was intimately tied to transnational cooperation, essentially because the external outreach afforded an effective and credible leverage to the internal opposition itself, especially in contexts where free trade was immediately seized upon by the media

as an essential and indispensable instrument for the promotion of economic growth in the country.<sup>17</sup> All these factors would play in and be important to the mobilisations against the FTAA as well.

Mobilisation on a large scale against a free trade deal between U.S. and Mexico started off in both countries in 1990, quite a while before the launching of the official negotiations, while Canadian organisations came on board only after their government was admitted to the negotiating table in March 1991. Ultimately however, these campaigns were unsuccessful. Apart from the addition of two side-accords to the agreement, NAFTA was duly signed by the three countries and came into force 1 January 1994, as planned.

Even if the struggles against NAFTA were unsuccessful, and therefore may at best have had only an indirect impact on the WSF, as we shall see below their subsequent branching out into a host of struggles against the FTAA came to have a very direct impact.

### The Struggle against the FTAA and the Road to the WSF

No sooner was NAFTA signed than the White House came up with an even grander scheme. This project was first spelled out in a memorandum issued by the National Security Council (NSC), dated 29 November 1993, sent by National Security advisor, Anthony Lake, to President Clinton. The object of the memo was ‘Proposed Hemispheric Summit,’ and its purpose, the following: “To seek your approval for a summit meeting of Western Hemisphere heads of state in Washington in May 1994 *to build on the NAFTA victory* to generate a broad hemispheric consensus behind our key policy objectives (...).”<sup>18</sup>

The memo’s ‘background’ unfolds the argument in the following manner:

The moment is ripe for an historic initiative—of the weight of the Good Neighbour policy and the Alliance for Progress—to establish the themes for inter-American relations for the rest of the decade and beyond: The NAFTA is the foundation for the gradual expansion of hemispheric free trade (...)

Hemispheric institutions, including the OAS and Inter-American Development Bank and now the NAFTA institutions, can be forged into the vital mechanisms of hemispheric governance.

The organising concept could be a hemispheric ‘Community of Democracies’ increasingly integrated by economic exchange and shared political values. Whatever the slogan, your vision of an inte-

grated Western Hemisphere could be a model for international relations in general and for North-South relations more specifically. (...)<sup>19</sup>

This eventually led to an event held in Miami in December 1994 where the project of a *Free Trade Area of the Americas* (FTAA) was unveiled by the U.S. to the thirty-four heads of state and government in attendance.<sup>20</sup> But for the national coalitions that had mobilised against NAFTA,<sup>21</sup> the opening of this new and expanded round of commercial negotiations was a challenge that called for even more intense transnational collaborations between the North and the South of the hemisphere, in order to defeat the FTAA.

Here, it is important to note that the economic and political situation in South America, and a long history behind it, led to a somewhat different approach and strategy than what was used in the campaigns against NAFTA. This was because the labour union movement in South America—and most notably, the *Coordenadora das Centrais Sindicais do Cono Sul* (CCSCS, or the Coordination of Trade Unions of the Southern Cone)<sup>22</sup>—were, like their counterparts in the European Union,<sup>23</sup> more supportive of the creation of a different, *regional* alliance named MERCOSUR.<sup>24</sup> This project of regional economic integration in the so-called ‘southern cone’ of South America had been launched in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay,<sup>25</sup> and the unions’ support to this can be understood both as a means to gain greater political leverage on their part at the national level and as a part of a much longer tradition of Latin American integration as a political and economic project that emerged soon after the wars of independence in the 19th century, at the first Pan-American Congress convened by Simón Bolívar, in Panama, in 1826.

In other words, in some countries of South America at least, and especially in those that were members of MERCOSUR in particular, the labour movement and its allies did not oppose economic integration *per se*. In fact, they were quite open to confronting their own governments on occasions when they took positions that could have a detrimental effect on the consolidation of MERCOSUR. But this approval and support by the union movement was limited to MERCOSUR and not extended to the FTAA project, and even though some of the concerned governments pretended to advance the MERCOSUR agenda through their negotiations around FTAA.

For their part, governments were also conscious of the importance of this support by the trade unions. This led them to extend the right of participation in the MERCOSUR process to the union movement and to other social organisa-

tions, under the Protocol of Ouro Preto, signed in 1995. This openness on the part of governments involved in the MERCOSUR process towards the participation of unions and other social organisations established a clear-cut difference with the NAFTA process, where such opportunity absolutely did not exist.

This distinction became all the more discriminatory in the light of the fact that many of the unions from the South involved in MERCOSUR, as well as the unions from the North all of whom were excluded from NAFTA, were members of the same regional organisation (ORIT) and were affiliated to the International Conference of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). One of the basic tenets of ICFTU philosophy and practice since its creation back in 1949 was collaboration with business and governments under what was called *tripartism*—an approach and philosophy that was binding on all parties. This had allowed ICFTU union members to participate actively in organisations that implemented *tripartism*, like the Economic and Social Forum of the UN (ECOSOC) or the OECD.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, in implementing *tripartism* in the MERCOSUR process in the same way as the European Community—now the European Union—had done before, governments of the MERCOSUR in effect aligned themselves with this philosophy, while governments from North America refused to do so. In fact, the latter went even further and practiced *bipartism*—by extending consultative status to the Americas Business Forum (ABF) in 1995 even while excluding all other citizen organisations, like the unions.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, when civil society organisations from the South and from the North in the Americas came together at a parallel social summit convened during a meeting of the ministers of commerce of the Americas in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) in 1997, and founded the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA) as an instrument in their common struggle against the FTAA, MERCOSUR did not figure on their agenda.

From then on, and over the ensuing years, there emerged an ever-widening circle of mobilisation concentrating attention and efforts against the FTAA in the Americas, not only at the continental level but at the national and local levels as well—as the struggle against water privatisation in Cochabamba, Bolivia, showed so well. The HSA organised a string of People’s Summits held in parallel to the Summits of the Americas, in Santiago (Chile) in 1998, in Québec City (Canada) in 2001, in Monterrey (Mexico) in 2003, and in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in 2005. Local chapters of the HSA also organised two Social Forums of the Americas, one in Quito (Ecuador) in 2004 and the other in Caracas (Venezuela)

in 2006, the latter at the same time as the polycentric sixth world meeting of the WSF that was held there. Each time, the results of the debates were fed into the founding document of the HSA, *Alternatives for the Americas*, which went through a number of revisions over the years.<sup>28</sup>

The HSA also received an important political boost and a continent-wide recognition when *comandante* Fidel Castro convened the first *Campana continental de lucha contra el ALCA*, (Continental Campaign of Struggle against the FTAA)—which has been convened yearly ever since then—at La Havana (Cuba) in November 2001, in the wake of the second Peoples' Summit of the Americas held in Québec in April of the previous year, 2000.<sup>29</sup>

This strategy—of a sustained process of both mass mobilisation and of idea development—proved very successful. The heads of state and government finally abandoned their project of a hemispheric free trade area at their fifth Summit of the Americas, that took place in 2005 in Mar del Plata (Argentina). This happened because the mobilisation that took place around the FTAA along with other factors led to a shift leftwards in country after country, and by 2005, the opposition to the treaty at the governmental level had grown to such an extent that it was no longer a feasible proposition. I will discuss this in more detail below.

But this outcome would not have been possible if the HSA and its member organisations had concentrated and limited their involvement only at the continental level, and if they had not also invested heavily in organising, mobilising, and networking at the local and national levels as well. It is here that the bulk of the work was done, by countless grassroots organisations, with the result that barely three years after its launch in December 1994, the FTAA came to be condemned in almost every city and town in the Americas; and where several years later, in January 2002, opposition to the FTAA was the main theme on the banners stringing the opening march of the second WSF held in Porto Alegre.<sup>30</sup>

### Other Contributing Factors

As indicated earlier however, it would be simplifying matters greatly to suggest that this extensive social mobilisation, networking, and alliance building that took place in the Americas came exclusively out of a response to the new strategies of free trade, liberalisation and imperialist dominance alone, to the exclusion of other historical issues. Two important reminders are in order in this respect. The first has to do with the proclamation by the UN General Assembly, on 21 December 1993, of the International Decade of the World's In-

igenous People (1995–2004),<sup>31</sup> whose main objective was “strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health.”<sup>32</sup> The second has been the emergence during the same period of the women's movement throughout the Americas.

In the Americas, the pivotal moment in the re-emergence of indigenous peoples as historical and collective actors had occurred a few years earlier, from 1992 onwards, in the wake of the celebrations surrounding the quincennial anniversary of Columbus's landing in 1492. This event spurred a host of mobilisations throughout the hemisphere, which took the form of Native American Protests against the official celebrations.<sup>33</sup> Over the ensuing years, countless gatherings, meetings, and assemblies were convened and numerous organisations set up. Among many initiatives, *Enlace*—a Continental Network of Indigenous Women set up in 1993—organised four continental meetings in Quito, Mexico City, Panama City, and Lima. Most notably, the indigenous peoples of the Americas organised important forums through the hemisphere during the 1990s that acted as forerunners of the WSF itself. And the indigenous peoples of the Americas have also preserved their organisational autonomy to this day, within and in relation to the WSF. Each year, their annual Social Forum of Indigenous People takes place immediately prior to the WSF itself, in which however they also claim their own space.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, in many contexts in Latin America, most notably in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Guatemala, indigenous organisations have played an important political role as well. The most important examples are the *Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE, or the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and the *Asamblea por la Soberania de los Pueblos* (ASP, or Assembly for the Peoples' Sovereignty), which became the Bolivian *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS, or Movement Towards Socialism), as well as the *Movimiento indigeno Pachacuti* (MIP, or Indigenous Pachacuti Movement), also in Bolivia.

Finally, the women's movement in the Americas also re-emerged in full view at the turn of the millennium, in particular through the organisation of the World March of Women in 2000.<sup>35</sup> This initiative has a most impressive following throughout the continent. Today, there are as many chapters of the March as there are countries in the hemisphere, and each is involved in the setting up of Women's Forums both inside and outside the WSF venue itself.

Some authors have credited both the women's and the indigenous peoples' movements for the implementation of many of the innovative rules and codes of conduct that have subsequently been adopted by participating organisations during social forums at all levels, and which have also filtered into the WSF charter and *modus operandi*. Most notable in this regard are the respect for pluralism, tolerance of dissent, and the implementation of horizontality in discussions and decision-making, as well as gender balancing.<sup>36</sup>

### The Shift to the Left In South American Politics and the WSF

Neoliberalism seeks to depoliticise issues, organisations, and people. Both its profound distrust of the State and its reverence for market forces serve this purpose. From the mid-eighties on, civil governments bent on state reform replaced military regimes in South America. In economic terms, these reforms reflected ideas contained in the so-called *Washington Consensus* that came to be defined in 1989, ideas that provided for the privatisation of public assets and the liberalisation of national markets (also articulated as *the four freedoms*—the free and unhindered mobility of goods, services, investments, and labour). This was at a time when the economic nationalism that had been advocated by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)<sup>37</sup> was under heavy criticism both from within and from outside the country, such as by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and when the newly elected democratic governments of Latin America substituted a new, more neoliberal model of development based on export promotion (*hacia afuera*) in place of the more inwardly-oriented model of import substitution (*hacia adentro*) that had prevailed since the late forties.

But this fling with neoliberalism was to be short-lived. Following the Asiatic financial crisis of 1997 and the economic meltdown in Argentina in December 2001, and in the wake of increasing social inequality, mounting economic insecurity, and creeping political corruption, disillusionment quickly set in, with the result that, at the turn of the millennium, the extensive social mobilisation that had taken place in the region assisted in ushering in a host of political parties belonging to the Left at various levels of governments.

From soon after the return to civilian rule in Brazil in 1986, the socio-political context in this country provides an interesting example of the cross-fertilisation between social mobilisation and politicisation. The involvement of two of its major civil society organisations—the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST, or the Landless Workers' Movement) and

the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT, or the Workers' Union)—in conjunction with the *Partido do Trabalhadores* (PT, or the Workers' Party)—served as stepping stones in the conquest of power in cities (for example, São Paulo and Porto Alegre in 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000) as well as in states (for instance, Rio Grande do Sul in 1998) before the accession of Luis Ignacio da Silva (Lula) to the presidency in 2002. During their battle against the neoliberal model of development, these organisations brought to the fore new initiatives and alternatives and, among them, a protocol for participatory democracy implemented by the PT in the city of Porto Alegre, which, among other things, explains why this city was chosen as the host of the first WSF.

In turn, the Workers' Party of Brazil—a key player in this process—played a central role in the founding of the WSF itself. This was well illustrated at the very first WSF in Porto Alegre, in January 2001, when the organisers welcomed the president of the PT, Lula who had lost his presidential bids in 1989, 1994 and 1998, and who would try again in 2002. Lula was extremely well received at the WSF, and this probably fired up his troops even more, so much so that he would win the next elections and return to the WSF, in January 2003, but now as head of state, in a bid to gather momentum before flying off to Davos to present his *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) programme to fight malnutrition in his own country and worldwide.

But this shift to the left of the political spectrum is not limited to Brazil.<sup>38</sup> To give an idea of its importance and swiftness, one has but to recall that at the third Summit of the Americas, in Québec City in April 2001, among the thirty-four in attendance President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was the only head of state who opposed the FTAA project. But barely two years later, at the fourth 'special' Summit of the Americas,<sup>39</sup> at Monterrey (Mexico), in January 2003, the project was seriously questioned by a number of states, most notably Brazil and Argentina, and with the result that at the last Summit of the Americas, in Mar del Plata in November 2005, governments from Uruguay and Bolivia joined the opposition and the project was kept off the official agenda, which concentrated on job creation and democracy instead.

This demise is basically imputable to the numerous changes in governments that had occurred in the intervening years, starting off with Venezuela and Brazil, followed by Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay and, more recently, Ecuador and Nicaragua. Furthermore, in many other contexts, the electorate has been remarkably polarised on the issue of free trade, liberalisation,



privatisation, and commercial integration with the North, as the recent electoral jousts in Mexico, Costa Rica and Peru have shown all too well. And these results are all the more striking when we compare them to what has been happening in the U.S. and in Canada that have both veered resolutely to the right of the political spectrum in recent years.

This juxtaposition in fact brings to the fore a historical opposition dating back to the first decades of the 19th century that played itself out in the rival plans for continental integration in the Americas: one put forward and defended by Simón Bolívar (of Venezuela but who is widely regarded in Latin America as one of the liberators of Spanish South America as a whole), who favoured a Latin American integration, and the other by President James Monroe of the U.S., who declared a U.S. guardianship over the Americas.

### Conclusion

To sum up, the multiplication, extension, and plurality of citizen mobilisation in the Americas at the turn of the millennium not only played a seminal and determinant role in the convocation of the first WSF in Brazil in 2001 but more importantly, these mobilisations assured that this new initiative would be active not only at the transnational and world levels but would proliferate at all levels. This proliferation was all the more applicable and relevant given that the organisations that had led this mobilisation were already in place and had previously engaged in similar initiatives on their own. In other words, having acted as the immediate vectors if not the immediate inspiration for the WSF, they could henceforth act as the *natural* relays of its objectives and mandate, and proceed to implement its slogan, 'Another world is possible,' in their actions and activities on a day-to-day basis.

In the Americas, as we have seen, these changes also played themselves out at the political level and in the political sphere with the result that Latin America is presently, in many instances, ruled by progressive governments that owe their accession to power to the innumerable social mobilisations in the hemisphere. And this is precisely what the WSF is all about: to serve as a catalyst and as a facilitator of mobilisations the world over, but especially on the more practical and pressing social as well as political issues at the national, local, and community levels.

### Notes

1. The author wishes to thank Georges LeBel and Jai Sen for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. Content editor for this essay is Vipul Rikhi.
2. J. Smith, *et al.* 2008, p 131.
3. *Idem*, p 133.
4. *Idem*.
5. Della Porta, *et al.* 2006.
6. Barlow and Clarke 2002; Foster, in Bandy and Smith 2005, p 223; J Smith, *et al.* 2008, p 14.
7. Smith, *et al.* 2008, p 14.
8. Matte and Guay, in Seoane and Taddei, 2001, pp 169-178.
9. This applies most notably to Via Campesina: an international movement created in Latin America—which coordinates peasant organisations throughout the world, to the World March of Women, as well as to the indigenous movement, the ecological movement and the Inter-American Regional Organisation of Workers (IAROW, better known as the *Organisation Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores*, ORIT) affiliated at the time to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The ICFTU merged with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and formed the International Trade Union Conference (ITUC) in 2006.
10. In Canada, a *Memorandum to the Cabinet* spelled this out quite explicitly. The secret document in question, dated 7 August 2002, was entitled *Mandate for WTO Negotiations* and was tabled by the Minister of International Commerce and the Minister of Industry. It had this to say about NAFTA and other such agreements: "The challenges of NAFTA and bilateral free trade agreements provided the impetus for the *structural adjustments* (*emphasis added, DB*) needed not only to face competition at home but also to compete and win abroad, including in the world's largest market, the U.S." p 18.
11. Benasayag and Scavino 1997; Benasayag and Sztulwark 2002; Beck, 2003, p 516.
12. Out of four, the fourth being complete mobility ('freedom' [sic]) of *labour* which is provided for, with limitations, in the European Union.
13. For instance, negotiations on the issue of agriculture between the U.S. and Mexico under NAFTA have been going on since 1995, ie for the past thirteen years.
14. There is a simple explanation for this: since states had provided for the constitutional protection of land, natural resources, public utilities or social rights, among others, liberalisation required the *deconstitutionalisation* of these collective rights. This debate will in all probability re-emerge in Mexico when the issue of the privatisation of Pemex is brought to the fore.
15. See: Barlow and Clarke 2002, pp 103–4 and 155–6. Also: Deblock and Brunelle 2000.
16. The four are: The *Red Mexicana de Accion Frente al Libre Comercio* (RMALC: [www.rmalc.org.mx](http://www.rmalc.org.mx)), the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART: [www.art-us.org](http://www.art-us.org)), Common Frontiers ([www.commonfrontiers.ca](http://www.commonfrontiers.ca)), and the *Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale* (RQIC: [www.rqic.alternatives.ca](http://www.rqic.alternatives.ca)).
17. Cross-border liaising between coalitions started off as early as 1990, but took on an extended and more permanent turn after the Miami Summit and the launching of the FTAA negotiations in 1994, and the creation of the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA) in 1997, as we shall see below. These exchanges have been going on ever since.

18. The use of the expression 'NAFTA victory' in the present context explains why I chose to emphasise the expression 'FTAA victory' earlier on, when mentioning the successful outcome of social mobilisation in defeating the deal.
19. National Security Council, *Memorandum for the President*, 29 November 1993. Declassified 3/8/96. Emphasis added. This memo was readily available on the NSC web site for a while, but was subsequently removed. The memo, as well as its political and strategic implications are further analysed in Dorval Brunelle 2003.
20. The 35th, Cuba, long excluded from pan-American affairs, is obviously not involved in this process.
21. There are four *national* coalitions in North America against free trade. The Quebec coalition has kept its own autonomy through the process and played an important role in the organisation and as co-host of the second People's Summit in Quebec City in April 2001.
22. The founding members of the CCSCS were the *Central Obrera de Bolivia* (COB); the *Movimiento Intersindical de Trabajadores* (MIT), from Paraguay—later renamed the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT; the *Comando Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT) and the *Central Democratica de Trabajadores* (CDT) from Chile—which later merged into the *Central Unica de Trabajadores*, CUT; the *Confederacion General del Trabajo* (CGT) from Argentina; the *Plenario Sindical de Trabajadores / Convencion Nacional de Trabajadores* (PIT-CNT) from Uruguay; and finally, the *Central Unica de Trabajadores* (CUT) and *Central General de Trabajadores* (CGT), both from Brazil. See Vigevani and ors, 1998, p 109.
23. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) plays a similar role in the EU. It gave full support to the integration process from the outset and has sought to strengthen its social dimension.
24. The unions of South America belonging to ORIT / ICFTU had set up the CCSCS as early as 1986. In a declaration issued in 1998, the CCSCS stated: "Representatives of the workers were always in favour of the creation of Mercosur, which should foster commercial exchanges among the four countries." On line: www.ccscs.org.
25. The negotiation process between Brazil and Argentina started off in 1985, under the governments of Sarney and Alfonsín. The main conceptual influence on the MERCOSUR project at the time was, and still is, the European model of social and economic integration.
26. This involvement in OECD affairs of the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) however, alongside the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC), was of little use during the MAI negotiations in 1998, either because the union representatives at the OECD failed to see the relation to Chapter 11 of NAFTA or because of sheer thoughtlessness on their part. Be that as it may, the net result was the same: it is not thanks to union presence that civil society was provided with a draft of the document, but through other channels, most notably, in North America, through the doings of the particularly *unradical* Western Governor's Association which posted the draft on its website to denounce what they saw as an assault on 'state sovereignty.'
27. *Tripartism* is one of the reasons why unions from Canada and the U.S.—since this does not apply to Mexico—were often at odds with other social organisations that did not, by definition, have this kind of privileged access to governments and businesses. Consequently, the fact that they were deprived of this access under NAFTA played an important part in allowing them to open themselves up towards civil society organisations. To this we must now add another factor: that for their part within MERCOSUR, unions from the South benefited from *tripartism*, while the unions from the North did not. This is probably why the issue of civil society consultation and participation would play such a prominent role in the document *Alternatives for the Americas* prepared under the aegis of the HSA.
28. For details on the Hemispheric Social Alliance, see <http://www.asc-hsa.org/> or <http://www.web.ca/comfront/hems2.htm>
29. Significantly enough, the final declaration of the first encounter was entitled: *Consenso de La Havana* (the 'Havana Consensus') as a direct attack on the 'Washington Consensus.'
30. The sheer number of such encounters against the FTAA, citywide, nation-wide or even continent-wide in a short span of time defies the imagination. To which one should add all the other social struggles (workers, peasants, women, First Nations) where the FTAA was not the central issue, but was appended to other claims or denunciations. Some of these are listed on numerous websites. See, for instance: [www.asc-has.org/](http://www.asc-has.org/); [www.laneta.apc.org/asc/](http://www.laneta.apc.org/asc/); [www.social-movements.org/](http://www.social-movements.org/); and [www.elhabanero.cubaweb.cu/2001](http://www.elhabanero.cubaweb.cu/2001).
31. Followed, it must be added, by the proclamation of a Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People commencing 1 January 2005.
32. See: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/decade.htm>.
33. In some instances, these activities led to the cancellation of the Columbus Day parade, an important yearly celebration in the U.S. For an overview of activities organised in 1992, see: <http://faculty.smu.edu/twalker/protest4.htm>.
34. See the WSF web site: [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias\\_01.php?cd\\_language=1&cd\\_news=1394](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias_01.php?cd_language=1&cd_news=1394).
35. See: [http://www.marchemondiale.org/qui\\_nous\\_sommes/en/](http://www.marchemondiale.org/qui_nous_sommes/en/). This initiative came out of and was initiated by the *Federation des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) which had staged an important march in Québec, in 1995, 'La Marche du pain et des roses' (*The Bread and Roses March*).
36. For instance: Smith *et al*, *op cit*.
37. ECLAC is a geographical organisation set up in 1948 under Article 59 of the UN Charter. It answers to the ECOSOC.
38. A caveat is in order here since this 'shift to the Left' should neither imply that the governments involved are of the same ilk, nor that *left* is here synonymous with socialism. After all, Argentina's Kirchner is more a *peronist* than a socialist, and in Chile, the *Coalicion* headed by Michelle Bachelet comprises socialists as well as Christian democrats, while in Uruguay, the ruling *Encuentro Progresista-Frente Amplio-Nueva Mayoría* of Tabaré Vasquez is an even more complex mix.
39. 'Special' because the negotiation process relied on four summits of heads of state and government in all. But mounting difficulties and numerous changes of governments called for the convocation of an additional summit.