Alliance of Hope and Challenges of Global Democracy

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Global power and the state of statehood

Two features of the world today stand out — the unprecedented concentration of global decision-making powers in the hands of the North and the resulting global chaos and human and environmental destruction.

There is no need here to reiterate the roles played by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, GATT, the Group of Seven, transnational corporations and other institutions of Northern dominance, which in the course of the 1980s introduced a new process of "recolonization", as Chakravarthi Raghavan termed it, into the socio-economic and political life of billions of the world population, hitting the weakest hardest. In the 1990s, the concentration of power was completed with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This landmark event represented the dramatic failure of the major twentieth-century project of emancipation of the poor and underprivileged from the yoke of world capitalism, and simultaneously came as the emancipation of peoples subjected to a singular non-capitalist system which, despite its revolutionary origins, had ruthlessly imprisoned and killed a vast number of its own citizens and suffocated civil societies. Ironically, this emancipation immediately hurled the free people into the embrace of the other ruthless giant.

At that stage, the United Nations, which rightly claims to be the only existing universal organization of the world today, has been called in to legitimate the operations of the Northern powers that be. Such legitimation is necessary since the self-appointed global power centre has never been mandated by the majority of the world population to rule them. The Gulf war, fought in the name of the UN, was a menacing show of force aimed not only at Saddam Hussein but at all who may defy the North-dictated order.

The global power centre does not limit itself to economic, political and military domination. It is a crusader for the ideological — indeed, theological — dogma that

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freedom, democracy and free market are three in one. In fact, this free-market ideology is bound to create chaos because it does not provide norms for harmonious human relationships. It is a rule of the strong having the right to prey on the weak, the rule of avarice. On a global level, it conveniently perpetuates Northern domination.

It is this global structure that we are called upon to transform. For without replacing it by an alternative governance of the people we can hardly hope to ensure the survival of humankind, let alone overcome the immense gap between the rich and poor in the world.

But how? The twentieth-century answer was that real, substantive changes come only through the state, whether the welfare state, proletarian dictatorship or the newly acquired development state. Now we realize that the failure of twentieth-century socialism stemmed from state absorption of civil society. In the globalization of capital which has induced the prevalence of the global power centre, state solutions are being questioned.

The legitimacy of the state is eroded when it must willingly or unwillingly enforce decisions made by IMF-World Bank on and against its own people. Most states do not remain sovereign in their relationships with the global power centre. Of course, a better state makes a difference. But even the best of states trying to be accountable to the people cannot escape the deadly embrace of the world power centre. The contradictions here are felt even in the Northern states that take care of globalizing capital as a whole and thus have the whole world as their constituency. For their source of power and legitimacy is still their respective people within their respective territories. Uncontrollable capital movement out of their territories can cause domestic economic depletion, plant closures, lay-offs and unemployment. But they cannot enclose capital activities within their territories. This puts them in a very difficult position. Each seeks to "solve" this contradiction by exporting its negative consequences to another country, which naturally provokes antagonism from it. Yet although the world power centre is thus ripped by chronic conflicts, it behaves as one power centre in the face of the South.

But if statehood is approaching the end of its historical lifespan, to whom can we turn as an alternative agent of change? In the face of this historic challenge we need to be both daring and patient, for we are talking about long-term perspectives, a new paradigm of social change addressing the roots of the problem. In addition to changing the internal structures of individual countries, we must set ourselves the task of democratizing the global structure itself.

This task, specifically in the context of the North-South relations, is not entirely new. In the 1950s, the coalition of newly independent countries whose great leaders gathered at Bandung challenged it. In the 1970s, a consortium of 130 third-world countries pushed for the righting of economic disparities and injustices through the New International Economic Order. In both of these cases, the subject for global structural change was a coalition of states, and both efforts failed. Given the erosion of states in the 1980s, and with the loss of countervailing power to the global power centre in the 1990s, it is hard to hope for the resurgence of a viable alliance of states to act effectively on behalf of the people to rectify the global structure of injustice.

Transborder participatory democracy

What we need in this historical setting is a global democracy based on the global constituency — the people themselves — corresponding to the exercise of power by the global power centre all over the world and to the view of transnational capital that the whole world is its unitary arena of accumulation.

We were searching for the way to such global democracy when we inaugurated the People's Plan 21 (PP21) in 1989. In August that year, a coalition of Japanese people's movements and action groups hosted the first PP21 programme, composed of 19 international workshops, conferences and festivals. Some 360 activists from Asia, the Pacific and elsewhere met with thousands of Japanese activists and worked out the Minamata declaration. Participants agreed to make PP21 a continuing process, and a second programme was held in Thailand in November-December 1992, with increased grassroots and international participation. It adopted the Rajchadamnoen pledge. Earlier that year people's movement representatives from six Central American countries met in Nicaragua with a Japanese PP21 group; the newly organized PP21 Central America issued the Managua declaration.

These declarations developed a new concept of global democracy, which we termed "transborder participatory democracy", with the people of the world as the constituency. This is a dynamic process as well as a goal. It is a permanent democratization process based in "democracy on the spot" — emancipatory transformation of everyday relationships in the family, community, workplace and other institutions — extending beyond social, cultural and state barriers to reach, influence and ultimately control the global decision-making mechanisms wherever they are located. The Minamata declaration asserts that "all people, especially the oppressed people, have a natural and universal right to criticize, oppose or prevent the implementation of decisions affecting their lives, no matter where those decisions are made". This right is more fundamental than any artificial law or institution established by the state, permits people to cross any border, national and social, to carry their struggle to the exact sources of power seeking to dominate or destroy them. PP21 in Thailand, concretizing this line, called for participatory democracy at the community, national and global levels.

But how and by whom can transborder participatory democracy be implemented? "The people of the world" is too abstract an answer. In fact, there is no ready-made "people of the world". People are divided into large groups, often in conflict with each other, across South and North, state boundaries, gender, religions, caste, ethnicity, community, race, culture, language, history. When they clash over real or misinterpreted immediate interests, people even kill each other, as we sadly witness in Sri Lanka, India, the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Somalia and many other places. Chauvinistic tendencies are ominously gaining ground in many parts of the North, leading to heinous persecution of minorities. In many such cases, brute sexist violence is attacking women. The global power centre capitalizes on such internecine conflicts in order to legitimate itself by posing as the only power that can enforce law and order — a grotesque and hypocritical claim, since it is largely the gospel of the free market that sows the seeds of these conflicts.

It is at this point that we must talk about an alliance of hope. The people of the world as the subject of transborder participatory democracy can emerge only in the

form of an alliance of large, significant groups of people — an alliance informed and enriched by great diversities and varied identities. But is such an alliance possible?

To say the least, it is not only possible but inevitable, because the domination by the global power centre has the effect of forcing us all to live together in a single, global division of labour. This single system, however, divides us into North and South, winners and losers, oppressors and victims. It is a system that perpetuates interpeople conflicts and antagonism. The state aggravates the situation because, as a system of exclusivity, it inevitably provokes political struggle over which group can maximize its benefits through monopoly of state power. Pushed into this huge global organization, few of us can now escape the forced living-together, like it or not. So we must manage to find ways to coexist if we are not to perish in irresoluble conflicts.

But this is a forced coexistence and has yet no element of hope. Can we go a step further? I am convinced we can. The antagonistic mutual relationships between people's groups are basically the ones which are imposed upon them externally by the global system, by history, by chauvinist misleaders. Existing relationships among peoples are not of their own choice.

Can we regulate our mutual relationships? If so, on what basis? In the 1989 PP21 programme, we postulated "peopleness" as the basis enabling alternative interpeople relationships. Whatever it may be called, there is no doubt that as much human bonding as hatred can and does exist, and it is at work in individuals as well as communities, especially when different people discover that they share something in common. Such a discovery makes positive interaction possible. When, by recourse to this commonality, people's groups begin to enter into mutual interaction and regulate their own mutual relationships, they are entering into a positive alliance. In 1989 we termed this "interpeople autonomy", which by definition cuts across borders — including state boundaries — between groups. Such an alliance is itself a dynamic process, as it is constantly renewed through intergroup interactions. Properly stimulated and organized, these interactions can cause mutually liberating changes in the practices and cultures of the communities involved; and the community with a modified internal culture, by deepening its understanding of partner communities, will certainly improve its relationships with them. When this unravelling of imposed mutual relationships occurs, inducing internal transformation, we see an alliance of hope being built.

This is not mere wishful thinking. The Alliance of Hope building process is in part a description of what is happening on a significant scale and in part a new context for understanding what is happening. Mirna Cunningham, leader of the 500 Years of Resistance campaign in Nicaragua, told the PP21 forum in Thailand how this campaign was working to unite the indigenous people, black people and popular movements. On the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, deep cleavages exist between the indigenous people and black people who were brought as slaves to open fields at the cost of the indigenous people's rights. It was not easy for them to unite. In the end it was by recourse to history, namely, the history of conquest, that the entangled relationships between groups unravelled and they joined the campaign. This is by no means an isolated example. In solidarity movements, NGO work, farmers' movements, transnational labour organizing and cross-sector encounters, we find elements of alliance-building and cross-fertilization at work. Diversity in culture and values does not mean mere coexistence of separate, unrelated entities.

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Cross-fertilization can occur between civilizations as dominance of one over others is overcome. This is occurring already. The human rights concept, originating in Western Europe, has been greatly enriched and profoundly humanized through interaction with third-world realities, Asian civilizations, indigenous peoples' cultures, feminist thought and ecological world-view.

International civil society

In 1989 we said Alliance of Hope meant an alliance of billions of people, replacing the interstate system by transborder participatory democracy. In other words, it is nothing less than a global society of tomorrow in dynamic and dialectical processes of self-generation through interactions. What is envisaged is not just alliances among large communities as such, but interaction that transforms the internal life of the communities involved in favour of freedom of individuality and abatement of repressive relations.

What is termed "international civil society" seems in this sense to be very close to what I mean by Alliance of Hope. However, I have some reservations about the term:

1. Civil society is largely a creation of the modern nation state. It is demarcated by national borders and filled with nationalist substance. Hence the term "*international* civil society*". Should we not envisage broader social relationships beyond national borders, instead of linking already nationally constituted civil societies?

2. As a concept modelled after European experience, civil society inevitably carries with it strong European flavours. Is Islamic *ummah* a civil society? Civil society is a historical product of modernity, which is the creation of the West.

3. Does civil society include all the residents in a certain territory as full-fledged members? Were the working class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not considered outcasts from civil society? Do they not have their equivalent in civil societies of today? Are "illegal" migrant workers members of civil society?

4. Is it not necessary to transform civil society itself, for it is where exploitation of labour takes place and dominance of the poor by the rich and of women by patriarchy are entrenched? But the civil society approach does not give us guidelines on how to transform civil society.

Civil society should clearly be considered an important element to be integrated with global society of the future. Its heritage has rich potentials. But making it the single model of global society, even with thoughtful redefinitions, may bind our hands too tightly. Alliance of hope is more flexible and open-ended.

But whether it is called international civil society or alliance of hope, our alternative society building approach raises several questions.

Paradigmatic changes: beyond the state

The twentieth-century state-centred approach as a strategy of global social transformation, now called into question, assumed that revolutionary change would occur as follows:

1. A *country-by-country seizure of state power by the vanguard party claiming to* represent the working class, leading to social transformation within the country's territory by using the coercive power of the state as the primary leverage.

2. Creation of revolutionary states, one after another, which are cemented into a socialist camp to serve as the basis of support for revolutionary movements outside.
3. Formation of an international united front between the revolutionized states and third-world countries to press democratization of the global structure.

While the old perspective assumed that real social change in a country occurs after the seizure of state power, the new one envisages alternative social relations and systems prepared autonomously by social movements prior to a change in the nature of the state. This does not mean that a completely new society will emerge under the existing state, nor that the state will allow such changes without resistance. State-wise solutions should be pursued wherever possible and feasible, and in many cases even as a pre-condition for any meaningful social change, particularly where the state, having lost its legitimacy in its relationship to civil society, imposes itself by sheer violence. In Burma, Haiti and Guatemala, for instance, there is no democratic space, and nothing positive will occur without first dismantling the militarized state structures. But even in many such cases, we see people and their communities organize and begin building new socio-economic relationships, if simply to survive, for they know that they cannot sustain their political struggle without survival. In other cases, where there is more democratic space, changes may occur in a more evolutionary manner, with emphasis on transforming the relationships in the existing civil society. In either case, alternative systems defining a new society begin to be organized and made operative, if partially, prior to "seizure" of state power.

In the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the so-called first world, there was an explosion of new people's movements, radical not only in action but also in perspective — among them the black power movement, Native American movement, anti-war movement, student movement and women's liberation movement. Not all achieved their immediate goals, but they opened new horizons and transformed our concept of politics with the discovery that politics is in the midst of everyday life — social relationships into which we are born and cultured. After the radicalism of the 1970s waned, the ecological movement followed.

Without dreaming of repeating the same thing, we should not forget the unique lessons contained in that experience. One is that oppressive and exploitative social relations can and should be changed *here and now*, not postponing this to a remote future day when the state has become "ours" either in a revolutionary or social democratic way. When social movements start changing existing relationships here and now, they are already building an alternative society here and now. And if an alternative society is emerging, social movements must integrate social, economic, political and cultural aspects with an articulated process of society-building.

Ruben Zamora, president of the Democratic Alliance of El Salvador, suggested new perspectives for a twenty-first-century type of revolution to the PP21 Central America conference in Managua in August 1992. He spoke of the need to overcome "statist tendencies" and to redefine the relationship between the state and popular movements. Social movements should establish the capacity to resolve problems for themselves, "drawing only sparingly on the state from time to time". Political parties are necessary as long as the state remains, but popular movements should not be controlled by parties. Zamora called this a "repoliticization" of popular movements: what he was suggesting is a new way of being political.

This brings us to another important point that requires a Copernican change in the understanding of social movements. Viable social movements always represent empowerment of people, the creation on the spot of a new way of organizing society. However, under the old state-centred paradigm, on-the-spot social change was regarded as significant only insofar as it was instrumental to the ultimate goal of the seizure of state power. Since the political party was considered as the sole vehicle to the state, the success or failure of a social movement was measured not so much by what it had really achieved as by its contribution to the build-up of the party. The party was considered the only organization concerned with universal liberation, while social movements were concerned with particulars. As the pre-state state, the party was modelled after the state, vertically organized, exclusive and monopolistic in its claim to leadership over the mass movements, because the state is by nature a monopolistic organization. In actuality, there was more than one party, each representing diverse interests, which had to coalesce in a united front to form a single body to rule. But the united front never worked harmoniously for long, simply because the underlying principle was monopoly and the bonding factor the concurrence of immediate interests. The utilitarian motivation to unite tended to collapse once the immediate goal was attained. Bitter infighting would ensue.

In this setting, the people's groups and communities did not forge their mutual relationships directly but only through the medium of vertically organized political parties. The alliance of hope approach ventures to negate this instrumentality and seeks to restore direct relationships between communities, large and small, to see to it that they begin to constitute an alternative society here and now.

Another important aspect of the new paradigm is integration of the economic aspect into popular movements. If an alternative society is to be built here and now, people's own alternative systems of economy must be developed. Here we have rich mines of experiences. Southern and Northern NGOs have been engaged over years in the development of self-reliant economic bases in rural villages. Farmers in Asia have organized buffalo banks, rice banks and credit unions, while a self-managed "informal economy" has been organized successfully by poor urban communities in a number of third-world countries. In the North, consumer cooperatives, workers' production cooperatives, alternative trade and other interesting initiatives have been developed.

But have these economic ventures been properly situated in the general perspective of social movements? Are they an integral part of new politics? Much investigation is needed in this area, particularly in respect to the local and global organization of alternative economic systems as an integral part of the alliance of hope building work.

Mediation and NGOs

An alliance of hope is not built automatically. To get under way, the process requires mediation to universal change. We are talking here about a new universalizer replacing the party as the sole and privileged universalizer. Or rather, we are talking about changing our perception of universality.

Our assumption, and perception also, is that an element goading us to expand the notion "we" beyond the given and safe lines of demarcation is at work at the depth of every social movement. It is a radical element, an urge to relate, an urge for human equality. It mobilizes wisdom also. We tentatively called this "peopleness" in Minamata.

Functionally, we see voluntary solidarity movements and campaigns on a large variety of issues assiduously undertaken between the North and South and in the South itself. NGOs are working all over the world to empower the grassroots. In the best cases, "we" means people with discernible human faces living in very different and asymmetrical social and cultural settings, who are bound in a relationship in which the joys and sufferings of one are felt as joys and sufferings of the other.

As chains of inter-relationships extend, the "world" as seen from each partner group is peopled, broadened and enriched. From a poor original image of the world as confined to the circle of immediate interests and contacts complemented by an abstract representation of the rest of the world, it evolved into an increasingly concrete world peopled by identifiable partners. The visions of the world will vary according to the positions the respective communities occupy in the whole structure, but these visions will be mirroring the same global community as the chains of inter-relationships take hold of more and more communities. In this process, the structure of the world will also be brought to an increasingly lucid cognition, not as a dry, descriptive analysis of the "objective," but as a living whole in which each community is embedded. The world thus ceases to be a cold external monolith and emerges as an ensemble of more or less malleable relationships which can be worked upon for change.

What I mean is mediated concrete universality. It is like the dragonfly's compound eye composed of hundreds of small eyes, each holding an image of the same surrounding with its respective bias. This is a new way of approaching the whole question of universality. Thus mediated, the universal is pulled down from heaven to earth, ceases to be vertical and becomes horizontal and comes to mean human totality being lived and no longer an abstraction from it. Unlike the state-centred approach, the new approach opens us to a path to universal change without our leaving the community, allowing us to think globally while acting locally and globally.

Who then are the mediators? Here, we depart from the old tradition of separating the universality-oriented activists from their backgrounds and organizing them into a specialized universalizing organization, typically the party. Basically, the mediators are within the communities, where they bring themselves into mutual communication and facilitate interaction of the whole communities.

It is only in this context that NGOs can play a mediating role. They should not be regarded as specialized universalizing agents for whom a closed, privileged space is set aside. European NGOs working in the third world are still committed to the European community and culture, as are Japanese NGOs to theirs. Third-world NGOs come mostly from urban middle-class backgrounds. These NGOs are not just working *for* and *with* grassroots communities. They are not change agents on behalf of somebody else, nor are they residents in a cosmopolitan space. They are meaningfully functioning as mediators only when they also work fundamentally to change societies and the milieu of their origin. Being NGOs, they do so by bringing the communities on both sides into productive, dynamic and dialectical interaction, developing means, devices and institutions to narrow the scandalous inequalities, and thus helping an Alliance of Hope gradually to emerge.

Global popular representation

For such an alliance of hope to prevail, we need intermediary steps. One such step is the emergence of NGO coalitions as an influential actor orienting world affairs in the

arena of the United Nations. The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 made the advent of this new actor definite. There is no doubt that this is a way for the people of the world to express their demands, aspirations and power in front of the global power centre at this stage.

But by the same token, this seems to be a time of crisis for NGOs. For the global power centre, faced by the objective impossibility of the schemes it promotes in development or environment, has set out to co-opt, tame and usurp NGOs. There is a temptation for NGOs to feel comfortable and complacent with the prestigious status attained through their years of struggle.

The rise of NGOs as a global actor is important only if it is a breakthrough towards a further goal of achieving the representation of the people of the world themselves in the world arena in the form of, say, a world people's assembly, directly rooted in the Alliance of Hope. I hasten to add that I am not proposing such an assembly for the near future. A hastily called global assembly of this type would end up as just another global conference of NGOs. But talking about it as our goal and guideline is relevant, if only to abate the degeneration of NGOs into an exclusive club united to protect its own interests. NGOs are instrumental to the process of "making the people themselves visible", in the terminology of PP21 Thailand.

Our perspective is not the abolition of the state in dramatic ways in the foreseeable future. We have to coexist with ever degenerating, ever self-protective and ever declining states, which will be depleted as our alliance of hope building work proceeds. Thus we envisage eventual absorption of the state by the alliance of hope, where we shall make transborder participatory democracy fully operative. This will certainly be a long process carried into the coming century. The United Nations likewise will continue as the universal assembly of states. We have to coexist with it for quite a time. But it is as well clear that the states, and the United Nations for that matter, can no longer represent the people of the world. The notion of the world people's assembly is to orient ourselves in this relatively long transitional period. In this process we must first build up a global countervailing power of the people, and then enable the coalesced people of the world to penetrate the arena of the interstate system.

The groundwork at the grassroots level for the formation of an alliance of hope should precede concrete steps to convene such a global assembly of the people. Although it is premature to call such an assembly, it is not premature to envision it, for thus we can identify our intermediate goal — steady but systematic replacement of NGOs with people's organizations as the representative in the global arena.

Challenges

The challenges we face at the end of the twentieth century are unique. Globalization of capital supported by the global power centre has not only made the world smaller, but also telescoped major events and problems having arisen in the past centuries into the present. This defines the nature of alternatives we are committed to create. We face a single complex of problems. The problems integrated into this single complex, arising at different times and settings in history, have not only been bequeathed to us unresolved, but also fused in peculiar combinations, so that they

cannot be resolved separately one by one. To simplify, the present condenses at least the following problems and their legacies:

1) thousands of years of domination of women by men;
2) five hundred years of domination of the South by the North;
3) two hundred years of domination of agriculture by industry;
4) two hundred years of domination of society by the modern state and interstate system;
5) two hundred years of the domination and exploitation of labour by capital;
6) one hundred years of imperialist domination of colonies;
7) forty years of destruction of nature and diversity in the name of development.

You can add any number of "current" problems. The point is that none of them has survived in its original shape. They have been brought into a deformed synthesis in diverse combinations.

Our alternatives address precisely this problem complex. Given the organic intertwinedness of the problems, the process to overcome it needs be a single process. "Single" does not mean "in one fell swoop". Nor do we anticipate an apocalyptic settlement. It means disentanglement in the same historical time and in inter-relatedness. Trying fully to resolve any of the problems as separate from the others will not succeed in resolving even that problem. This is a crucial point. For instance, the environmentalist movement will never succeed in preserving nature if it refuses to consider Southern poverty.

Having recognized the intertwining of the problems, we set out to disentangle the complex. The clue to disentanglement is to begin taking the side of the dominated in the above list: women, indigenous people, the South, agriculture, labour, (civil) society, nature and diversity. Already, vigorous voices have been raised on their behalf. There are fairly active social movements on all these issues. The starting point in our search for global alternatives is to go full length to work changes in line with the demands of the dominated on the dominating side — men, conquerors, North, capital, state, human species and homogeneity. Without the prerogative of the dominated, there is no emancipatory alternative.

An alternative world will not be constituted by the mechanical summing up of such efforts. For there is no guarantee that alternatives evolved by different sectors and on diverse issues will harmonize into a single picture of an alternative world. Alternatives pressed by urban citizens may collide with those developed by farmers. Feminist perspectives may worry traditional communities. Conflicts are bound to occur.

But the differences and even conflicts can be constructive. They may be a driving force towards weaving comprehensive alternatives. If the conflicts end in antagonism, the current system will survive by capitalizing on them. Mere compromise is postponement of antagonism. But if the differences are brought to a higher level of synthesis through dialectical interaction, then we have an Alliance of *Hope* with ever self-enriching alternative visions and programmes that fully cope with the entirety of the historical problem complex. This is the challenge we need to take on.