

(Article contributed to the Imagining Society Project, Znet, August 7, 2009)

## Movement of Movements - People's alliance and charter making as a process

Skipping elaboration, let me begin by positing that we are in the second wave of the historical people's movement against capitalism, the first wave being the 19-20 century communist-socialist movement concentrating on the seizure of state as the decisive instrument of social change. Here I can hardly go into historical assessment of that state-centered paradigm but it is obvious that the historic movement guided by that paradigm was tested in a big way and failed in a big way, leaving global capitalism triumphant, though in a miserable shape. The second wave is there to undermine and overthrow the capitalist regime in new ways, that is, ways not dedicated to the seizure of the state and establishment of the party-state. Our second wave struggle certainly requires new practice guided by new visions and using new means to achieve "another world." What then should be the visions and strategies of the second wave?

Our point of departure is that the world today is managed and ruled by a composite global power center to keep extremely destructive capitalism going. Empire or not, this is a *de facto* global center of rule consisting of diverse agencies, national and transnational as well as public and private, an organic formation into which nation states have been inextricably enmeshed. True, the global power is not monolithic but is divided by clashing interests among its components. But they come together when it comes to the point of defending their logic and interests against the actual and possible resistance from the popular forces. There is in fact no legitimacy for this power, nor is there any democracy if it comes to the management of global affairs. The second wave of anti-capitalism movement therefore has to be a political struggle to resist, undermine, and overthrow this global power structure and thus a struggle for global democracy of a new type.

But it is as well clear that we cannot expect global democracy as a world government or some certain enlarged state, like a United States of the World, with the mission to abolish capitalism from above. What we envisage as another world therefore must be a global autonomy of the people of the world that manages social and economic systems in non-capitalist ways. If this is to

be our perspective, it follows that the key to change of this nature is the ability of the people of the world to organize themselves into global democratic autonomy, politically and morally forcing the capitalist power center to succumb to their rules. Is such a thing possible?

But in examining this question, we must begin by recognizing that there is no “people of the world” as the potent agency of autonomy. So the whole problematic about “another world” boils down to how the people of the world will emerge as the body of global autonomy, and more specifically, whether, and how, social movements are instrumental to the emergence of global people exercising autonomy.

### People’s alliance and transborder democracy

Let me take a look into this problematic, using as referent some of our pre-WSF experiences, namely, the People’s Plan 21 (PP21). In hindsight, this program was a forerunner of the movement of movements for another world, projecting a vision of global social change beyond the state-oriented perspective. I as a chief organizer of the program feel it is important to look back on it from the point of view of historical continuity as a contribution to the on-going discussion.

It was in August 1989, immediately before the fall of the Berlin wall, that we, a coalition of movement groups in Japan, took the initiative in organizing, together with movement and NGO friends from other lands mainly Asia, initiated a large international program titled the PP21. The program held throughout Japan in the form of numerous thematic and sector-wise international events culminated in a synthesis gathering in Minamata, known for mercury pollution that victimized hundreds of thousands of people and grassroots struggle against the polluting company, raising environment concerns in Japan and beyond. The purpose of the program was to get people’s efforts together to bring about “*janakashaba*,” a “world that does not stand like this,” a word coined by poor fishing people victimized by pollution in the midst of the struggle against murderous injustices imposed by the establishment. The second PP21 convergence was held in 1992 in Thailand and in 1996 in South Asia, culminating in big mobilization in Katmandu. In 2002 we met last and decided to stop holding

large scale multi-issue, multi-sector gatherings as the WSF was launched. But ideas and linkages created through PP21 have left some imprints in the later movements. Unlike WSF, PP21 adopted declarations, beginning with the Minamata declaration in 1989 through Rachadamnon Pledge adopted by the Thai program in 1992 to the Samargatha Declaration in 1996 in Katmandu.

The key concepts we introduced then were transborder participatory democracy and global alliances of the people to emerge as the body to exercise autonomy. Emphasizing that our hope for the future pinged on the formation of such a global people's alliance, we called it "alliance of hope." We posited both transborder participatory democracy and people's alliance not as static institution or body but as dynamic processes of constant renewal. In other words, we adopted these concepts as movement concepts, ones predicated on praxis. I believe that these concepts are relevant in designing our global strategies of today.

We chose the word "people" to designate the body to self-rule, but as earlier said, our keen concern was that there was no such "people" as the actually existing body to exercise democracy as self-rule. On the contrary,

As was pointed out in Minamata, they (people) are "divided into various groups positioned differently in the global hierarchical structures, divided by gender, ethnic, religious, geographical, class, cultural, and national borders" while the people's identities are not static, but dynamically changing, overlapping, and mutually interacting. As such "these groups are being forced to live together under conditions imposed upon them." We said that "state-supported global capital is organizing all these groups into a system of international and hierarchical division of labor" and that "this order is lauded as the world of interdependence." Read interdependence globalization. "But it is an interdependence forced upon the people and permeated by hostility and division. The dominant system perpetuates itself by organizing internal division, and setting one people's group against another." We had in mind "national chauvinism, machinated communalism, cultural exclusivism, sexism, and the whole varied panoply of radical ethnic prejudices" that "serve the ruling elites well in their efforts to establish a great organization incapable of its own unity." (My presentation to the PP21 Assembly in 2002)

Currently two parallel phenomena are evident. On the one hand, the accelerated development of communication technology and networking beyond borders is creating a cosmopolitan arena, in which people, especially the young, from far-flung cultural and political as well as geographical locations and milieus are communicating and sharing information, sentiments, and cultures. Actions resisting the capitalist global rule spread fast benefiting from this development. On the other hand, we witness serious divisions ripping the people into antagonistic collectives. People are badly divided, segmented, and set to fight each other, engaging in often violent, even murderous conflicts. The divides run between collectives of various kinds as well as individuals. Religious and other “fundamentalisms,” jingoism, misogyny, racism, other hate campaigns, internal wars, and other forms of violence wielded by common people against one another are part of the daily life on the surface of the globe. During the Bush war, Empire’s vertical violence bred, aggravated, and mingled with horizontal violence among people’s collectives. How then can the people across the world autonomously rule themselves?

This perception leads us to the rejection of the notion of global civil society that sees the world society more or less as an association of homogeneous citizens. The “civil society” discourse, prevalent in the 1990s, reflected the rise of NGO culture over social movements as complementary to the neo-liberal offensive of capitalism. Similarly, we take exception to the idea of “multitude” advanced by some overoptimistic theorists who argue that the “multitude” under the hegemony of non-material labor embodies the “common” preserving their singularities. I wish things were like that, but this postulate of predetermined harmony among people’s communities is not at all borne out by the realities daily unfurling in front of our eyes.

In reality, the capitalist globalization regime is dividing the people in the same process that links them up. Communities are brought to come closer but not in ways of their own choice. This gives rise to two eventualities – inter-people antagonisms and conflicts on the one hand and development of social activities and movement seeking to create new mutual relations beyond barriers on the other. Both are products of the same capitalist globalization process and the antagonism, basically, is not just subjective but reflects structural inequalities people are organized into.

Alliance building therefore relates to the demolition from within of the structural and subjective barriers separating/linking the people's communities. In other words, if members of the groups linked together into externally determined relationship begin to interact with one another, find that relationship not fatalistic, and discredit, weaken, and overcome it by creating new relationships of their own making, in which people from both sides find each other different than before. In the PP21 program, we called it inter-people autonomy meaning that communities self-manage not only their internal affairs but also their mutual relationships by transforming imposed mutual relationships. People's alliance as a step toward global people's autonomy emerges as people's collectives and communities bound by new relationship of their own making.

Here I am talking about very diverse groupings of the global people with intersecting identities. Their diversity, instead of being developed as richness of human civilization, is often exploited by the capitalist regime as the base of competition useful for capital accumulation. So we are talking about power relations at different levels, micro and macro.

Global society in fact is articulated into extremely complex sets of relationships, whose systematic analysis I can hardly undertake in this paper. Suffice it to say here that the North-South, gender, class, urban-rural, nation-state, cultural, and religious divides are some of the macro instances of divisions to be overcome in historic terms.

Alliance building would not occur automatically. Here, movement plays a decisive role in helping this process get under way. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, discussing the World Social Forum and the global left, noted that one of the salient features of WSF's contribution was "the passage from a movement politics to inter-movement politics." By inter-movement politics he meant "a politics run by the idea that no single issue social movement can succeed in carrying out its agenda without the cooperation of other movements." I fully agree. Inter-movement politics, however, is not complete in itself, or, to put it differently, it is not merely a matter between issue-based movements. In the people's alliance context, it carries more general signification. A few important features involved include the following:

- (1) Inter-movement politics, if relevant, must involve inter-people politics.

Meaningful social movements always have their respective constituencies of which they are organic part. Inter-movement politics can have significance only when it is integral to inter-people politics and is not closed within itself. In other words, inter-movement politics is tested by the degree to which it engenders inter-people interactive politics conducive to people-to-people alliance making.

- (2) This does not mean, however, that a specific movement “legitimately” and monopolistically represents one constituency considered more or less homogeneous. The constituency itself is a mobile entity comprising complex identities. The relevance of inter-movement politics should prove itself by organic relationships it creates and recreates with the community. Inter-movement politics also works within the same constituent community which usually generates plural movement initiatives.
- (3) Interaction between people, as collectives and as individuals, in a positive context is one of the main modes of alliance building. Interaction in a hostile context would mean escalating hostility, distrust, and clashes, but we have abundant experience that people from usually unfriendly or even hostile groups, meeting in a favorable context, find each other just common human beings and friends.
- (4) Let me call this kind of interaction virtuous interaction. The other type is vicious interaction that aggravates conflicts. For virtuous interaction to take place, mediation is essential. Movement is expected to be an essential element of mediation. Assumptions under the old paradigm were that classes are represented by their parties and class alliances are deemed arranged when the parties representing them come together to sign a joint front agreement. Now we know movements, let alone political parties, do not represent the people’s collectives. It is the people’s groups themselves that interact and enter into alliance processes. And in these processes movements based in their constituencies play indispensable mediating roles.
- (5) Virtuous interaction can cause changes not only in the mutual relationships between groups, but also the internal power relationships and cultures within the groups involved in emancipator directions.
- (6) We said that under the capitalist regime different communities and collectives of the people are bound together, even despite themselves,

into antagonistic relationships, typically of hierarchical formation. Alliance building therefore would not continue, even if virtuous interaction is constituted, if the oppressing/oppressed, exploiting/exploited, dominating/dominated relationships that exist between collectives are allowed to continue. For alliance building to continue and develop, this process should entail processes mitigating and eventually abolishing the real and structural as well as subjective unequal power relationships.

- (7) This aspect of the matter takes us to a broader area of building another world, or another global society. In the classical Marxist-Leninist understanding, a worker-peasant alliance was not only the key to the formation of revolutionary power but also the basis of economic articulation in a new society between industry and agriculture, or urban and rural. The first wave experience (mostly negative) should be reassessed from this angle, namely, the economic aspects of class alliances and antagonisms. The people's alliances we envisage, though they embody far more complex inter-group articulation than worker-peasant, are pregnant with some future economic articulation of another world. This means that the people's alliances are not just a political partnership that is likely to collapse the moment political goals they are aimed at are achieved, but rather the baby in the womb of the society yet to come. Alliance building through interaction and relational transformation will involve processes of changing existing socio-economic patterns of articulation toward a better world.

- (8) Interaction should take place not only among the people. The alliance building process of necessity entails reflection on the whole course of capitalism-driven modern civilization, particularly its arrogance toward nature (including our bodies). Interaction – or dialogue – will be started with nature, learning particularly from wisdom of indigenous peoples, to find ways to undo the self-destruction we have willingly inflicted upon ourselves through redefinition of development and progress.

- (9) Alliance building through positive and virtuous interaction is a dynamic process and therefore fluid and changeable. But at each phase of the process, the parties involved must negotiate terms of agreement at a given time on a certain basis. This will represent the formal aspect of alliance building. This means that we are coming up with inter-people

social contracts at diverse levels. Some of them may be written out and signed on and others may be accepted as new habits observed and practiced. At a time when nation states are still there, the autonomous agreements may be institutionalized or even made into state laws or written into international covenants. Let me emphasize that these are processes already under way but not necessarily perceived as steps of alternative world building as they are seen only in issue-based contexts. Thus, in actuality, alliance building processes are, explicitly or implicitly, social contract making processes. The agreements and contracts are also renewable and actually being renewed reflecting new inter-people relationships. Movements are there as agency to remake them through inter-movement politics. If these numerous autonomous inter-people contracts and agreements proliferate and are accumulated, linking ever broader segments of global people's activities, and begin to guide the course of events, then we approach inter-people autonomy whose shared basis will be a people's charter composite of numerous agreements and in constant renewal process.

Now, I go back to the actual movement, "movement of movements" and its important arena, World Social Forum. I hear that for some time, whether WSF is a space or a movement has been debated as an issue relevant to the very nature of WSF. I have no doubt that it is a movement but should be consciously a movement of a new type. When Chico Whitaker, probably one of the strong proponents of "space" says "movement and space are complete different things," I disagree with this dichotomy. According to Chico,

A movement *congregates* people — its activists, as the activists of a party — who decide to organise themselves to collectively accomplish certain objectives. Its formation and existence entails the *definition* of strategies to reach these objectives, the *formulation* of action programmes, and the *distribution* of responsibilities among its members — including those concerning the direction of the movement. Those who assume this function will lead the activists of the movement, getting them — through authoritarian or democratic methods, according to the choice made by the founders of the movement — to take responsibility for their commitments in the collective action. Its organisational



structure will necessarily be pyramidal however democratic the internal process of decision and the way used to choose those who will occupy different levels of management might be. On the other hand, its effectiveness will depend on the explicitness and precision of its *specific objectives*, and therefore, of its own boundaries in time and space.

Sure, WSF should not be, and cannot be either, a movement of this type. True, there may be some people who want to reorganize WSF in that image. But rejection of this type of movement would not justify the idea of a square rented for free use. In between is the possibility and necessity of a new type of movement. WSF I believe should develop itself as such a movement – **a movement devoted to generating and mediating interactions among diverse groups of people and deliberately igniting processes to build and develop inter-people alliances based on multilateral agreements that will form the body of the people's charter for global people's self-rule.**

Is such effort a movement? I think this is exactly what people call movement of movements. This coinage vaguely implies cooperation among various movements but can be understood as temporary, utilitarian cooperation. I think it can mean far more.

WSF has created excellent possibilities for a new type of movement to emerge, and in fact numerous workshops and other events in the arena offered various issue-, sector-, class-, gender- and otherwise based movements to meet, develop common platforms, and common action. But efforts to encourage inter-movement politics as WSF, it appears to me, have been absent or minimal. As far as I know, meetings of social movements which used to be held as one of the voluntary projects were not intended, nor appropriate, as an occasion to facilitate serious, patient discussion and negotiation for transborder alliance building. Setting dates of worldwide action and agreeing on general goals, it seems to be, was the utmost the social movement gathering could agree on. It is time for us to clearly recognize inter-movement politics, and for that matter inter-people politics, in its own right, as a new dimension of movement.

I think time is ripe for change. The Bush administration ironically gave us a focus – the war while WTO another focus – neoliberal globalization. WSF functioned as an effective arena where by the momentum of huge getting together people emerged as “another superpower” making their presence felt. But that stimulus is gone with the downfall of Bush, leaving Empire and global

capitalism bogging down, so that hostile global focuses facilitating people's mobilization too have become less visible. Instead of constituting ourselves chiefly by reacting to the global power, we need to find ways to constitute ourselves among ourselves through the medium of movement of movements.