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TODAY'S BANDUNG?

RATHER THAN OPPOSING the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre to the World Economic Forum in New York, it is more revealing to imagine it as the distant offspring of the historic Bandung Conference that took place in Indonesia in 1955. Both were conceived as attempts to counter the dominant world order: colonialism and the oppressive Cold War binary in the case of Bandung, and the rule of capitalist globalization in that of Porto Alegre. The differences, however, are immediately apparent. On one hand the Bandung Conference, which brought together leaders primarily from Asia and Africa, revealed in a dramatic way the racial dimension of the colonial and Cold War world order, which Richard Wright famously described as being divided by the 'colour curtain'. Porto Alegre, in contrast, was a predominantly white event. There were relatively few participants from Asia and Africa, and the racial differences of the Americas were dramatically underrepresented. This points toward a continuing task facing those gathered at Porto Alegre: to globalize further the movements, both within each society and across the world—a project in which the Forum is merely one step. On the other hand, whereas Bandung was conducted by a small group of national political leaders and representatives, Porto Alegre was populated by a swarming multitude and a network of movements. This multitude of protagonists is the great novelty of the World Social Forum, and central to the hope it offers for the future.

The first and dominant impression of the Forum was its overflowing enormity; not so much the number of people there—the organizers say 80,000 participated—but rather the number of events, encounters

and happenings. The programme listing all the official conferences, seminars and workshops—most of which took place at the Catholic University—was the size of a tabloid newspaper, but one soon realized that there were innumerable other unofficial meetings taking place all over town, some publicized on posters and leaflets, others by word of mouth. There were also separate gatherings for the different groups participating in the Forum, such as a meeting of the Italian social movements or one for the various national sections of ATTAC. Then there were the demonstrations: both officially planned, such as the opening mass May Day-style parade, and smaller, conflictual demonstrations against, for example, the members of parliament from different countries at the Forum who voted for the present war on terrorism. Finally, another series of events was held at the enormous youth camp by the river, its fields and fields of tents housing 15,000 people in an atmosphere reminiscent of a summer music festival, especially when it rained and everyone tramped through the mud wearing plastic sacks as raincoats. In short, if anyone with obsessive tendencies were to try to understand what was happening at Porto Alegre, the result would certainly have been a complete mental breakdown. The Forum was unknowable, chaotic, dispersive. And that overabundance created an exhilaration in everyone, at being lost in a sea of people from so many parts of the world who are working similarly against the present form of capitalist globalization.

This open encounter was the most important element of Porto Alegre. Even though the Forum was limited in some important respects—socially and geographically, to name two—it was nonetheless an opportunity to globalize further the cycle of struggles that have stretched from Seattle to Genoa, which have been conducted by a network of movements thus far confined, by and large, to the North Atlantic. Dealing with many of the same issues as those who elsewhere contest the present capitalist form of globalization, or specific institutional policies such as those of the IMF, the movements themselves have remained limited. Recognizing the commonality of their projects with those in other parts of the world is the first step toward expanding the network of movements, or linking one network to another. This recognition, indeed, is primarily responsible for the happy, celebratory atmosphere of the Forum.

The encounter should, however, reveal and address not only the common projects and desires, but also the differences of those involved—

differences of material conditions and political orientation. The various movements across the globe cannot simply connect to each other as they are, but must rather be transformed by the encounter through a kind of mutual adequation. Those from North America and Europe, for example, cannot but have been struck by the contrast between their experience and that of agricultural labourers and the rural poor in Brazil, represented most strongly by the MST (Landless Movement)—and vice versa. What kind of transformations are necessary for the Euro-American globalization movements and the Latin American movements, not to become the same, or even to unite, but to link together in an expanding common network? The Forum provided an opportunity to recognize such differences and questions for those willing to see them, but it did not provide the conditions for addressing them. In fact, the very same dispersive, overflowing quality of the Forum that created the euphoria of commonality also effectively displaced the terrain on which such differences and conflicts could be confronted.

Anti-capitalism and national sovereignty

The Porto Alegre Forum was in this sense perhaps too happy, too celebratory and not conflictual enough. The most important political difference cutting across the entire Forum concerned the role of national sovereignty. There are indeed two primary positions in the response to today's dominant forces of globalization: either one can work to reinforce the sovereignty of nation-states as a defensive barrier against the control of foreign and global capital, or one can strive towards a non-national alternative to the present form of globalization that is equally global. The first poses neoliberalism as the primary analytical category, viewing the enemy as unrestricted global capitalist activity with weak state controls; the second is more clearly posed against capital itself, whether state-regulated or not. The first might rightly be called an anti-globalization position, in so far as national sovereignties, even if linked by international solidarity, serve to limit and regulate the forces of capitalist globalization. National liberation thus remains for this position the ultimate goal, as it was for the old anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles. The second, in contrast, opposes any national solutions and seeks instead a democratic globalization.

The first position occupied the most visible and dominant spaces of the Porto Alegre Forum; it was represented in the large plenary sessions,

repeated by the official spokespeople, and reported in the press. A key proponent of this position was the leadership of the Brazilian PT (Workers' Party)—in effect the host of the Forum, since it runs the city and regional government. It was obvious and inevitable that the PT would occupy a central space in the Forum and use the international prestige of the event as part of its campaign strategy for the upcoming elections. The second dominant voice of national sovereignty was the French leadership of ATTAC, which laid the groundwork for the Forum in the pages of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. The leadership of ATTAC is, in this regard, very close to many of the French politicians—most notably Jean-Pierre Chevènement—who advocate strengthening national sovereignty as a solution to the ills of contemporary globalization. These, in any case, are the figures who dominated the representation of the Forum both internally and in the press.

The non-sovereign, alternative globalization position, in contrast, was minoritarian at the Forum—not in quantitative terms but in terms of representation; in fact, the majority of the participants in the Forum may well have occupied this minoritarian position. First, the various movements that have conducted the protests from Seattle to Genoa are generally oriented towards non-national solutions. Indeed, the centralized structure of state sovereignty itself runs counter to the horizontal network-form that the movements have developed. Second, the Argentinian movements that have sprung up in response to the present financial crisis, organized in neighbourhood and city-wide delegate assemblies, are similarly antagonistic to proposals of national sovereignty. Their slogans call for getting rid, not just of one politician, but all of them—*que se vayan todos*: the entire political class. And finally, at the base of the various parties and organizations present at the Forum the sentiment is much more hostile to proposals of national sovereignty than at the top. This may be particularly true of ATTAC, a hybrid organization whose head, especially in France, mingles with traditional politicians, whereas its feet are firmly grounded in the movements.

The division between the sovereignty, anti-globalization position and the non-sovereign, alternative globalization position is therefore not best understood in geographical terms. It does not map the divisions between North and South or First World and Third. The conflict corresponds rather to two different forms of political organization. The traditional parties and centralized campaigns generally occupy the national sovereignty

pole, whereas the new movements organized in horizontal networks tend to cluster at the non-sovereign pole. And furthermore, within traditional, centralized organizations, the top tends toward sovereignty and the base away. It is no surprise, perhaps, that those in positions of power would be most interested in state sovereignty and those excluded least. This may help to explain, in any case, how the national sovereignty, anti-globalization position could dominate the representations of the Forum even though the majority of the participants tend rather toward the perspective of a non-national alternative globalization.

As a concrete illustration of this political and ideological difference, one can imagine the responses to the current economic crisis in Argentina that logically follow from each of these positions. Indeed that crisis loomed over the entire Forum, like a threatening premonition of a chain of economic disasters to come. The first position would point to the fact that the Argentinian debacle was caused by the forces of global capital and the policies of the IMF, along with the other supranational institutions that undermine national sovereignty. The logical oppositional response should thus be to reinforce the national sovereignty of Argentina (and other nation-states) against these destabilizing external forces. The second position would identify the same causes of the crisis, but insist that a national solution is neither possible nor desirable. The alternative to the rule of global capital and its institutions will only be found at an equally global level, by a global democratic movement. The practical experiments in democracy taking place today at neighbourhood and city levels in Argentina, for example, pose a necessary continuity between the democratization of Argentina and the democratization of the global system. Of course, neither of these perspectives provides an adequate recipe for an immediate solution to the crisis that would circumvent IMF prescriptions—and I am not convinced that such a solution exists. They rather present different political strategies for action today which seek, in the course of time, to develop real alternatives to the current form of global rule.

Parties vs networks

In a previous period we could have staged an old-style ideological confrontation between the two positions. The first could accuse the second of playing into the hands of neoliberalism, undermining state sovereignty and paving the way for further globalization. Politics, the one

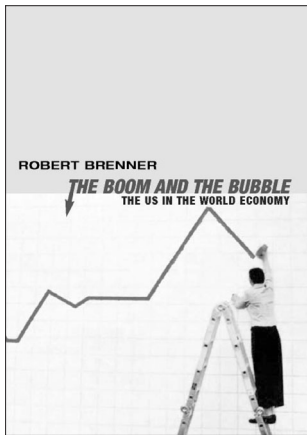
could continue, can only be effectively conducted on the national terrain and within the nation-state. And the second could reply that national regimes and other forms of sovereignty, corrupt and oppressive as they are, are merely obstacles to the global democracy that we seek. This kind of confrontation, however, could not take place at Porto Alegre—in part because of the dispersive nature of the event, which tended to displace conflicts, and in part because the sovereignty position so successfully occupied the central representations that no contest was possible.

But the more important reason for a lack of confrontation may have had to do with the organizational forms that correspond to the two positions. The traditional parties and centralized organizations have spokespeople who represent them and conduct their battles, but no one speaks for a network. How do you argue with a network? The movements organized within them do exert their power, but they do not proceed through oppositions. One of the basic characteristics of the network form is that no two nodes face each other in contradiction; rather, they are always triangulated by a third, and then a fourth, and then by an indefinite number of others in the web. This is one of the characteristics of the Seattle events that we have had the most trouble understanding: groups which we thought in objective contradiction to one another—environmentalists and trade unions, church groups and anarchists—were suddenly able to work together, in the context of the network of the multitude. The movements, to take a slightly different perspective, function something like a public sphere, in the sense that they can allow full expression of differences within the common context of open exchange. But that does not mean that networks are passive. They displace contradictions and operate instead a kind of alchemy, or rather a sea change, the flow of the movements transforming the traditional fixed positions; networks imposing their force through a kind of irresistible undertow.

Like the Forum itself, the multitude in the movements is always overflowing, excessive and unknowable. It is certainly important then, on the one hand, to recognize the differences that divide the activists and politicians gathered at Porto Alegre. It would be a mistake, on the other hand, to try to read the division according to the traditional model of ideological conflict between opposing sides. Political struggle in the age of network movements no longer works that way. Despite the apparent strength of those who occupied centre stage and dominated the representations of the Forum, they may ultimately prove to have lost the struggle. Perhaps

the representatives of the traditional parties and centralized organizations at Porto Alegre are too much like the old national leaders gathered at Bandung—imagine Lula of the PT in the position of Ahmed Sukarno as host, and Bernard Cassen of ATTAC France as Jawaharlal Nehru, the most honoured guest. The leaders can certainly craft resolutions affirming national sovereignty around a conference table, but they can never grasp the democratic power of the movements. Eventually they too will be swept up in the multitude, which is capable of transforming all fixed and centralized elements into so many more nodes in its indefinitely expansive network.

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