CHAPTER 9

Social Forums – Challenges and New Perspectives

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The decision of holding the World Social Forum on exactly the same days as the Davos World Economic Forum was in fact something of a “counter-communications operation.” The global media, which is entirely attuned to what global elites are doing and saying, would be obliged to open at least a little space to those who were contradicting these global elites at a simultaneous meeting time about alternatives for the future of the world.

The WSF organizers won the bet, and the WSF got some media coverage. Yet communication with the world continues to be a big challenge to the WSF process. We are still fighting to make the WSF better known and experienced all over the world, and to make the majorities aware that “another world” is not only possible but it is necessary and urgent.

A good example of this difficulty is the distorted information about the WSF International Council decisions after its meeting in Nairobi, in January 2007, regarding the continuation of the WSF process in 2008 and 2009. With very little information, those who preferred to see the WSF disappear said that its International Council did not know what to do, specially considering the lower attendance at the Nairobi Forum compared with earlier ones. That is to say, the claim was that the process was getting weaker.

In fact, even with fewer participants at this Forum it was a big step forward to increase the African civil society political participation and articulation at the continental level. The Council decided to promote a Global Day of Action in January 2008, the 26th, with multiple, diversified and auto-organized activities all over the world; and then with a new centralized World Social Forum in 2009, in a place then to be defined, and then it was decided after the subsequent IC meeting to have the 2009 Forum: in the Amazon Region, more specifically in the Brazilian city of Belem do Pará.
Nor did the global media pay much attention to the evolving regional, national and local plans announced at the IC meeting. So, very little was said before and after the United States Social Forum that was realized in Atlanta in June 2007, at the very heart of the country that so dominates the world today. Such information as this shows that instead of weakening, the WSF process is even speeding up, as more and more plan to participate in the 2008 Global Day of Action and to participate in the 2009 WSF in the Amazon region.

Unfortunately for me I could not come to the United States Social Forum. I read nevertheless many reports, commentaries and evaluations disseminated through the internet. So, I could see that it was a very successful Forum, as a space where multiple and diverse organizations that are fighting for “another United States” – specially at the grassroots level – could exchange information and ideas, learn about each other, and mutually identify convergences and plan more articulated common activities and struggles. It seemed to me that the majority of those that came to the USSF left it with very much enthusiasm.

But I would like to make a comment about something that, from my point of view, can have a negative effect on the continuation of the process. I saw reports that there was a final resolution that participants at the USSF were called upon to endorse. As this type of resolution or proposition tends to appear in many Forums, it would be perhaps useful to deepen this question. Its with the same preoccupation with the future, I would also like in this paper to indicate some new possibilities that are emerging in relation to the activities to be organized in connection with the 2008 Global Day of Action.

Final Declarations

The question of final declarations or resolutions is not new in the WSF process. It accompanied the process since its beginning, in the discussion of how to ensure its character of space facilitating the emergence and articulation of as many as possible actions to change the world, and, at the same time, how to facilitate and deepen the engagement of the Forum’s participants in the actions and articulations proposed in it.

Some participants consider that to ensure the engagement in actions, the Social Forum process should have a political mobilizing program, defined in a final declaration of each meeting, as an all activists’ meetings