

# **International Seminar of Social Movements, Brussels, September 28 / October 1, 2006: A Synthesis**

Friday 13 October 2006, by [Assembly of Movements](#) (Date first published: 1 October 2006).

**An international seminar of social movements was held in Brussels from September 28 to October 1, 2006. The text below presents a synthesis of discussions.**

This summary is not meant to be a list of the opinions expressed nor a benchmark draught text. We have simply tried to give some order to the ideas put forward in order to facilitate a debate at this stage in our work, based on what has already been said.

Today social movements are confronted by a new phase in the capitalist neoliberal system's offensive. This period is characterised above all by a state of permanent global war. For most of the human race this war means recolonisation. Using the 'war on terror' as a cover, this war aims at controlling natural resources by pillaging peoples the world over. American projects in the 'Greater Middle East' and South America are the most visible signs of this. Nevertheless, they cannot cover up the 'forgotten wars' in Africa and Asia. Zionist expansion is also part of this desire to subjugate the whole planet.

Mobilising social movements against this state of permanent war means defining new cross-border ways of ensuring solidarity with those peoples that are mounting resistance. The nature of some of these movements poses questions, especially with regard to the values that we share. We should embrace such a debate.

However, the violence the system uses does not just manifest itself in open warfare against 'peoples who resist neoliberal thinking'. Other weapons used to break down resistance are the repression of social movements and the restriction of basic rights. Military occupation and the establishment of foreign bases are an open attack on peoples' sovereignty and their desire to cast off the shackles of imperial domination.

Other forms of violence, such as the forced displacement of people and expropriation of land, are the result of a desire to commodify land, water and other natural resources. This state of war affects society as a whole and violence becomes the natural means of oppression. Women are amongst the first victims.

The planet itself is suffering the consequences of the system's headlong rush. The concept of maximum profit at maximum speed leads to climate change and pollution and endangers the natural equilibrium.

Such violence affects all aspects of social life. People who reject the privatisation of natural resources, which only benefits multinationals, are likened to terrorists. By questioning the sovereignty of the people, the use and division of their natural resources and products, the very

foundations of democracy are being undermined. Dictatorships and corruption thrive in this environment. Basic rights are denied to the victims, the producing classes, small holders, etc. The poorest people are in an even more precarious position both in the global North and the global South. Billions of people are deprived of basic public goods such as education, health and the right to housing. Farmer and fishermen organisations, as well as the population as a whole, demand food sovereignty in order to satisfy their needs independently of the world market.

People who fall victim to these policies and the conflicts linked to them are often forced to flee their country. In the era of free movement of capital a fundamental task of the social movements we belong to is defending migrants' rights, the rights of those fleeing neoliberalism and oppression, and the rights of women fleeing from forced marriages or sexual mutilation.

The patriarchal system is reinforced by the dominant economic set-up. Trafficking minors and prostitution are further proof of the commodification of all aspects of life. The situation of women at work is exacerbated further, especially in free trade areas where they account for a large part of the labour force and enjoy few rights.

Our direct enemies are clearly identified. First of all the G8, but also the World Bank and the IMF, who impose their policies and are the motors behind this recolonisation. The debt imposed by these institutions not only allows the privatisation of the world's wealth but also the transfer of wealth produced in the South to the dominant classes, based for the most part in the North.

The WTO and bilateral agreements further aggravate the situation through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA). In areas such as agriculture, labour, environment, intellectual property, migration or the liberalisation of services, restrictions are imposed on people throughout the world. States themselves encourage these policies or even apply them.

The challenge for social movements is to ensure joint global mobilisation against these enemies both in developing countries and in developed countries, where people also suffer the effects of these policies. Producers in both the formal and informal economies have their rights restricted in the name of competitiveness and competition. One of financial capitalism's main aims is reducing labour costs. Workers themselves are submitted to competition through reforms to social policies, the expansion of free trade areas and relocation.

We should also note the difficulties the system faces in its attempts to reach its objectives. It has faced significant setbacks at the hands of popular resistance. The war in the Lebanon, the impasse in WTO negotiations and the resistance shown by young French workers in the face of job insecurity all show that it is possible to counterattack,

Our greatest victory, however, is burying the false idea that there is no possible alternative. The idea that there is only one train of thought has been called into question and the legitimacy of the dominant system is being challenged on a massive scale.

### **The Assembly of Social Movements and its objectives:**

The Assembly has developed in step with the World Social Forum but has shown it is different by the fact that it is an open space for building joint agendas. It is a group of diverse movements with specific regional and national aims, but who together want to fight on a global scale against neoliberal, imperialist and military capitalism (permanent global war), against racism and against the patriarchal system. It aims at being a space open to all who want to fight, in all their different guises.

At the same time it wants to put forward concrete proposals for the idea 'A different world is possible' by proposing alternatives that reflect development and living models that are different and based on the needs and aspirations of the people and on the respect for natural resources. What sort of trade do we want? What sort of individual and collective relationship between men and women do we want? Between peoples even? We have to develop concrete ideas to answer these questions starting from the primacy of rights for all, public goods for all and the experience gained from the social struggles themselves... The Assembly is not the only initiative and the movements concerned do not represent the entirety of their geographic regions nor all areas of struggle, not even all of the interested parties, but the fact that it exists is an achievement in our desire to rally people and expand.

Bringing together actors is a process designed to end the isolation many struggles face, to build forces and to better coordinate. This allows us to identify a common enemy and enumerate the different mechanisms it uses to exploit and subject. In real terms the Assembly is also a space for debate and exchanging views on the international situation, on relations with political parties and left-wing governments, on the nature of and dialogue with the various resistance movements. By doing so we can define joint working approaches, agreements, agendas, calendars and joint campaigns, while at the same time respecting movements' independence. This type of process has to respect the rhythm of the various collective actors, for fear of paralysis and the alienation of grassroots militants. It is also necessary to draw up our own agenda separate from the agenda of capitalist institutions.

The working method must therefore be in keeping with these trends, i.e., with clear objectives in mind and it must be democratic. It must aim at creating the Assembly's public space. With this in mind the following proposals have been put forward, without wanting to stifle the process:

- The setting-up a follow-up and facilitating group, composed of the networks and organisations that initiated this seminar, without delay, according to the working speed of the different regions or continents.

*The group's mandate would be:*

- to ensure the report on this meeting is disseminated in various languages
- to prepare the WSF in Nairobi. In particular with regard to the agenda for the fourth day dedicated to campaigns. The assembly of social movements should allow the consolidation of the campaigns and movements and should plan the fundamental political points to be debated.
- to send out the actions calendar
- ...to create tools for better communication (website)

*Other proposals have been made and they are still to be looked at in greater depth. These are:*

- A world day of action to give our joint project greater visibility.
- Eventually considering a reference document based on progress as a whole.

## **Participants at the seminar**

Alianza Social Continental

Alternative Information Jerusalem/ Bettlehem

Anti Globalisation Activists Group in Syria

Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign-Stop the Wall Palestine

APPASH-CADTM Brazzaville

ARCI Italy

Askapena

Basque Left Movement

ATTAC Germany

ATTAC Japan

ATTAC Maroc

ATTAC Vlaanderen/ Belgique

CADD-Bénin

CADTM

CADTM France

CADTM-Belgique

Censat Agua Viva REDLAR

Centro de estudios europeos-Cuba

CIDAC - Centro de Intervencao para o Desenvolvimento Amilcar Cabral

CLACSO Argentine

CMT-WCL

COBAS

Collectif 18 octobre Tunisie

Comité Splintex

COMPA/CADA/No Bases

Confederation paysanne CPE-Via Campesina

CUT Brasil

DAWN

EHNE-CPE-Via Campesina

ELA-Colect. ANITZA

Endyl- European Network of democratic Young left

ESK-Colect ANITZA

Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France

European March Against Unemployment

Federation Indonesian peasant Union (FSPI)

Fiom-Italy

FNDP/Côte D'Ivoire

Focus on the global south

Forum mondial des alternatives

Forum Social Lémanique

FSU

Globalize Resistance

Grassroots Global Justice

ICFTU/Belgium

IGTN-INT Gender and Trade Network

IWC-ISF-CITU INDIA

Jubilee South

Marche mondiale des femmes

Marches européennes contre le chômage et la précarité

MIB

Minga Informativa Movimientos-Sociales + ALAI

Movimiento Boliviano por la Soberania y la Integracion Solidaria de los Pueblos contra el TLC y el ALCA

MST/ Via Campesina

NAD

Nouvelle alternative pour le développement

National Alliance of People's Movements(NAPM), India

NCEC/KSF

No Vox

OCLAE

PAPDA-HAITI

JSA/COMPA/APC/CADTM

Pakistan Social Forum

Party of the european left

People's Health Movement

Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign-USA

Réseau National Dette et Développement (RNDD-Niger)

Russian Social Forum

Left Front of Russia

Union of Coordination protest Committees

Social Movement « Alternatives », Social Movement « Education for Everybody »

Solidarité nouvelles

Transnational Institute (TNI)

UDEP/Belgique

Union Syndicale Solidaires France

URFIG

Via Campesina

Via Campesina Europe

Via Campesina Madagascar

WIDE

Wide Network Women in development

WSF 2006 Karachi