

Another world is indispensable!

Thursday 4 January 2007, by [CANNAVO Salvatore](#) (Date first published: December 2001).

After the attacks in Manhattan and in the context of a war which promises to be long, hard and terrifying, can the movement against capitalist globalisation continue as before? Can its identity, perspectives, and priorities remain unchanged or should they undergo a profound transformation?

Contents

- [The return of geopolitics](#)
- [Imperial globalisation](#)
- [Reinventing the movement](#)
- [The antidote to barbarism](#)

A bastion of the free market, the British daily newspaper the *Financial Times*, has tried to respond to these questions. Its edition of October 10 devoted an entire page to the subject. The article, written by James Harding, was direct: "A month ago the anti-globalisation movement was preparing its biggest protest ever [the demonstration against the IMF/World Bank summit in Washington]. Robbed of momentum on September 11, it must now reinvent itself".

Harding interviewed US activists who confirmed that the spirit which had motivated the protests had weakened, that the brunt of efforts were now being orientated towards the anti-war movement, but that this latter mobilized much less people than the WTO and IMF contestations. "The movement is shifting into educational mode. The activists in New York are going to change their entire tactical approach. There are not going to be militant street protests. There are going to be teach-ins and candlelit vigils." The movement has to change. What, for example, is the impact of opposition to the multinationals and their profits in a period where "reopening the New York Stock Exchange has been seen as an act of national defiance and buying shares an act of patriotism?". It seems that "with America on the offensive, the counter-capitalist movement is in retreat."

There is also the fear of an amalgam with terrorism. "In public, activists say this is just a respectful pause. In private, however, some campaigners are asking whether the anti-globalisation movement itself will prove to be a victim of the attacks on America." This, for example, reduces street action, one of the distinctive traits of the mobilizations, and without a public profile and contestation the movement cannot exist.

According to a US Green, "There will be some of the same people who were into anti-globalisation and are now involved in anti-war. But labor will be nowhere to be seen. Labor will be rallying around the flag."

However, US activist Kevin Danaher concludes; "We were damaged, but not irreparably. The movement is getting back on its feet. For a while, we were drowned out, but we are finding our voice."

The difficulties described here are visible and appear in part everywhere, even in the preparations for the Perugia-Assisi peace march in Italy. [1] To a great extent these difficulties present problems for the simple "growing over" of the movement against capitalist globalisation into an unambiguous struggle against the war, without ifs and buts, with the same mass characteristics which marked Genoa, Seattle, and Gothenburg.

The return of geopolitics

One of the most widespread suggestions - above all in the economic press, starting with the *Financial Times* itself - is that the process of globalisation, as seen in the 1990s, has ended or entered into deep crisis. Many economists try to demonstrate this thesis, confirmed also by the recessionary phase affecting the whole planet: the contraction of trade, the limitation of financial exchanges, and the very cautious projections of growth. Also the ultra-liberal madness has given way to a new public interventionism, a return of "Keynesianism" which, although debased by an irrational mixture of deficit spending and reduction of the welfare state constitutes a revenge of the state on the private.

At the same time in the midst of war and terrorist alarm - well summed up in Bush's warning: 'for us or against us' - international relations and hierarchies are being redefined. Some examples: inside the WTO the US has seized the initiative in seeking the support of some of the Third World countries - from India to Pakistan and the Arab countries - who had contributed to the debacle of Seattle. Washington can count on a new "round", which will open (perhaps) starting from the November 9 at Qatar and which will be very advantageous for its own trade interests. The same deficitary politics followed by the Federal Reserve - which, remember, has intervened twice since September 11 to change interest rates - has given a solid base of support to the dollar which, after the torments of Wall Street, can still present itself as currency of reference on a world scale. On the European side of the Atlantic however, as Adriana Cerretelli has noted in *Il sole 24 Ore* of October 12, "the special relationship between London and Washington currently represents for European construction a shock analogous to that brought about by German unification: the sole real European potential outside of the Euro - the Europe of defence - "is breaking up". Note also that the European states have all faced the crisis on the basis of their own interests, which has certainly been noted on the other side of the Atlantic.

All told, after the years where the centre of attention was monopolized by the dynamic of the global economy, the mergers and integrations of multinationals which seemed to take over the role and function of the state, building a kind of completely integrated and undifferentiated monolith (the Empire), geopolitics becomes relevant again and along with that national and macro regional foreign policy. Does that mean that globalisation is dead and that geopolitics is once more the only key to the interpretation of world processes? Certainly not.

In reality, throughout the last 20 years there has been a phenomenon of superposition between on the one hand the structural growth of global capitalism and on the other the role and function of national states, whereby the first has bent the second to its own needs, without however succeeding in eradicating entirely their function of servicing the accumulation of capital. As Daniel Bensaid writes, "the order of capital rests then still on a multiplicity of states whose cooperation in the framework of "global governance" does not replace their functions. On the contrary the role of these states is transformed to the extent that they are no longer solely the guarantors of their internal markets, but increasingly strengthen their means of ensuring social reproduction and guaranteeing property beyond their frontiers. [2]

Politics has remained the amiable and necessary servant of the economy. Undoubtedly, the former has been in the shadow of the latter, also because of the phase of expansion, favoured by the remarkable development of technology, of gigantic rationalizations of production, of insistent “policies” of liberalization and of privatisation. With the coming of the recession, the phase of expansion has given way to a falling back on internal demand, the role of spending and state aid and thus on “politics”. Today all this obscure work turns around the discovery of the centrality - even in a physical sense - of the White House, the Pentagon, Downing Street or Islamabad and the relative marginality of Wall Street.

To use an expression of Andrea Fumagalli, globalisation has ultimately represented “a mirror hiding the continued redefinition of the hierarchy of economic and military powers”. [3] The destruction of the Twin Towers and the unfolding of operation “Enduring Freedom” has shattered the distorting “mirror”, revealing a more complex and more contradictory relationship between geopolitics and globalisation.

Imperial globalisation

But the fact that globalisation is in crisis and that this crisis rests on its main contradiction - its inability to fulfil the promise of providing global well being - should not lead us to consider it as a finished phenomenon. It is difficult to believe that the international vocation of capital is an exhausted tendency; it remains rather to see what will be the form of its affirmation, even if the current war indicates that this vocation will follow the route traced by US bombs and strategic lines drawn up by the Pentagon.

After years of seeming decline, the US is again trying to impose its primacy. They do so in both traditional and novel terms, with an unchanged imperial logic, which nonetheless cannot ignore the internal modifications which have taken place in international relations, precisely because of economic processes. Globalisation, with its spider’s web of global interlacing, renders this imperial domination more uncertain and dependent on interlocking alliances and supranational integrations. However, if on the economic level the situation is uncertain and confused, on the political and military level there is no state or even group of states capable of competing with the US. Never in recent history has so much power been concentrated in a single state and, symbolically, in the hands of a single man - the US president. The US offensive is aimed essentially at maintaining this primacy; thus, we are in the presence of a new phase of globalisation, an imperial globalisation where the tendency to integration is superimposed again on the murderous reality of inter-capitalist competition and the unequal development of contradictions - the strengthening of the US state, for example, is associated with the weakening of the Third World states, the Arab states in particular.

This evolution demands a sharpening of analyses, in particular in the movement against capitalist globalisation. And if it is true that until now the objectives, identity, action and shape of the mobilizations have been calibrated on an adversary - economic globalisation - which has represented uniquely the mirror of a more complex and multiform reality, the unveiling of this reality (imperial politics) demands a “leap” forward politically. The movement against capitalist globalisation, in becoming an anti-war movement, must pass brusquely to an adult phase, and hence give itself a new project and identity.

Reinventing the movement

This passage will not be easy or painless. Certainly, it cannot be simplified. For example, reference

to the traditional anti-imperialist struggle will not help at all, for at least three motives.

First, the traditional anti-imperialism which informed the post WW2 struggles whether in the West or in the ex-colonial countries, will not be what it was - with certain slogans, dynamics, objectives - without the existence of the USSR. The presence of an alternative bloc - leaving aside its errors and horrors - constituted a rearguard, a point of support which gave anti-imperialist struggles a credibility and a real, if erroneous, perspective.

Secondly, the interlacing between the absolute power of the free market and political domination leads perforce to a greater "politicisation" of objectives: to attack the IMF, WTO without posing the problem of what lies behind these is to miss the point. Initiatives against "one's own" state - and thus social initiatives, for example around the question of the budget - will acquire a new centrality. Thus, it is necessary to re-designate objectives.

Third, for the first time in the history of the US (references to the Civil War are inappropriate given the distance in time) at the height of its political - but not economic - power, the country has been struck at the heart; instead of being aggressors, they find themselves victims. It is this contradiction, moreover, which gives force and substance to the polemic on anti-Americanism that attempts to isolate the movement against capitalist globalisation. There is the prospect of a climate of "world civil war" where peoples, movements and workers are set against each other. In an era of globalisation, nationalism could yet have the upper hand.

The antidote to barbarism

These difficulties require the movement to call on its natural defences, its "antibodies", to react.

Most important of these is the ethical dimension; the capacity for indignation and moral revolt which stirs among thousands, indeed millions, of youth constitutes a formidable force in the new phase which is opening up. There is a great similarity between the capacity to be angered by the poverty in the world - which has generated the activity of a myriad of groups of youth in the US -and indignation at the new barbarism, war as terrorism. This facilitates discussion, debate, confrontations, which can allow the movement to make a qualitative leap.

The second antibody is internationalism. Against the two wrongs, we must oppose another rationality. Internationalism, which motivated the struggles in Seattle, Bangkok, Amsterdam, Nice and Genoa represents an unequalled rationality. The world forum at Porto Alegre constitutes in itself an immediate response to the war. Dialogue and common struggles of the movements of the whole world, including the Arab-Muslim world, are the only real antidote to barbarism, the only possible response to war.

Faced to the nationalist threat (whether western or Islamic), "the globalisation of struggles and hope" - to use the slogan of Via Campesina - represents the only viable alternative.

The third resource is democracy. War is the negation of democracy. To fight for a better, more advanced and more mature democracy represents a final antidote to barbarism. The practice of democracy - in the movement as in the construction of exemplary experiences - also constitutes the response for a correct reaffirmation of the public sector, at a time when too many neo-liberals are rediscovering Keynesianism under its military form.

Democratisation of public intervention is precisely the sole guarantee that it responds to social needs and not the logic of profit. There again Porto Alegre, with its practice of the participatory budget, shows the way. This year, more than ever, Porto Alegre will mean peace.

Notes

[1] The march for peace between the towns of Perugia and Assisi in Umbria (central Italy) has taken place every year since 1960, in October. This year an unprecedented 200-300,000 people participated. The event was marked by tensions among the organizers, between the centre-left, especially the Left Democrats (DS), who supported the “war against terrorism” and activists in the movement against capitalist globalisation fiercely opposed to military action against Afghanistan. At the end of the day, the leaders of the DS, heckled by demonstrators, had to depart precipitately.

[2] Daniel Bensaïd, “Le nouveau désordre imperial”, in *ContreTemps* number 2, 2001.

[3] (See La sfida al G8, various, Manifestolibri, 2001.

P.S.

* From International Viewpoint Online magazine : IV n° 336 - December 2001.

* Salvatore Cannavò is a member of the national political committee of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) and a PRC deputy in the Italian parliament lower house, the Chamber of Deputies.