

# From Resistance to Alternatives

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**The footnotes which are in the French original of this document, also posted on ESSF, are not in the present English translation. They will be added if we egt them. To open the French original, click on the “Translation article” command in the left column.**

## Two large opposing trends

Two large opposing trends are at play in the world today. The dominant trend in the past 25 to 30 years has been the pursuit of a neoliberal, imperialist, capitalist offensive. Lately, this trend has been marked by the growing rate of imperialist wars, notably over petroleum reserves, the increased arming of large powers, forced market liberalization on dominated countries, a general wave of privatization and the systematic attack on salaries and mechanisms of collective solidarity hard earned by workers. It is all part of the Washington Consensus, and such policies are at play not only in developing countries but in the most industrialized countries as well.

A counter trend, clearly still weak on a global scale, began emerging at the end of the nineties. This counter trend that started at the end of the nineties and is still very timid has its epicenter in Latin America. It is noticeable in many ways: the election of presidents seeking to break with or at least tame neoliberalism (beginning with Hugo Chavez’s election at the end of 1998); Argentina’s default on external public debt owed to private creditors from the end of December 2001 to March 2005; the passing of new democratic constitutions by constituent assemblies in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador; stronger civil and political liberties and progress in guaranteeing economic, social and cultural rights; the beginning of a return to state control of large public companies (such as Venezuelan Petroleum - PDVSA ), natural resources (water, petroleum and natural gas in Bolivia) and essential services (the production/distribution of electricity and telecommunications in Venezuela); the lessening of Cuba’s isolation; the defeat of ALCA (the free trade treaty that Washington attempted to impose on the entire North and South America); the emergence of ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas) and the development of trade and barter agreements between Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia, etc.; the strengthening of Petrocaribe to enable non oil-exporting countries of the Caribbean to buy Venezuelan oil at 40% off the world market price; Bolivia’s withdrawal from the ICSID (the World Bank’s court of investment settlements); the expulsion from Ecuador of the World Bank permanent representative; the announcement that Ecuador will close the US base in Manta in 2009; the launching of the Bank of the South.

This counter trend would not be possible without powerful popular mobilization against the neoliberal offensive beginning in the eighties in Latin America (April 1985 in Santo Domingo and February 1989 in Caracas), and happening periodically in different places around the world ever since. Cuba’s survival in spite of Washington’s blockade and aggressions has also contributed to this counter trend because it shows that it is possible to stand up to the strongest economic and military power on earth.

The resistance facing imperialism in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan also plays a fundamental role in Latin America because it is difficult for the US to directly intervene militarily there while it must

maintain a significant fighting force in the Middle East and Central Asia.

**We are on the threshold of 2015, the deadline for meeting the timid Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by the United Nations in 2000 . With only a handful of years to go, the picture ahead is very troubling.**

Clearly, the living conditions of a significant part of the population are deteriorating, as much in highly industrialized countries as in other parts of the world. This deterioration affects salaries, employment, health, nutrition, the environment, education and access to culture. It affects people's fundamental rights too, whether as individuals or communities. The decline is also evident in ecological equilibrium and in relationships between States and citizens, with the large powers resorting to military aggression. The United States is not the only aggressor; it has allies in Europe, where several countries participated in the aggressions against Iraq and Afghanistan, and some are still actively participating today. And then there is state terrorism exercised by the Israeli government against the people of Palestine, and the Russian authorities' intervention against the Chechen people.

### **Signs of barbarity surround us every day**

Goods, services and capital flow freely across the globe, but people from impoverished countries are blocked from going to wealthy countries. It is a form of contemporary barbarity to grant complete free circulation to capital and goods and to deny it to human beings.

In Western Europe and in the United States, it is particularly deplorable to see how asylum seekers are denied justice.

It is especially disgusting to hear many political leaders, including on the left, give credit to the idea that we cannot accommodate all of the world's suffering and therefore it is acceptable for countries of the North to massively refuse asylum and to collectively turn away or bar entry to anyone not benefiting from this right. This type of barbarity leaves asylum seekers stranded at the European Union's borders. Consider the people killed by firearm while trying to climb over EU-erected barriers in the Spanish enclaves in Morocco in 2005. Consider the thousands of people who lose their lives trying to cross the Strait of Gibraltar or attempting to reach the Canary Islands. This situation is obviously not limited to Europe. It is also happening along the Rio Grande at the southern United States border.

At the same time, the concentration of wealth among a tiny minority of the earth's population has reached a level never seen before in the history of humanity. A few thousand American, European, Chinese, Indian and African capitalists command a fortune greater than the annual revenue of half of the world's inhabitants. This is also barbarity.

The gap between rich and poor countries is growing steadily. This is unacceptable.

**These forms of degradation and this lack of justice cannot be resolved without a reversal of political course**

2015 is the deadline for the millennium goals, which are far too modest and do not address the root of the problem: the uneven distribution of wealth and the private-profit motive. In many countries, we are not getting closer to the millennium goals, we are moving away from them. This realization is highly troubling and raises the question of whether there are forces out there strong enough to defeat the current historical trend.

This historical trend goes back thirty years, equivalent to one generation. Pinochet's military coup in

Chile in 1973 created a laboratory in which to try out neoliberal policies that gradually spread to Western Europe – with Margaret Thatcher in 1979 –, to North America – during Ronald Reagan's presidency from 1981 to 1989 and to the rest of the world, for instance with the restoration of capitalism in Russia and China.

### **The advent of historical forces of opposition**

Are there historical forces capable of defeating the advancing neoliberal stranglehold? The answer is yes. Some people see 1999 as the beginning of protest, with the Battle of Seattle against the WTO. Several earlier dates should also be considered as milestones on the path of resistance to neoliberal globalization. 1989 is important in this regard. First it was thought of only as the year the Berlin Wall fell, of course a very significant historical event. The fall of the wall represented the end of the sad chapter of bureaucratic Stalinist socialism, a version which in fact had little to do with socialism, itself an emancipating process. But 1989 also represents the popular uprising in Venezuela on February 27 against the implementation of an adjustment plan concocted by the IMF and the government in power. It is only possible to understand the changes taking place in Venezuela in the last 10 years by keeping February 1989 in mind. 1989 was also the year of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, and the impressive mobilization against the Paris G7 which included a call for the abolition of third-world debt.

The second large milestone in the resistance movement against neoliberal capitalism was 1994. It was the year of three big events:

1 – On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista rebellion erupted in Chiapas. This group had already struggled for centuries against Spanish occupation and the oppressive regimes that followed. The Mayas – an indigenous people – voiced basic demands. In the universal language of their spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, they addressed the entire planet. This is not just the case of one man and his force of personality. It became the expression of a deeper movement and the Chiapas Indians were not alone in their struggle: in Ecuador another group had united to form the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador – CONAIE. And in 2005 Evo Morales, an Aymara Indian and political and labor leader, became the first indigenous president to take office in Latin America.

1994 thus marked the uprising of native – and minority – people who called into question the free trade treaty between the United States, Canada and Mexico as well as the counter agrarian reform imposed by neoliberal President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) declared a “pacifist” bloodless war on the Mexican government. In effect, the EZLN declared: « We have risen up and taken up arms, but we do not wish to use them. » This was not the final guerilla experiment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but rather a new 21<sup>st</sup> century-style guerilla process.

2 – Also in 1994, the World Bank and the International Monetary “celebrated” their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The event was commemorated by a huge protest gathering in Madrid. The demonstration, called “The Other Voices of the Planet,” later inspired French social movements which, as part of the mobilizations against the G7 in Lyon in 1996, formed collectives of the same name. The Spanish initiative united NGOs, movements such as « 0.7% platform » in which youth called for 0.7% of their country's GDP to be allocated to public development aid, the CADTM and also unions, feminist groups and ecologist movements. A whole series of movements united at this alternative summit and would later come together again in Seattle in 1999, in Porto Alegre in 2001 and so on.

3 – The third powerful event in 1994 was the Tequila crisis, once again in Mexico. It should be noted that in 1993-1994, everyone was speaking about the Asian miracle, the Mexican miracle and the Czech miracle for the countries of Eastern Europe. There was much talk about developing countries and their great achievements. The Tequila crisis shook up all of Latin America. It was the beginning

of a great financial crisis that struck one by one Southeast Asia (1997-1998), Russia (1998), Brazil (1999), and Argentina and Turkey (2000-2001).

**Whereas 1989 marks the beginning of mass, sustained resistance in Latin America to neoliberal policies, 1994 is a turning point in terms of new forms of resistance, new alliances and crisis besetting the neoliberal model, and 1999 reveals to the world in real time that it is possible to succeed against the WTO, a global organization symbolizing the commoditization of all human relations. These milestones are part of a larger set of struggles and social and political reorganization.**

New resistance everywhere

During the 1990s, following an initial period dominated by such figures as Pinochet, Thatcher and Reagan, new forms of resistance began to emerge in different regions of the globe. A number of groups began to speak out and the void left by the decline of the traditional workers' movement started to be filled.

The workers' movement developed and gained strength throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading the struggle for emancipation on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in most countries around the world. In Europe, this workers' movement with its strong bastions in the industrial labor class was central to the Resistance during World War II, and to the Liberation and ensuing conquest and victory against Nazism and Fascism. But weakened by the neoliberal offensive in the 1970s and 1980s, the workers' movement has entered into crisis. Almost the entire leadership of organized labor has become so bureaucratic and aligned with the capitalist system that it essentially serves as a brake on social struggle and radicalization. New unions form by breaking away from large traditional unions in order to mobilize, but it is difficult for them to take hold because the large bureaucracies place huge obstacles in their way. Within the large unions, sectors to the left of the central bureaucracy manage to play a helpful role. From time to time, salaried workers in the public and private sectors manage to mobilize on a large scale in spite of being weakened and anesthetized. This is the case in Western Europe where the labor movement is known to participate actively in large social mobilizations (in Italy, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain, etc.). It happened in autumn 1995 in France: salaried workers mobilized and had Prime Minister Alain Juppé removed from office, resulting in Lionel Jospin withdrawing France from formerly secret negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) and causing an important front in the neoliberal offensive to fall. Similar cases are happening in several Latin American, Asian, African and North American countries.

In the 1990s, groups that up until then had remained in the background began to come forward. Farmers' movements gained momentum world-wide: the Landless People's movement of Brazil was founded in 1984, Via Campesina was created in 1992, José Bové became a symbolic figure following Seattle, the coca producers led by Evo Morales mobilized in Bolivia, and many farmers' movements rose up in India, South Korea and other regions of the planet.

Who could ever have imagined, living in the most industrialized countries in the 1960s, that farmers would play such a key role in the new fight for social justice? The movement became an extremely important factor in resisting the neoliberal offensive, the commercialization of the world and the patenting of life forms. It focused attention on needs, particularly regarding public goods: water, land, seeds etc. Such needs or values were not new in and of themselves, but what changed was the attitude towards them, because traditionally, despite the gains of the Liberation and the strengthening of public services, the issue of public goods was not seen as an objective. But access to many public goods secured in the post World War II period is entirely under assault by the neoliberal offensive, and we are discovering the need to defend or regain them.

**Indigenous movements** are also worth mentioning because indigenous people are increasingly going on the offensive. In Bolivia, for instance, from the 1940s to the 1960s, Indian miners and their unions led the way for the Bolivian people. When the mines were closed in the 1980s, Indians, particularly coca farmers, formed a movement that was both peasant and indigenous. We saw retired or unemployed miners build a common front with the farmers' and indigenous movement: a new alliance was born.

It is also important to mention the **women's movement**, revived in 2000 with the World March of Women, and various youth movements that became very active in the 2000s (Peru , Mexico , the United States , Italy , Spain , France , Greece , Chili etc.).

A new force has also joined the ranks, the **"new proletariat"** or newly marginalized. The uprisings in the French suburbs (that spilled over some into Belgium and Germany) were led by this new proletariat. They are not so much exploited workers in an industrial context, although some fit that category; but the youth of the suburbs who rose up in autumn 2005 are proletariats in the real sense of the term: having no ownership of the means of labor, they must hire out their arms and minds to support their families. They live in tenuous conditions and are often victims of racism.

### **A challenge : connecting with the rebels**

The youth of the suburbs are a type of new proletariat who are seeking and finding ways they deem appropriate to make themselves heard. Sometimes the form their actions take is regrettable (hundreds if not thousands of cars burned) but it is a basic challenge for organized citizens' groups and union movements to be able to interface with this form of rebellion. It may not be easy, but in the fragmented circumstances in which we are living, it is hard to see how groups opposing the neoliberal onslaught can truly succeed without making connections. In countries of Western Europe or North America, those lucky enough to have job or retirement security and enough energy and good health left for the fight (people reaching retirement age 40 or 50 years ago did not have the same possibilities) must push for a new social alliance. If wage earners between the ages of 20 and 60 or retirees with benefits are unable to find a way to form a united front with the voiceless, the new proletariat, and create a protest movement that fundamentally reassesses society, then it will be difficult, in the most industrialized countries, to bring about radical change. Indeed, any change has always largely depended on the younger generation, whether they are in school, unemployed or already part of the workforce. In France, the youth let their voices be heard in the movement against the CPE (the "First Employment Contract") in spring 2006, but they are also raising their voices in the suburbs.

### **Many revolutionary tremors have shaken the world since the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

There were large revolutionary upheavals in many places around the world in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Revolutions in France, the United States and Haiti had significant and lasting repercussions, in particular in Latin America where wars of independence broke out early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1848, European countries experienced revolutionary uprisings. Three years later it was China's turn. The Taiping rebellion against the Qing dynasty began in 1851. Christopher Bayly wrote: "From the early days they proceeded to redistribute land, emancipate women and promote communities that some commentators later saw as representing a form of local socialism." A few years later, in 1857, rebellion broke out in India against the British occupier. It started with the mutiny of the Cipayes, local soldiers in the East India Company's Bengalese Army, and lasted two years, taking very radical forms. European governments colluded to repress the revolutionary wave in Europe, London crushed the rebellion in India, and London and Washington offered their aid to the Chinese rulers to defeat the Taiping revolt. Meanwhile, no international organization rose up that was capable of recognizing the links between the different struggles by the people and giving

them support.

Just before spring 1848, which saw a true European revolutionary dynamic develop, Karl Marx wrote "a specter is haunting Europe" which talked about communism. Along with Friedrich Engels and different political groups, he founded the International Workers Association. Four Internationals were created between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, revolutions shook Russia in 1905 and 1917, Mexico from 1910 to 1917, Germany (1918-1923), Italy (1918-1919), Spain (1936-1939), China (1949), Cuba (1959), Algeria (1954-1962), Nicaragua (1979), and others. The neoliberal offensive and the restoration of capitalism in the former Soviet block and in China severely limited the revolutionary perspective. But the fires of resistance to neoliberalism and capitalism have not gone out completely. A resistance movement emerged in the 1990s and has taken hold internationally.

### **The World Social Forum process**

The new alliance that is forming is expressed in part in the World Social Forum (WSF), a novel process compared to the international leftist organizations of previous periods in history. It is much less radical than the four Internationals that succeeded one another in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is due to the trauma left over by the bureaucratic disaster of certain socialist experiments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from gulags to the re-imposition of capitalism in the "real socialist" block. It is also due to the sheer force of the capitalist offensive that is underway.

The World Social Forum is one element in the formation of a vast, evolving international resistance movement. It is a heterogeneous movement without an epicenter. It embodies many but not all of the components of multifaceted resistance.

### **The WSF is no miracle**

The World Social Forum should not be analyzed only in terms of its innovative and positive aspects because it has obvious limitations. First, as indicated earlier, it does not represent all elements of the global resistance movement. Two examples are the Zapatistas in Mexico, who do not take part, and resistance struggles in China not connected to the WSF. Furthermore, the notion of alternative strategy is a new one, and the old debate between reformers and revolutionaries is still open. Should we break with the system or simply rearrange it and introduce regulatory mechanisms and a more civilized form of capitalism? This debate is ongoing and will certainly grow stronger. It could divide the movement, which currently represents an alliance between more or less radical movements who share a charter of principles. In general, there is a platform of basic demands ranging from the Tobin Tax to the abolition of third-world debt, the fight against tax havens, the refusal of patriarchy, the desire for peace and disarmament, the right to sexual diversity etc. But whereas there is agreement to wage the fight together on these points, how can they be achieved and how can even more fundamental goals be added? What is this other possible world that we proclaim with all our might and wish to create quickly so that younger generations will actually experience it (and not just dream and yearn)? This point must become the focus of a strategic debate. It is essential to discuss alternatives and at the same time the means to implement them. No effort must be spared.

A negative trend is currently jeopardizing the WSF's future. The success of the global meetings, which have regularly brought together several tens of thousands of participants and delegates (and in some cases more than 100'000 such as in Mumbai in 2004 and Porto Alegre in 2005), has turned some of those involved into event organizers and fundraisers. Their vision of an alternative is largely limited to giving globalization a more human face. Social movements and international campaigns themselves, beset by debates between radicals and moderates, do not bring enough weight to bear

on the future of the WSF. The mountain runs the risk of giving birth to a mouse and the WSF risks sinking into an endless organization of meetings.

### **What can facilitate change?**

Among the forces of change, resistance movements are active in all geographic areas of the world, even in China, a country presently very much on the margins of the social forum process. This country is experiencing an extremely significant social struggle, reminiscent of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In response to raw capitalism, forms of labor and urban resistance are emerging there similar to what we knew in Europe and in the United States a century ago. One fundamental difference that may make the revolutionary process in China difficult is that socialism and communism were given a bad name by the Chinese authorities who led the country up until now. Socialism has been severely discredited and there is an obvious lack of reference points and a distaste for political risk that could very well last.

But, much yearned for change can come from anywhere on the planet.

### **Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, protagonists of change**

In terms of revolutionary change, the South seems to be more of a breeding ground right now than the North. Today, the most innovative and sweeping change is seen in Venezuela, Bolivia and more recently Ecuador. Of course it is important to keep a critical view and not to idealize. Shifts are possible, and the chance of not moving towards a true distribution of wealth always lurks when capitalists inside and outside resist strongly, and especially when there is strong pressure from governments in highly industrialized countries and their regional allies (the regimes of Alvaro Uribe in Colombia and Alan Garcia in Peru). These three experiences should not be reduced simply to the roles played by Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales or Rafael Correa, although these three figures are key. They have a positive influence on the process and are part of the powerful movements underway in their countries. But Evo Morales would not be there without the huge protests against water privatization in Cochabamba in April 2000 and the even bigger protests against the privatization of natural gas in January and February 2003. Chavez would not have become president in 1998 were it not for the enormous anti-IMF riots in 1989 and the powerful resistance by the Venezuelan people. Rafael Correa would not have been elected without the 10 years of struggle that toppled four rightist presidents .

These three countries are showing the way because the movement found a channel within the government. All three governments reclaimed the initiative regarding public goods: Bolivia regained control of gas and water and Venezuela reinstated public control of oil production and allowed oil revenues to serve a new social project of regional redistribution. Venezuela has signed agreements with non-oil exporting countries of the region and sells oil to them at a price lower than the global market price. In addition, Cuba, which has sent 20,000 volunteer doctors to provide free health care to the Venezuelan population, has launched a very interesting cooperative relationship with Venezuela and Bolivia. It is a type of bartering arrangement between countries with different capacities, backgrounds and political models. Ecuador is in the middle of a constitutional reform that could lead to significant democratic progress in the country. Furthermore, the Ecuadorian president declared on several occasions that he is reconsidering odious debt repayment, and he called for an audit of internal and external public debt.

What is happening right now in these three Andean countries is very significant. Reference to Simón Bolívar's struggle shows that there is a desire to link present circumstances with past revolutionary experiences and to view the present in a Latin American context. There are also references more and more to the liberation struggles led by indigenous people, for instance the rebellions under

Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari . The African contribution to the cultural richness of countries like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador is also more and more apparent.

### **Steering the course of history towards liberation of the oppressed**

What forces will be capable of reversing the last thirty years of history? Good examples such as Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador will combine with mobilization in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. This linkage of forces between the old world and the new world could produce a veritable turning point in the course of history. Having said that, it is not guaranteed. That is why it is important for all of us to take part in citizen action.

### **Moving towards 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism**

It is not necessary to foresee the collapse of capitalism or the triumph of some revolutionary project in order to act every day and resist abuses of justice. Nothing in history is inevitable. Capitalism will not fall on its own. Even if a new grand revolutionary event is not for tomorrow, it is reasonable to imagine that we are heading towards new socialist models involving liberty and equality. There is by no means consensus in the movement or within the World Social Forum, but many people consider it necessary to reinvent socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While avoiding the traumatic pitfalls of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hideousness of Stalinism or of events in China and in Pol Pot's Cambodia, we must bring back the emancipating socialist project of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the revolutionary values of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, because struggles to throw off oppression have been stepping stones throughout humanity, from Spartacus to Tupac Amaru to the rebel afro-descendants led by Zumbi in Brazil to today's struggles. We must take into account new contributions from many fronts as well as new demands, and inject all this into 21<sup>st</sup> century reality. Socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the free association of producers, it is equality between women and men, it is an international project, a federation of countries and regions in a framework of large continental entities with respect for major texts, international pacts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the Pact of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights of 1966, a series of instruments to define rights in an international and universal way that have been written and adopted during earlier revolutions. Attaining these fundamental rights can only come about through creative enactment of a new model of socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has more than nine decades to go...

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\* Translated by Carol Bonvin (Coorditrad).