

## The Fourth World Social Forum in Mumbai

### A Conclusion

The fourth World Social Forum that has just ended in Mumbai was an important milestone for the anti-globalisation movement. For the first time the Forum took place in Asia and not in Porto Alegre in Brazil. This was not only a success but has enriched the Forum in many ways. Over 1200 events and over 100.000 participants were strongly influenced by movements from the Indian sub-continent. As in Porto Alegre, unions and non-government organisations social and ecological groups as well as radical basis groups succeeded in bringing people together under the motto "Unity in Diversity"<sup>1</sup>

Directly oppressed peoples were much more strongly represented than in previous Forums. The lowest caste of the Dalit, homo and transsexuals, womens' groups, the handicapped and inhabitants and indigenous peoples forced out of their homelands and forests were able to make their protest clearly heard. Especially those groups who are suffering in India were able to make good use of the Forum.

Their grassroots organisations created a second language with their demonstrations, dance and theatre at the Forum. Discussions with them were a great enrichment. Comments in some media about a carnival are evidence of an arrogant and superficial view. Through the street events the Forum profited from a first hand knowledge about real living conditions, that were often only discussed abstractly in the conferences. The Indian organisers managed to mobilise groups to come to attend the Forum who have otherwise been under represented. It is also pleasing that the "Stars" of the movement played a much smaller role than at Porto Alegre.

In the seminars and conferences, the primary arena for the Forum, attendance was especially high for those events which dealt with problems directly affecting people in India: questions about access to water, land and seeds, the caste system and forced resettlement due to major projects such as river dams. The discussions about a Coca-Cola plant, which increasingly takes water away from small farmers in southern India received special attention. At discussions about topics that are little discussed in India the situation was different and the representatives of the international movements held discussions amongst themselves, and the dialogue with Indian groups was only partially successful.

It was noticeable at many events how strongly initiatives from the victims of oppression relied on the concept of human rights. Earlier criticism about this "bourgeois legal concept" did play hardly any role.

The great interest in the concept of a global democracy was new such as the suggestion by the British writer and activist George Monbiot of a World Parliament. The tendency of many initiatives and movements to engage more directly in the institutionalised political process is a move in the same direction. Various groups referred positively to the role of the UN, and the formation of a G20 group within the WTO was even welcomed by groups demanding the abolition of the WTO itself. Via Campesina is working on an international Convention on Food Security. Events concerning Globalisation and War of course took up of the Forum.

Parallel to the WSF various further meetings took place. The Mumbai resistance was particularly noticeable as they heavily criticised the Forum. Key focus of the criticism was the diversity of the Forum, and greater political clarity was the main demand. One can also view it narrowly - as a demand for a clear anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist position as well as a concrete alternative to the existing World Order. Whether such a return to old fashioned form of organisation is especially smart must be questioned in view of the Globalisation of the challenges and plurality of the answers to them within the movement. Many of the Indian groups took this view and so made the Mumbai Resistance a relatively small event

It is regrettable that China was so little discussed at the Forum, and the Tibetans discussed their position without any Chinese attendance. Workers and human rights in China were seldom

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<sup>1</sup> This report contains many comments made at the closing session from German participants as well as from the analytical discussions in the International Council of the World Social Forum.

discussed, nor was the position of new industries in Asia which face hard Chinese competition. Sections of the Indian industry have threatened to emigrate if they don't get a further three "Special Economic Zones" where the typically lousy working and environmental standards do not apply, but special tax incentives are on offer. Similar threats have also come from South East Asian industries.

Other parts of the world, such as Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe were also clearly under-represented, and sadly many South American groups did not make it to India. More positively more than 1.000 people from Pakistan took part in spite of the fact that the Indian Government, contrary to previous assurances, stopped issuing visas. The Pakistani delegation was the largest to visit neighbouring India since independence.

The delegation from Germany was of a similar size and political make up as in Porto Alegre (Unions, church groups, development NGOs, BUND, students party political foundations and Attac). This time however the India fans were in attendance and the South American faction stayed at home! Sadly leading representatives from the German churches, unions, environmental and social groups were not present. But it was good to note that Attac activists, with 40 delegates was the largest German group.

The lessons of Mumbai clearly show that the to involve other regions in the WSF process it is necessary that the Forum takes place in different locations. At the moment the planning trend is for the WSF to take place every second year in Porto Alegre, and move every other year. In a meeting with African groups doubts were expressed as to whether Africa could organise a WSF in 2006. The timing was also considered, and there is increasing support for a Forum to take place every two years. However it is definite that the next WSF will take place in Porto Alegre in January 2005. It will be in parallel with the World Economic Forum. Further decisions as to the location and frequency of the Forum will be taken by the International Council.

It was impressive how successful India was in organising the Forum with very little support from international business. Almost all the food and other services were supplied by local providers. The organisers also proved consistent in the financing and grants from the Ford Foundation were not accepted, nor were development funds from governments that took part in the War in Iraq.

In the German and to some extent in the international media, many voices questioned the value of the Forum, and what it actually achieved. Unlike, party conferences there is no main motion, and no resolutions decided by all participants, so that with over 1200 events it is difficult for reporters to get an overview of all events. That doesn't change the fact that in the various campaign areas resolutions were agreed for further actions and many useful contacts made. But these resolutions are only binding on those involved and not the Forum as a whole. Only this way is the plurality of the WSF possible. The WSF is the best place to plan campaigns and discuss events with activists from all over the world. Nowhere else do so many protagonists meet in one place. But to increase the political effectiveness of the Forum, it would be necessary to go a step further. Some key political demands could become a form of 'Consensus from Porto Alegre', as Bernard Cassen from Attac France has suggested. These demands would of course have to be determined in a public process. The trick would be to formulate such demands that are concrete and clear enough to have a political bite, without damaging the broad support for the Forum. Even if it transpires that this is unattainable, the Forum is an important and invaluable event that is by no means of no consequence.

This year's international Attac meeting was also a success. There was a very good international exchange of experiences to the various campaigns - GATS, Tobin tax, tax-havens, European constitution, and privatisation. Many members and sections regretted that the campaign for the Tobin Tax was weaker and less of a priority than it was two years ago. In some countries the priorities are being re-thought. In Belgium a parliamentary decision on the Tobin Tax will be taken shortly. Other Attac groups are planning new campaigns. In the somewhat technical part of the meeting actions were agreed above all to: revise the international Attac platform and on the form and presentation of the Attac website. On the revision of the international platform all activists can

take part.<sup>2</sup>

Many activities for this year were agreed at parallel meetings of social groups. A meeting of unions representatives, the peace movement, the small farmers network Via Campesina, Friends of the Earth, womens' networks various local and national social foren and Attac agreed to call an international 'Day of Action' against the occupation of Iraq for the 20. March. A meeting of European initiatives, confirmed the Action Days against Social Cutbacks on 2. And 3. April. The attending organisations will also mobilise for the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong, but the exact date is not yet fixed. At the meeting of anti war groups a network against foreign military bases was founded as in many parts of the world there is increasing resistance to various NATO bases.

Much media attention was caused by a suggestion from Arundhati Roy. In her speech at the opening session she proposed boycotting and 'closing down' two US firms which have profited from the neo-liberal order in post war Iraq. This would enable movements against the war and against the neo-liberal globalisation to find a common focus. Initially she left open whether this should include violent protests, but in later interviews she stressed non-violence and clarified her position. Unfortunately this suggestion was not taken up at meetings of the anti-war or social movements as too much energy was taken up by the Action Days on 20. March.<sup>3</sup> It remains to be seen whether this proposal develops a life of its own.

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<sup>2</sup> Details will follow shortly visa the internal Attac Lists

<sup>3</sup> In separate media statements both myself and Philip Hershel essentially greeted this proposal though we also stressed, several times, that European corporations should also be boycotted. The Iraq war and the neo-liberal post war order is influenced by European states as well as the international economic institutions. Besides which it was important for us that such international actions remain peaceful.