

Walden Bello: Pacific Panopticon

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The Filipino analyst and organizer of Focus on the Global South, veteran of the years of Allende and Marcos, discusses the prospects for the World Social Forum after September 11, arguing for the need to link protests against the IMF and WTO to campaigns against US military expansion.

Could you tell us about your education and family background?

I was born in Manila, in 1945. My father was in the movie business in the Philippines, and involved in advertising and entertainment. My mother was a singer and composer—both of them were interested in the arts. My father read widely. The story goes that he was immersed in Thoreau when I was born, and decided to name me Walden; though I have two or three Spanish names as well. My parents were both Spanish-speakers, but they didn't transmit it to us—English was more or less the first language in our household when I was growing up. I had two other Philippine languages, but just spoken ones, not written. I was taught by Jesuits, from first grade through to college graduation, and my initial radicalization was a reaction against that conservative educational system—the Jesuit schools in the Philippines essentially catered for the children of the elite. I wasn't from that background, and was instinctively opposed to their strict class bias, in a pre-political way.

This was prior to the development of liberation theology?

There were only a handful of people from the university who took up radical positions in the early part of the Marcos period. For the most part, the Jesuit system has been a fairly efficient producer of ruling-class minds. As in Latin America, a layer of Christians with a national-liberation perspective did emerge from some of the religious orders, especially the relatively newer ones, such as the Redemptorists. But that never predominated among the Jesuits. I knew them all, and very few of them—maybe eight or ten—ever embraced a progressive politics. The Jesuits always had a liberal façade; but in terms of their education and the people they produced, they were really quite conservative.

What did you do after graduation?

Upper-class education in the Philippines led automatically either to a corporate career with the multinationals, or into law and government. I didn't want to be trapped in either—at least, not so soon. So I went down to Sulu and taught in a college in Jolo for about a year. There I got involved in discussions with Muslim intellectuals—people who would go on to form the Mindanao National Liberation Front, in which a number of my students later became active too. I was in sympathy with their analysis of a systematic discrimination against Muslims in the Philippines, although I might not have supported outright secession.

After that I worked for a few years as publications director of the Institute of Philippine Culture, which had been set up by anthropologists from the University of Chicago. Their approach was highly empirical but their ideas about Filipino social structure and behavioural patterns still had a lot of influence. They were closely linked to the US Agency for International Development. At that time, a huge proportion of American funding for social-science research came from the military. People would go to the Philippines—to places like the IPC—on US naval-research grants. This was in the second half of the sixties, at the height of the war against Vietnam—but the social scientists there still claimed their research had no military application. It was a highly politicizing moment for me, in understanding how the system worked: that there was no distinction at all between this sort of funding and academic research.

Was this the time of Marcos's re-election?

I left for post-graduate studies at Princeton just before the elections in 69—it was a vicious campaign. These were momentous times. In 1970 there was the so-called First Quarter Storm in the Philippines, with the rise of the student movement. But it was the American student struggle against the war in Vietnam that really politicized me, in the United States itself. My next important experience was going down to Chile for my doctoral research in 1972. I was attracted by Allende's constitutional road to socialism, and wanted to study political mobilization in the shanty towns. I spent a couple of months working with Communists organizing in the local communities, but as soon as I arrived I realized that the correlation of forces had already shifted: it was now the counter-revolution that was in the ascendant. So I ended up re-focusing both my academic work and political interests on the emergence of the reaction in Chile. Coming from the Third World, this wasn't easy to do. If you weren't Chilean, and were brown-skinned, you tended to be marked down as a Cuban agent. That got me into trouble a number of times.

The dissertation developed into a comparative study of counter-revolution in Germany, Italy and Chile. It acknowledged the role of the CIA, but put equal, if not greater, weight on domestic class forces in explaining the consolidation of the anti-Allende bloc. The experience gave me a healthy scepticism—running clean against much standard American political science on developing countries—about the democratic role of the middle class. I could see that this was a very ambivalent layer.

By the time I got back to the US to defend my thesis in early 73, Marcos had declared martial law, and the Filipino community in the States was in uproar. It was then that I first became active in exile Filipino politics. Various groups were forming. There was a Movement for a Free Philippines, associated with Senator Raúl Manglapus, one of the stalwarts of the elite opposition to Marcos who had fled to the US straight after the declaration of martial law. A number of Americans, some of them specialists in the area, set up a group called the Friends of the Filipino People; among them was Daniel Schirmer from Boston, who had just written *Republic or Empire*. I gravitated towards the Union of Democratic Filipinos—the Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP)—which was allied to the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army.

Given the direct relationship between the US and the martial-law regime, which you analysed at the time in *Logistics of Repression*, [1] how far did the broad Left in the Philippines see its fight as a national liberation movement, rather than simply opposition to military rule?

Marcos, of course, claimed that the rising revolutionary movement was his central reason for declaring martial law, saying it demanded a tough centralized response. His other pretext was what he called the "democratic stalemate"—a stand-off between the traditional elite and the Left, which he maintained hampered development. The Communist Party of the Philippines had been refounded in 1968—the "old" CP was regarded as hopelessly compromised and pro-Soviet—and in March 1969 formed the New People's Army, based essentially in central and northeastern Luzon. Its strategy was classically Maoist: create liberated areas in the countryside, treating the towns as a secondary front, mainly important for recruiting people to the NPA. So when Marcos imposed martial law, there was already a very active, revived Philippine Left.

Could you go back to the Philippines after 72?

No—when I tried to renew my passport in 74 or 75, it was confiscated without explanation. So I was effectively stateless for the next several years. The KDP was now the central focus of my life. I taught at the City College in San Francisco, the State University of New York, and at Berkeley for about four years—not in order to pursue an academic career, but to survive. I joined the CPP and ended up wherever they sent me: New York, San Francisco, Washington. But I was also developing an area of analysis and writing that didn't automatically reflect the party's priorities, but that I felt was important for understanding what was really going on. Most of the Left weren't very interested in the World Bank at the time, but I had a sense that, for a variety of strategic reasons, it was absolutely critical. One of the biggest development projects in the Philippines was a nuclear-power plant; that got me interested in energy issues more generally. In 1979 Peter Hayes, an Australian, Lyuba Zarskey and I set up the Nautilus Institute, to research the intersections between energy and politics. It still exists today, but I was mainly associated with it in the eighties, when we produced documentation on the nuclear plant in the Philippines, and then went on to look at US deployments and military structure in the Pacific. [2]

It was when we were researching the question of US bilateral aid to Marcos that we realized how much of it was being channelled through the World Bank. The role of multilateral institutions—and the Bank in particular—in the Philippines dwarfed direct American support. That's where my own interest began. I had no formal background in economics; it was all on-the-job training. Figuring out the contours of this comprehensive development strategy became a passionate, all-consuming task, that eventually led to a book, *Development Debacle*. I began to realize that the process had a dynamic of its own, powered by a very specific ideology.

In the Philippines, the years from 1980 to 1986 were marked by a combination of economic crisis and dwindling regime legitimacy. The South was badly hit by the world recession of 82. Marcos lost a lot of his local power-base, and became increasingly reliant on the multilaterals and US support. At the turn of the decade the World Bank forced Marcos to appoint a cabinet of technocrats to protect its more open-market model of export-oriented production from the depredations of his cronies. Before 83, the Americans' great fear had been that the opposition to Marcos might fall under the sway of the NPA, since the oligarchic alternative was weak and fragmented—its main leader, Benigno Aquino, was out of the country—and the Left appeared to be largely hegemonic in the resistance to martial law. That changed in 1983, when Aquino returned and was assassinated. His martyrdom revived middle-class and elite opposition, which was gradually able to win the initiative away from the Left.

From then on, Marcos became a thorn in the side of the United States. He didn't want to open up the system, and wouldn't agree to the various suggestions from Washington that he should incorporate the illegal opposition into substantive political roles. The tensions between the two came to a head in early 1986, when the US pushed Marcos into holding elections, and he stole them. The result was to trigger middle-class and elite civil resistance, and an uprising with military backing took place. In Washington functionaries like Michael Armacost, the State Department official responsible for the area, took alarm when Marcos prepared to bombard the rebels, and the US stepped in. Marcos was flown out to Hawaii, and Corazon Aquino was installed in power, to popular acclaim. In effect, oligarchic democracy was restored in the Philippines. The CPP, which had boycotted the elections of 1986, arguing they were just a façade to let Marcos to stay in power, was a bystander as these events unfolded. This was one of the reasons for the eventual marginalization of the Left from the mainstream of political life in the country.

What did you do after the fall of Marcos?

When I went back to Manila, I joined the faculty at the University of the Philippines. By then I was more interested in working on broader issues—the role of multilaterals, the Asian development model, the newly industrializing countries—than in specifically national concerns. From the late eighties I was involved with a number of organizations—the Philippine Resource Centre, Food First, Oxfam and Greenpeace—in a personal capacity, rather than in connexion with the CPP. It was not that I was disillusioned at a general level, but I felt that the Left in the archipelago was out of touch with both local and world realities. The purge of the New People’s Army in the mid-eighties, when it executed many of its own militants in a panic over infiltration by spies from the military—I wrote about this—made me question a number of the movement’s philosophical assumptions, about class and the individual. [3] Its miscalculation over the elections of 1986 also had a big impact on me.

Was it at this stage that you founded Focus on the Global South?

We wanted to establish an institute that would look at Asian economic, political and ecological issues, linking them into the broader picture. We based it in Bangkok, partly for reasons of cost, and partly because of conditions for research and analysis there not to be found elsewhere in Asia. Also, Philippine NGOs have a way, naturally enough, of absorbing people into local issues, while we wanted to concentrate on regional and global work. Examining World Bank development models and other patterns of domination had made me increasingly aware that these couldn’t simply be challenged at the national level. Whether it was a question of opposing the US military, or the World Bank or IMF or multinational corporations, it was crucial to begin creating cross-regional links. When the movement in the Philippines succeeded—helped by various contingent factors—in getting the American bases shut down in the early nineties, a number of us warned that, unless we changed the military equation in the region, the victory would not last very long. It didn’t change, and today US troops are back in the Philippines with a vengeance. National movements, important as they are, have to combine with the creation of regional and global movements. Traditional paradigms of international solidarity are no longer appropriate in the current situation.

Who else did you draw into Focus on the Global South?

Kamal Malhotra, from India, was my co-director. The people who helped set us up in Bangkok were Thai scholars, like Suthy Prasertsert, who made a very important intellectual contribution. We were also in touch with the Korean movement, and people like Muto Ichiyo in Japan. Quite a few of these have come onto the board of Focus, which we’ve tried to make as diverse as possible. So far as the name goes, although we started from Asian and Pacific issues, our horizons were always the global patterns of domination and resistance.

On the question of terminology: do you see problems in defining, or reclaiming, words like ‘South’ and ‘North’ or ‘development’ and ‘globalization’, which international institutions often deploy in a mystifying way?

I hope Focus hasn’t contributed to this. We have always been sceptical about the word ‘development’: capitalist development would be a clearer phrase, and we usually speak of ‘corporate-driven globalization’, tying it to the dynamics of world capitalism. I resisted using ‘globalization’ at all at first; people were tossing it about in such a rhetorical fashion that it obscured the real class forces involved. In fact, all these terms tend to be used much too loosely. I was appalled when Oxfam branded some of its allies as ‘globaphobes’, distorting everything they were fighting for. So far as ‘North’ and ‘South’ are concerned, a distinction between the super-industrialized, advanced countries and the rest of the world—or between the centre of the global capitalist economy and its

periphery—;is clearly valid. At the same time, unequal relations of the North—;South type are reproduced within the North itself, while there are Third World elites in the South whose economic interests and lifestyles are closely integrated with the North. So we’ve tried to inflect these terms in a more nuanced way.

Could you describe the activities of Focus?

Our work has been dictated by the priorities of the global struggle. Trade is a major axis. International trade relations, and organizations like the WTO, have become so central to the structuring of the global economy that they demand special attention. ‘Security issues’ are a second axis—that is, tracking the emergent patterns of US military and political hegemony, especially in the Asia—;Pacific region, and helping to build resistance. We also look at the ways in which local elites—;globally, as well as more specifically in South and East Asia—;become integrated into the strategic system. A third area is civil society. We examine the different facets of the popular organizations it harbours, their tremendous potential contribution to democratization, but also their strong tendency to be co-opted and to impose their own agenda on broader movements. Finally, we look at the role of ideologies. Many of the ultra-simplistic conceptualizations of Islam broadcast by CNN and the like are being naively reproduced by people in the South. We wanted to adopt a more critical perspective on the various aspects of Islamic revivalism. Bearing in mind its many retrograde elements, we still need to ask: why has it been in the forefront of the struggle against the United States? But Muslim ‘fundamentalism’ is not the only sort we discuss—we look at Hindu and Christian versions too. Still, the two key institutions to which we always come back are the WTO and the Pentagon. One of our criticisms of the movement against corporate globalization is its tendency to de-link the economic logic of the multinationals and WTO from American military dominance. We need to understand how the two connect—which also means trying to bring together two different movements.

In concrete terms, much of our research and analysis comes out in Focus publications. Take a look at our website—;www.focusweb.org—and you’ll see the range of what we do. We organize conferences, particularly on financial, trade and military issues. We work to bring together the global movements—in particular, the peace movements and the anti-corporate globalization campaigns. We are also involved in what bureaucrats call a ‘capacity-building’ role. The Vietnamese government got in touch with us to discuss whether or not they should join the WTO. We gave them a great deal of technical information about the Organization that demonstrated how and why it would be a disaster if they did. One of our jobs is to keep grass-roots communities and national organizations, including some governments, informed about the workings of global institutions. In the process, we get to hear about a lot of interesting initiatives from the grass roots. For instance, there have been efforts in Thailand to bypass the national currency system; people have set up their own common currencies in some of the regions. In Argentina and Chile too, they are improvising barter systems giving local people more control over trade. There’s a two-way process of learning in this sort of work.

How are you funded?

We have more than twenty funders, including European NGOs like NOVIB, Oxfam, Inter Pares and Development and Peace in Canada. We also get some money from the Ford Foundation and other outfits on a project-by-project basis. We have several principles about this. Firstly, we diversify our funding—;no more than 20 per cent should come from any one source, to guarantee our independence, and to make sure we don’t tie our financial survival to just one or two funders. Secondly, we need to make sure that there are no strings attached. Thirdly, no funding from the US state. Fourthly, with other governments and institutions, our board always considers proposals on a case-by-case basis. So far, it’s worked quite well. For instance, although we receive a lot of funding from Oxfam, and respect many aspects of their work, our 20-per-cent and no-strings-attached rules have allowed us to be very open in our criticisms of their market-access campaign and recent Trade Report, which argues that it is the access of Southern countries to Northern markets which is the critical problem of the global trade regime.

What are your differences here?

We don't agree that market access is the key issue—to pose it as such effectively supports the paradigm of export-oriented growth, and presupposes a quid pro quo of open Southern markets. Moreover, Oxfam's campaign actively deflects the movement from far more important problems. The overriding priority right now is to oppose the WTO's push for a wider mandate. Its current agenda is to consolidate the concessions extracted from the developing countries at Doha in order to make the fifth round in Mexico next year a springboard for broadening the WTO's scope to include investment, government procurement and competition policy—an expansion whose scale would rival the Uruguay Round. This is what the opponents of neoliberalism should be concentrating on: increasing the domestic pressure on the real areas of conflict within the WTO, exacerbating the differences over steel tariffs and farming subsidies. Its formal requirement for consensus is a weakness we should try to exploit—it means that talks can founder. In that sense, the Economist is right: corporate-driven globalization is reversible.

How would you summarize your own critique of the WTO ?

The WTO is an opaque, unrepresentative and undemocratic, non-transparent organization driven by a free-trade ideology which, wherever its recipes—liberalization, privatization, deregulation—have been applied over the past twenty years to re-engineer Third World economies, has generated only greater poverty and inequality. That's the first point: implementation of neoliberal dogmas leads to great suffering. Secondly, the WTO is not an independent body but a representative of American state and corporate interests. Its development has been closely linked to the changing needs of the United States, which has moved from supporting a weak GATT to promoting a muscular WTO as a nominally multilateral order with strong enforcement rules. Neither the EU nor Japan were particular partisans of the WTO when it was founded, at the behest of the Clinton administration. The American state is very flexible in how it pursues its ends—it can be multilateral when it wants to, and unilateral at the same time. The Achilles heel of the WTO is its secretive, undemocratic, oligarchic decision-making structure. This is where we should take aim.

What would you propose as a positive alternative to the WTO regime?

What we call for is deglobalization—hopefully, the term won't contribute to the confusion; I still think it's a useful one. If you have a centralized institution imposing a one-size-fits-all model across the globe, it eliminates the space for developing countries to determine their economic strategies themselves. The use of trade policy for industrialization is now banned by the WTO. Yet if you look at the experience of the newly industrializing countries—of Latin America in the sixties and the seventies, say—the reason they were able to achieve a modicum of capitalist development was precisely because they had that room for manoeuvre. We believe that the WTO and similar bodies need to be weakened, if not eliminated entirely. Other international institutions, such as UNCTAD—the UN Conference on Trade and Development, which was performing reasonably well until the rug was pulled out from under it by the WTO—should be strengthened, as should regional organizations like MERCOSUR, which has the potential for being an effective, locally directed import-substitution bloc. Regional financial institutions need to be created, too. If the Asian Monetary Fund had existed in 1997 and 98—when it was pushed by all the countries in the region—the course of the Asian financial crisis would have been different. Instead the idea was killed off by Rubin and Summers, as a challenge to the hegemony of the IMF.

In world terms, then, we call for greater decentralization, greater pluralism, more checks and balances. In a less globalized order, grass-roots groups and popular movements would be in a stronger position to determine economic strategies. At the moment, local elites can always say, 'We have no choice but to follow this course—if we don't, the IMF or WTO will rule our policy protectionist'. Focus on the Global South is not against trade; well managed, an increase in imports and exports could be a good thing. But in the Third World the pendulum has swung so far in the direction of export-oriented production, that it does need to be corrected back towards the domestic market—the balance between the two has been lost in the drive to internationalize our economies. We can only do that if we structure trade not through WTO open-market rules but by practices that are negotiated among different parties, with varying interests. Deglobalization doesn't imply an uncritical acceptance of existing regional

organizations. Some of them are merely outposts of the globalized economy, common markets controlled by local technocrats and industrial elites. Others could sustain a genuine regional development programme.

What would deglobalization mean for finance?

The deregulated character of global finance has been responsible for much of the instability that has rocked our economies since the late eighties. We definitely need capital controls, both at regional and local level. In different ways, the experiences of Malaysia, Chile and China have all shown their efficacy. What's required is an Asian monetary mechanism that would not only support countries whose currencies are under attack, but would also begin to furnish a basis for regional control. As to a world monetary authority, I am very sceptical of its viability as way of controlling global finance, since these centralized structures are now so permeable by the existing market powers, especially the big central banks. I don't think such an institution would provide an effective defence of the interests of Third World countries. I have never believed that access to foreign capital was the strategic factor in development, although it can be a supplementary one. In fact, our local elites—locked as they are into the existing international order—typically have tremendous reserves of capital. The problem is whether governments in the region have the ability to impose capital controls on them. The same goes for tax regimes, which in Southeast Asia are very retrograde. Of course, the wealth of these elites should be subject to proper taxation.

Land reform?

The distribution of land remains a central issue. One reason why export-oriented production could be pushed so successfully by the World Bank in the seventies, and had such strong support from local establishments and technocrats, was that the markets in developing countries were so limited, precisely because of highly unequal asset and income distributions. A focus on exports was seen by the elites as a way out of the trap of shrunken local markets—attaching your industrialization to the big market outside. It was a way to dodge the massive land reform needed to create—in Keynesian terms—the local purchasing power that could drive an indigenous process of industrialization. So agrarian reform is a necessity throughout Asia, as well as Latin America, for both social and economic reasons.

From Seattle onwards it's been clear that a critical faultline within the movement runs between those, essentially Northern, activists and organizations who group themselves around a combination of environmental and labour-rights issues—the position you've described as Green protectionism—and those in the South who see development in a much wider sense as the main priority. It would clearly be an illusion to think that these two perspectives could fit together easily. Yet if the movement is to develop, this tension has somehow to be negotiated and resolved?

The faultline is real, though I would point out that there are large areas of agreement between Northern and Southern movements—a shared critique of multinationals and global capital, a common perception that citizens need to play a stronger role in curbing the rules of the market and of trade. The fact that people from both tendencies can come together in coalitions and work on a range of points is testimony to the strength of these overlapping interests. However, I think the labour question has to be worked out. We were very critical of the way that trade unions in the US—and, to a great extent, in Europe, through the ICFTU—argued that the WTO would be strengthened if it took up tariffs and labour rights. [4] In our view they should not be calling for a more powerful WTO. That's a very short-sighted response. Beneath the surface rhetoric about human rights in the South, this is essentially a protectionist movement, aimed at safeguarding Northern jobs. Whenever we raise this in a fraternal way, they get very defensive about it. We say, let's cut out the hypocrisy: of course we should fight for the jobs of workers in the North—but in a way that supports working-class movements everywhere; not so as to protect one section and leave the rest aside. We need to work out long-term strategies to respond to the way that capital is re-stratifying the working class throughout the world—a division in which hundreds of millions of rural workers get the short end of the stick. The dynamics of global capital are creating a vast underclass, with no support from Northern unions. This is where we need to focus our strategy, on a powerful, visionary effort to organize the world working class. So far, the response from the

North—especially from the trade unions—has been a very defensive one, hiding behind the mask of human rights. It makes us deeply uneasy when people from our countries, who have been strongly supportive of workers' rights and have actively opposed ecologically damaging development policies, are cast in these polemics as anti-environmentalist and anti-labour.

Market access is not the central problem, but it is a problem. There is a tendency in the North—though not all Green organizations fall into this—to use environmental standards as a way of banning goods from developing countries, either on the grounds of the product itself or because of the production methods. The result is a form of discrimination. We need to find a more positive solution to this. We've called for a global Marshall Plan—one in which environmental groups would actively participate—to upgrade production methods in the South and accelerate the transfer of Green technology. The focus should be on supporting indigenous Green organizations in developing countries and this sort of positive technological transfer, rather than on sanctions. Sanctions are so easy—they appeal to defensive, protectionist interests, which even some progressive organizations in the North have taken up. It's very unfortunate that the US labour movement has adopted this hypocritical stance, saying that it's really concerned about people in China, whereas in fact its objectives are quite egoist. If we can get past this sort of pretence and establish a dialogue at the level of principles, on the interests of the global working class as a whole, we'll be moving forward.

How far do you regard the World Social Forum in Brazil as a representative arena in which these differences can be hammered out?

When the idea of a global forum was first broached, Focus was one of the organizations that immediately gave its full support. What the Brazilians were proposing was a safe space where people in the movement could come together to affirm their solidarity. This was a very important element of the first Social Forum in 2001. There was a strong sense of the need to talk about alternatives, after Seattle. I think there were real efforts to integrate people from Southern movements, both within the organizing structure and on the panels, although this might not have been successful everywhere. Vandana Shiva and others from the South were brought in from the start, not in a paternalistic way but so they could make genuine suggestions about who should be there. It's true that Le Monde Diplomatique and ATTAC played an important part in bringing it together, and the support of the PT state government was fairly crucial. But while ATTAC and Le Monde Diplomatique were still vital players in the second Forum, they had a much less central role. If anything, it has been the Brazilian NGOs, civil-society groups and the PT that have, not dominated, but been the moving force. One very positive thing they've done since the first Social Forum is to create an international committee, where regional-representation questions can be discussed. Most Third World participants are still Latin Americans, though, and there is a need to bring Africans and Asians into the process—which is why the Brazilians themselves have proposed that the next one could be held in India.

It's true that in many of the panels the main speakers, figures like Noam Chomsky and Immanuel Wallerstein, have come from the North. But I don't object to that because we have benefited so much from their work. Others like Rigoberta Menchú and Samir Amin also played a central role. We do need more people from the South—this is a developing process. But the real function is to have a space, every year or two, to be able to get together and exchange viewpoints, in a safe atmosphere—not just another protest demonstration. The main focus now should be on developing the battle of ideas at the WSF. It shouldn't be a love-fest where people with different positions all pretend to agree. We need to get beyond that, to sharpen our ideas about alternatives, not settle for peaceful coexistence.

Would you envisage a time over the next four or five years when the WSF might organize collective actions? So far we've seen very big, single protests in particular spots—Seattle, Prague, Washington. But there's another level beyond that, of synchronized global campaigns on specific issues. Or would that imply too great a degree of centralized coordination?

I don't think the WSF is structured for that sort of thing. What it has principally tried to do is to bring people together to discuss alternatives and affirm their sense of solidarity, and it would be very difficult to transform it into a

fighting organization along the lines of, say, Our World is Not for Sale. It needs to be an all-inclusive forum, where people who might not be able to agree on medium-level strategic factors can nevertheless still come and have a good, clarifying debate. What I would hope is that all these different movements and coalitions feel that it's inclusive enough to provide a yearly or bi-yearly arena where strategies and tactics can be discussed, not just ideas about alternatives. It's in the coalitions, a step below the Social Forum, that these actual strategies will be hammered out. The Our World is Not For Sale coalition is now leading an effort to derail the next WTO ministerial. Fifty Years is Enough, which has also played a key role in the WSF, is organizing against the IMF and the World Bank. The campaign around sweatshops and Nike is very dynamic—it could emerge as the principal anti-corporate network. The anti-war movement is being reborn. It's these coalitions, rather than the WSF, that could be the axis of a brains-trust on global strategies.

You speak of the World Social Forum being all-inclusive, but doesn't this run the risk that it might share the fate of the Non-Aligned Movement, where the noble original objectives of the Bandung conference eventually degenerated to the point where you had Suharto and his ilk hob-nobbing with leaders who were genuinely trying to better the world, making it a meaningless spectacle? The worst of these butchers always turned up, seizing the opportunity to burnish their Third World credentials. Mutatis mutandi, this last Social Forum was decorated by all kinds of Centre-Left politicians from Italy, France and elsewhere, who'd been ardently cheering on the war against terrorism, the attack on Afghanistan.

Yes, I would fully agree that this is a danger. A number of the people who showed up at Porto Alegre were there just to polish up their progressive credentials, even while playing a pernicious role at home. At the same time, I think the Forum will become more discriminating about whom it invites. With those who simply turn up, it's more difficult. But quite a few of those politicians were not asked to speak. Some World Bank officials came and demanded a platform, and were told, 'No. You can speak elsewhere in the world but this is not your space.' Then their spokesman went out and told the Economist, 'I was banned, this is a denial of free speech'. So, of course, the Economist took it up.

There is another challenge: how to remain independent of the established political parties. At present, the Forum's centre of gravity continues to lie in the social movements—despite the leading role of the PT, it hasn't attempted to bring in like-minded political parties. But now there is a danger that the old Centre-Left and socialist parties are looking at the WSF and wondering how they can harvest such a rich crop of grass-roots organizations. In a number of places, we're seeing efforts to establish social forums with political groups of a more traditional sort in charge.

What has been the effect of September 11th on the movement as a whole? The business press has triumphantly declared it a death-blow to the anti-globalization campaign, since it showed that anti-capitalist demagoguery always leads to violent protests in the streets, which lead straight to terrorism; now 9.11 has fortunately had a sobering effect. Many activists were indeed very disorientated or dispirited, partly by the way in which the war on terrorism captured the broad attention, but also by the fact that the movement itself was not well-equipped to respond to it. You alluded earlier to the disconnection between the campaign against corporate-driven globalization, which targets multinationals as the enemy, and the pattern of military deployments and structures of the US state, felt by some to be a divisive issue that is best kept off the movement's agenda. So perhaps it didn't have the resources for an immediate response, when confronted with this reality. How serious a set-back has all this been?

The initial impact of 9.11 was extremely disorientating, especially when the World Bank and IMF cancelled their meeting that month in Washington, which they were delighted to do. Thanks to Al Qaeda, they then managed to override both grass-roots protests and the qualms of developing countries and ram through the WTO's declaration at Doha—when previously, there had been a fifty-fifty chance that we could have stopped it. There is no denying this was a defeat. At the same time, there have been some countervailing developments. Firstly, Enron erupted; one should not underestimate the delegitimizing role that played, in taking the wind out of the triumphalism and the ideological push that followed 9.11. Secondly, there's been the ongoing crisis in Argentina, a social and economic catastrophe brought about by neoliberalism. Both have reignited a widespread scepticism about the corporate-globalization project. Thirdly, there has been the United States' own performance. The Pentagon still hasn't managed to get bin Laden, and is now becoming over-extended in areas from which it will be difficult for the US to extricate itself. Going into Iraq will create even greater problems.

Given the tensions in South Asia and the conflict in the Middle East, it's arguable that the strategic situation of the United States is probably worse now than it was prior to September 11, precisely because of this over-extension. The American response has served to strengthen Islamic-fundamentalist tendencies rather than reduce them. Mahathir and Musharraf are bending over backwards for the United States, but a big gulf is emerging between these leaders and their populations. Finally, I think there has been an evolution in the role of many of the anti-corporate globalization groups, who are now beginning to confront issues of warfare and militarism. In the recent conflict in Palestine we had quite a number of people trying to break through Israeli lines.

There were 50,000 people at the World Social Forum this year, as opposed to 15,000 in January 2001. At the EU summit this March in Barcelona, there were 300,000 protesters—much bigger than Genoa. There's a lot of work to be done before we get back to the situation we were in prior to September, but there are several indications that the movement is on its way back to a fighting stance. One example of this is that, when the US sent troops to the Philippines in January, we put out an appeal for people to participate in an international peace mission, and got so many volunteers that we were able to mount a full-scale investigation: to go to Basilan, study the situation, talk to people—including the Americans—and come back with a critical report that was lambasted by the Philippines government, and became an issue in the archipelago's politics. This was an instance of people who had simply been concerned with trade questions moving towards broader security-related issues. The Euro-parliamentarian, Matti Wuori, who went to Basilan is a former head of Greenpeace; these are the sort of links and transformations that are being made.

You often allude to class politics, not all that common in the anti-globalization movement. Where do you see your intellectual tradition today coming from?

I would say I've been a pragmatist, working with whatever seemed useful to the task in hand. That obviously includes the theoretical arsenal of Marxism. But I wouldn't call myself a Leninist any longer, because I think the crisis that hit the Communist societies was related to the elitist character of Leninist vanguard organizations. One can understand the historical reasons why they emerged, in repressive situations, but when they become permanent and develop theoretical justifications for their lack of internal democracy, they can become a really negative force. I have been attracted to aspects of the new movement—its decentralized form, its strong anti-bureaucratic impulses and its working through of the ideas of direct democracy, in the spirit of Rousseau—whether one labels that anarchism or not. Still, at this stage I think the movement's most valuable contribution is its critique of corporate-driven globalization, rather than the model it offers for coming together and making decisions. But there is a global crisis of representative democracy throughout the West today, as well as in countries like the Philippines. The movement does represent an alternative to this. Can direct democracy work? It did in Seattle and Genoa; so we should ask how we can develop it further. How might we—I hate to use the word—institutionalize methods of direct democratic rule?

Previous texts in this series have been Naomi Klein, 'Reclaiming the Commons' (NLR 9), Subcomandante Marcos, 'The Punch Card and the Hourglass' (NLR 9), John Sellers, 'Raising a Ruckus' (NLR 10), José Bové, 'A Farmers' International?' (NLR 12), David Graeber, 'The New Anarchists' (NLR 13), Michael Hardt, 'Today's Bandung?' (NLR 14) and João Pedro Stedile, 'Landless Battalions' (NLR 15).

[1] The Logistics of Repression: the Role of US Aid in Consolidating the Martial Law Regime in the Philippines, Washington, DC 1977.

[2] See 'Marcos and the World Bank', Pacific Research, vol. 7, no. 6, 1976; Development Debacle: the

World Bank in the Philippines, San Francisco 1982; American Lake: Perils of the Nuclear Pacific, London 1987.

[3] 'The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement', Kasarinlan, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992).

[4] ICFTU: International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.