



Rifts revealed at third World Social Forum

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Colourful banners, giant puppets, drummers, samba bands, dancers and songs on the streets of Brazil. No, not Carnival in Rio but the third World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre last month.

But the message being chanted, sung, rapped and drummed was one of resistance to global capitalism and the impending war against Iraq by the USA and Britain.

Over the last three years the numbers attending have more than doubled - every year; 20,000 in 2001, 50,000 in 2002, and over 100,000 in 2003. So too has the range of countries from which people came. To start off with it was very much a Latin American and European Affair (mainly French and Italian). This time it was truly global.

In the last three months regional Social Forums took place in Europe, Asia and Africa. At the European Social Forum in Florence, in November, 60,000 attended and took part in debates and on its concluding day, at its call, one million demonstrated against war. In early January 25,000 attended the Asian Social in Forum Hyderabad, India.

During 22-28 January Porto Alegre was bursting at the seams. Every conceivable public space - sports stadiums, empty warehouses in the dockyards as well as all the city's colleges and universities resounded to discussions and debates .

A resolution approved by the delegates on the second day of the meeting called on the 15 member states of the UN Security Council to use their power to prevent a war against Iraq. The resolution declares that they are opposed to the new world order under which the United States seeks to impose its "preventive war" doctrine and the statement considered that preventing war through joint actions with social movements as "an issue of the utmost importance."

It also suggested that the UN arms inspectors should be given enough time to complete their job.

This appeal to the predators to go vegetarian sows dangerous illusions in the United Nations, even the Security Council - the thieves kitchen par excellence. The problem is that if and when the USA twists enough arms and fills enough pockets to get a new resolution allowing it to attack Iraq then all the world's people who thought UN approval was the critical issue will subside in confusion, even if they still resent the war.

Pinning hopes on the UN is an example of short-sighted opportunism. The WSF should be warning, preparing and educating millions that the UN is as much a part of the imperialist system as the White House that controls its key appointments and proposals.

One good idea the WSF did come up with is that each country's social forums will send delegations to Iraq in the coming weeks, in an expression of solidarity with the Iraqi people and in opposition to the international embargo imposed on the nation.

The WSF also urged an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This call must be backed up with action to obstruct the war - strikes, boycotts, all forms of direct action, and to punish the imperialist warmongers by attacking their corporate and state interests and investments. That would be a real step forward.

At the World Social Forum, a WSF International Council announced changes for the next event. Its fourth assembly will take place in India in March 2004. There are proposals to constitute a secretariat and a - "network of social movements". Unfortunately these issues have not been discussed at the base of the movement- amongst the real anti-

capitalist and anti-imperialist activists from the streets.

As with the ESF in Florence, the masses of workers and peasants, those from the youth camp must displace the reformist bureaucrats and bourgeois intellectuals who have established an unelected and undemocratic control of the central organs of the movement.

Great opportunities and hopes exist for this movement, but great dangers too, unless a powerful and active democracy is built up on every continent, in every country, in every town and city. That is why we need social forums pledged to action as well as discussion at all these levels and a series of co-ordinations based on elected and recallable delegates not the self-selected representatives of the NGOs, intellectual think tanks or trade union bureaucrats.

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