

Whatever happened to the anticapitalist movement?

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The World and European Social Forums have become well known as huge international gatherings of thousands of social movements, trade unions and the left. However, these bodies were always more than simply big events with speeches by well-known journalists and academics. They came to form a central part of a new radical movement that emerged towards the end of the 20th century. By besieging the summits of the rich and powerful and later leading millions on to the streets to oppose the Iraq war, this movement has had a profound impact on 21st century politics.

Undoubtedly the rise of this new political force offered the opportunity to reinvigorate the far left. A new generation without illusions in Stalinism and social democracy could have been won to the programme of revolutionary Marxism. But this would be no automatic process - it would be a struggle. The new movement did not exist in a vacuum but brought together in antagonistic unity a range of political forces with distinct programmes, from new social democratic reformism, to various mutated brands of Stalinism, not to mention anarchism and environmentalism.

A conflict quickly emerged even over what the movement should be called. This was a clear expression of struggle over its political programme, i.e. over what it stood for. As we said in 2003:

?A movement without a name? Its left wing - young fighters on the streets at the summit sieges of Seattle or Genoa - call it anticapitalist. Its right wing - the speakers in the vast tents of its Social Forums at Porto Alegre, Mumbai, Florence, Paris and now London, call it altermondialiste. Or, if you want something that sounds safe? you can call it the Global Justice Movement. Whatever you call the ?movement of movements? it is suffering from an identity crisis... Speaking frankly it does not know where it is going. Does it want to ?fix or nix? the international financial institutions? Does it want to abolish capitalism or create a ?fair and equal? market? Does it want to take power from the hands of the warmongers? Or is any talk about ?taking power? just too twentieth century, too passé for words??*1

What does the movement stand for today? Has this political struggle over its politics come to any conclusion? These are pertinent questions, precisely because today many leading activists speak of a crisis. In the quote above, Walden Bello - a respected voice on the movement?s left wing - dares to ask the question, has the World Social Forum played out its historic role, is it now time to move on? Such talk from a leading activist in the social movement would have been unheard of just a few years ago. Indeed, Bello points to a real problem: both the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum are in a state of organisational and political paralysis and both have been postponed for two years.

A starting point for analysing the reasons for this paralysis is recognising that two trends have emerged within the movement. On the one hand are those who want an organised movement that coordinates and mobilises action against neoliberal globalisation, environmental catastrophe and imperialist war. On the

other side are those who are determined to stop this happening, who hold sacrosanct the idea that the forums are just an 'open space'. The bad news is that the second camp - the forces of paralysis - are winning: the 'movement' is not moving.

To talk, however, simply of those who are in favour of a movement and those who are in favour of a space, is to partly accept the terminology and analysis made by those who want the WSF to remain a so-called 'space'. This is because, for all the libertarian and postmodernist jargon they use to advance their position, they have not developed a new theory or strategy but are old fashioned reformist ideologues - people who represent real reformist forces in the working class. These outright bureaucrats have, ironically, been able to play on the non-hierarchical, anti-political, 'horizontalist' prejudices stemming from the initially powerful influence of anarchism and populism in the early days of the anticapitalist movement.

This article surveys the crisis in the social movements and shows concretely how the reformist politics of the leadership have led to real defeats and missed opportunities for the working class and social movements. This does not at all mean that there have not been great struggles. In the last year alone there have been many challenges to those in the corridors of power. From the mass struggles of youth in France, Greece and Chile, to the mass democratic revolutionary movements in Nepal and Pakistan, to the revolutionary crises of Mexico and Bolivia, and of course the crisis engulfing imperial armies in the Middle East, world politics has hardly lacked great struggles and crises.

This is not an exhaustive list and many other countries have experienced social and political crises. However, in response to these struggles the general trend of the leadership of the social movements has been to move rightwards. Some of the key forces - such as the Workers Party of Lula in Brazil (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT) and now Rifondazione Comunista in Italy - are in coalition government with neoliberal forces or hope to be in the future. The contention of this article is that the crisis in the social movements has its foundation in this tension: how can you fight the capitalists and neoliberals if you are in government with them or plan to be so in the future?

In demonstrating this thesis, four areas are examined:

- ? The history of the emergence of the anticapitalist movement and the social forums;
- ? The theory and strategy of the reformist leaderships in the social movements;
- ? The emergence of the crisis in the social movements;
- ? The relationship of these developments to the world political situation.

By analysing these areas the article will explain how the present crisis came about and point to the dangers and opportunities that lie ahead. In doing so we hope to set out a course that can take the workers and youth out of this state of affairs. This is no easy task and raises major strategic questions: what is to be done to prevent the movement against imperialist globalisation sinking ever deeper into a morass of self-congratulatory 'diversity'? How can a coherent force emerge from it that can challenge imperialism and capitalism? Does this inevitably mean a complete break from all those holding it back? In answering these questions we hope to outline how revolutionary Marxists can take forward the fight for a new world party of social revolution - a fifth International.

The Anticapitalist Movement

Bernard Cassen, a leading theorist of Attac France, entitled his 2003 book on the movement, Everything Began in Porto Alegre; a thousand social forums.² Leaving aside the impertinence of claiming that 'everything' began in Porto Alegre (the Brazilian city that hosted the first social forum) what Cassen is implying is that it gave birth to the movement. This may be true for his personal participation, but the history of the new anticapitalist movement stretches back to the mid 1990s at least.

It arose as a response to the 'triumphalist' phase of neoliberalism and globalisation of the early 1990s. In these years the message of the capitalist media worldwide was 'we won the Cold War' and 'there is no alternative to free market capitalism.' Poor farmers and sweatshop workers in the global south and trade unionists in the global north were told by their own governments: your rights, protections and welfare are all fundamentally secondary to the needs of business and enterprise.

They argued workers must give up their desire for permanent employment, rising wages, social security, pensions, education and healthcare. Instead workers must compete against one another - offering ever lower wages, longer hours and ever more minimal social overheads - to satisfy the corporate giants. Fear not, claimed the bosses, our super profits will eventually 'trickle down' to you. If at first it seems everything is lost, workers can console themselves with the thought that 'there's no gain without pain.' The official labour movement, social democratic and communist parties and the trade unions tended to accept the inevitability of globalization and began to slim down social provision, turning it into a 'safety net' rather than a system for promoting equality.

What was remarkable and inspiring about the anticapitalist movement was that in less than five years from the downfall of the Soviet Union, young people and militant sections of peasants and workers began to fight back and coordinated their actions on an international scale. This was made much easier by the developments in technology that were giving birth to the internet and new media.

An initial focus for crystallising the new movement was the 1994 'uprising' of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN). Though the EZLN uprising was a military failure, the declaration of war they issued against neoliberalism and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) was an astounding success. So much so, the Mexican army was unable to bloodily crush them, due to the focus of the world on out-of-the-way, poverty stricken Chiapas. By using the internet the Zapatista message spread like wildfire.

They drew the world's attention to huge discrepancies of wealth between the 'northern globalisers' and their accomplices in the southern elites on the one hand and the indigenous communities and peasants, not only of Chiapas but in vast areas of the world, on the other. In 1996, the Zapatista movement organized the first 'Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism', which drew activists from North America and Europe as well as Latin America. Out of this grew People's Global Action, a semi-anarchist, populist and ecologist network that influenced the early phase of the movement.

At the same time many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and environmentalist campaigns launched an international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments in 1998 and against the free trade agenda of the World Trade Organization. NGOs and charities linked to the churches launched the campaign Jubilee 2000 to highlight the terrible debt burden of countries in the Global South. In addition, sections of the trade union movement, especially in the United States, became alarmed at globalisation and began to organise protests. Some demanded protectionist measures, while others sought links with unions in the global south as a better way of defending jobs and conditions by creating a force able to stand up to giant multinational corporations.

These three currents flowed together, leading to the famous demonstration at the World Trade Organisation's Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999. Despite the leadership of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) demonstrating separately from the radical direct action forces, a section of workers marched to join the direct action protesters who were under heavy attack from the police. This act of solidarity was popularly described as 'when the teamsters joined the turtles'. This act of solidarity demonstrated not only the common interests workers had with youth to fightback, but also the great potential of the anticapitalist movement to radicalise the working

class.

Throughout this period, the current associated with this journal argued that the anticapitalist movement must orientate to the working class and its struggles, while the working class unions and parties needed to be won to anticapitalist ideas and involvement in direct action - including using solidarity strike action in support of the movement's objectives. In short, as we put it: 'bring anticapitalism to the working class - bring the working class to anticapitalism.' And indeed in the semi-colonial world, especially in countries like Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Argentina, the mass struggles underway in 2000-3 increasingly fused workers, peasants and unemployed in popular assemblies. These struggles were provoked by foreign debt, the IMF's structural adjustment programmes, neoliberal privatisation offensives and the Argentine economic crisis of 2000.

There was a clear objective basis to the need for an international movement and coordination. In the imperialist heartlands and the semi-colonies the same neoliberal attacks were being launched against workers (e.g. in the EU's Lisbon Agenda of 2000). The need to struggle across borders, against international capital that now knew no borders, was a felt need of the international working class - one that endures eight years on from Seattle.

The success of Seattle in helping to close down the WTO caught the imagination of youth and radical rank and file workers worldwide. There was no summit where the rich and powerful could convene meetings without opposition and disruption. In the Prague protests against the IMF in 2000 our slogan 'Turn Prague into Seattle' was taken up by activists - a powerful example of the new internationalism of this period. It had echoes of the late 1960s youth radicalisation against the Vietnam War.

These protests were filled with excitement and radicalism. They taught a whole new generation to hate capitalism and its destructive effects. Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide learnt a new vocabulary; against 'structural adjustment', 'third world debt', 'free trade', 'neoliberalism', 'précarité' and 'privatisation'. The media was obliged to register 'the new internationalism' that challenged globalisation not from a narrow nationalist position but from a profound feeling of solidarity with one another's struggles. In short, rampant capitalism ran into a powerful obstacle that repeatedly hampered the trade rounds and reforms dictated by the USA and the EU within the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and limited and frustrated attacks on public services. The chosen method for fighting this was direct action, however symbolic, and alliances between many hitherto different single-issue campaigns.

Writers like Susan George, Naomi Klein, Walden Bello, Michael Albert, Kevin Danaher, Martin Khor, Eric Toussaint, Samir Amin, Vandana Shiva, Noam Chomsky, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri poured out a flood of books and articles which, despite their differences with one another, created a new radical populist ideology which was biting and effective in its description of the ills of corporate globalisation - but usually reformist or utopian in the solutions they suggested.

Popular slogans of this early phase were 'one no and many yeses', and 'in our diversity is our strength'. This certainly embodied a powerful desire to combine the maximum forces against the common enemy and to recognise the hitherto excluded (indigenous peoples and the so-called 'underclass'). However, it also bore witness to a profound wariness about what sort of alternative world was possible.

Many of these ideologists consciously rejected Marxism, socialism and communism as supposedly failed utopias of the 20th century - typically pointing to the experience of Stalinist tyranny and bureaucratic planning in the Soviet Union and wrongly equating this with Marxism and indeed with the struggle for power per se. Many were also influenced by the postmodern philosophy that developed in the universities when the radical youth movements and New Left of the 1960s suffered defeats and setbacks.

The disillusioned intellectuals of this period argued that modernist emancipatory 'grand narratives' - the various 'isms' - had failed, only imposing totalising and authoritarian ideas, and were ultimately based on an exaggerated view of the human capacity to uncover objective truth about the world through rational empirical investigation and theory. For philosophers like Foucault and Lyotard³ this created a problem for radical political strategy that they were never able to answer - how to change the world without imposing a new reactionary order?⁴

Foucault in his essay 'useless to revolt' went as far as to ponder whether it was correct to revolt or not and concluded that this was a non-question, because 'people do revolt; that is a fact.'⁵ Indeed, the theorizing away of political strategy is the logical conclusion that much postmodern thinking comes to. This arises, from a mistaken analysis of how power and domination function in modern societies - they do not do so because of a wrong set of ideas, but from material social relations.

In the anticapitalist movement, activists influenced by postmodern thought tended to link their ideas to libertarianism. This was reflected in a focus on 'horizontal' forms of organisation, 'consensus decision making' in place of formal democratic structures and an aversion to a unified method and strategy. There was also a tendency to want the movement to move beyond or exist outside of politics - 'civil society' was emphasised over and above political parties.

More classical social liberal ideas were also present. In the early period of summit sieges the protests were often accompanied by counter-conferences. These were usually organised by NGOs and Attac,⁶ the campaign for a tax on financial transactions, and were usually counter-posed to the protests and indeed underpinned by a different set of ideas. For these more mainstream forces, protest and direct action were secondary or even unimportant. Instead, it was necessary to hold conferences to change world 'public opinion' over time. Then, via the normal operation of bourgeois democracy, neoliberalism would be displaced by a new social reformism.

There was clearly a real need to debate these questions out; to come to some conclusions as to how to achieve lasting social and political change. Ironically, given the prevalence of 'post-political' ideas, this process really expressed a need to discuss political strategy. The development of the social forums marked a real maturing of the anticapitalist movement in this sense. The huge conferences with workshops, joint-seminars and large seminars, gave a huge opportunity to discuss how to make 'another world possible.'

The turn to Social Forums

The initiative for a World Social Forum goes back a meeting in February 2000 between major Brazilian Non-Governmental Organisations and French academics-cum-journalists around the prestigious French journal *Le Monde Diplomatique* and Attac. The former were represented by Oded Grajew, coordinator of the Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship, and Francisco (Chico) Whitaker of the Catholic-inspired Brazilian Commission for Justice and Peace; the latter by Bernard Cassen, chair of Attac, and Ignacio Ramonet, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

They agreed to hold a global gathering of social movements, to be called the World Social Forum, held at the same time as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. It was planned to take place the following year, in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. It should be noted that for the organisers this was a conscious move away from the idea of summit sieges - away from militant clashes with the state forces guarding the rich and powerful, to discussion of alternative policies to neoliberalism. Earlier attempts to run counter summits alongside the direct action mobilisations had not been a happy experience for the organisers, since the latter drew all the media attention and most of the crowds.

However, the social forums differed from the narrowly focused NGO-sponsored counter-conferences at the summit protests. They were much broader in their conception, purporting to be open to the many organisations, networks and movements who had over several years been confronting globalisation.

From the outset, however, the forums had very clearly defined limits. After the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001, the committee of Brazilian organisations that organised it drafted a Charter of Principles that outlined a set of rules governing the forum and future 'editions', i.e. regional or local variations, of the concept.⁷ The charter banned the open participation of political parties in the World Social Forum (WSF), committed the forum to a consensus decision making model and insisted the WSF was not a 'locus of power'• i.e. no participants could speak for it or in its name and there was no leadership of the WSF. They argued the WSF did not claim to represent civil society, it only provided a 'space'• for it.

The Open Space: an alibi for paralysis

Chico Whitaker, a key leader and theorist of the WSF and a member of the Brazilian Workers Party, has sought to theorise the 'space not a movement'• approach which is enshrined as law in the Porto Alegre principles. He attempts to create a mystique of it, arguing that 'Something new was born in Porto Alegre. It was a true Agora of worldwide democracy, with all the murmuring and confusion of such a gigantic event. The atmosphere invited us to dream of another world that is possible, timely and necessary.'•

Juggling with the classical terms for a market place - a forum or agora - does not provide any alibi for blocking the taking of decisions there any more than it did in ancient Athens or Rome (in the classical world it was where the citizens' assembly met and made decisions).

In the same piece, Whitaker goes on to defend the undemocratic manner in which the principles were drafted, legitimising this with reference to the 'space not a movement'• method. He argued, 'the Forum is not deliberative in nature and time will not be wasted in discussing the commas in a final document.'⁸ The democratic niceties of discussion followed by amendments and voting was a 'waste of time'• for Whittaker.

He also makes it clear that this naked bureaucratism was not entirely uncontested, even amongst the very small circle of Brazilians and their co-thinkers in France and the Far East. He says, 'creating an open forum, respectful of all the ideas, initiatives and experiences of civil society was a risky task. During the preparation process and our days in Porto Alegre, there was tension between the concept of mobilising for direct action and the idea of creating a space predominantly for reflection and debate.'•

Why reflection and debate cannot lead to decisions is clear only to those who want to prevent any decisions being taken. There is certainly no objection that can be made to providing an open and democratic forum for debate, a place for networking between struggles in different countries and continents - indeed, as we stated above this was the historically progressive role played by the World and regional Social Forums. But the question is how can all this discussion and networking develop into an effective fightback against neoliberalism, capitalism and imperialism?

The implication of Whitaker and the majority of the WSF leadership's position is that no general global fightback is needed beyond those already being waged by local or single-issue campaigns. At most, on their model, all that needs to be done is to put such campaigns in touch with one another and swap ideas as to objectives and method of campaigning. Thus the Principles ban decision making altogether:

'The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of

power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings.?

What Whittaker wants to cast aside is the very idea that the movement brings together different political forces who will struggle for its leadership. Related to this is the banning of the open participation of political parties at the forum. It was because, for Whittaker, the forum itself should not struggle for power, that politics were excluded. While politics may be easily done away with in the sphere of pure thought, the reality of the struggles of the social movements against neoliberalism and war demonstrated they were highly political struggles. Indeed, the imposition of a neoliberal programme by states across the globe raised the question of political power for all those that confronted it - how do we replace these governments and what do we replace them with?

To say otherwise is to engage the masses in an illusion. Whittaker was actually attempting just that - an illusionist's trick. This is because, far from opposing politics per se, Whittaker was a key theorist of Lula's Workers Party which had been elected to office in 2002. His government had attacked landless peasants and sections of the working class, and complied with the IMF and World Bank's debt repayments. Lula had spoken at a number of the forums in a 'personal capacity' to mass crowds in huge stadiums. By trying to keep politics out of the forum, Whittaker was able to stop forum participants - many of whom were angry with Lula's policies - from using the forum to challenge him. They were prevented because the forum had no democratic structures or means for taking political positions.

But wait a minute! Who had the power to decide this? As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci once remarked, 'leadership is the first principle of politics'. Despite what it claimed, the WSF was no exception. The Porto Alegre Principles were decided at a meeting organised by the Brazilian sponsoring organisations. Those who already possessed the power hypocritically forbade anyone to dispute them. Having climbed the ladder, they unceremoniously kicked it down.

The real WSF leadership, the Brazilian Organising Committee, which later became the International Secretariat, were not even elected, let alone subject to recall by the social forums - they simply co-opted those who they thought were representative and trustworthy. The International Council with between 100 and 150 members was - and remains - just a sounding board. Even if the likes of Whitaker and Cassen lost a majority on it, like the Polish Sejm (parliament) in the eighteenth century, it can be prevented from taking action by the unanimity rule: anyone can veto it with the cry 'no consensus'. What was even more remarkable was that the Charter of Principles, despite being imposed from without on regional forums like the European Social Forum, could not be changed or amended by these bodies. Indeed, it is not clear if anybody could change them except the original cabal that drafted them. And even it would have to be unanimous.

Chico Whitaker - clearly a master of doublethink - elaborates: 'A space has no leader. It is only a place, basically a horizontal space? It is like a square without an owner.' This is manifestly not true. The WSF leadership considers the 'social forum' brand its own, and has rudely intervened to call to order any grouping, even the organisers of regional forums, if they defy the rules.

For instance, sharp exchanges occurred with the organisers of the first ESF in Florence on the role of political parties and on the anti-war theme they wanted the forum as a whole to address. At the Florence ESF in 2002, Rifondazione Comunista was very prominent and the Assembly of Social Movements, which convened on the last day of the Forum, undoubtedly spoke for the forum as a whole when it called for millions to march against war - a call that was answered in the mass demonstrations across the globe in February 2003.

Likewise, last year Samir Amin and the organisers of the discussions which led to the Bamako Appeal of

the World Social Forum in 2006 (see previous page) were sent a stiff rebuke by Whitaker and were forced to recant their claim that the Bamako Appeal had any status as the statement of the African version of the polycentric WSF. Likewise, Whitaker and co. rubbished the Porto Alegre Consensus, a reformist manifesto developed at a seminar during the 2005 WSF by a number of well known activists and academics, as having no more status than the hundreds of other pieces of paper fluttering on the wall of proposals in the press centre of the forum.

In practice, political parties have been clearly visible at the forums - although at times more openly than others. The Mumbai WSF 2004 and the Athens ESF 2006 almost completely disregarded the rules, with political parties playing a prominent role. Anyone who has been to the Porto Alegre forums would have found it impossible to miss not only the Brazilian Workers Party, but the smaller, more radical left parties like the P-SOL and PSTU.

Whitaker time and again has appealed to a postmodern framework, to justify the space conception and its apparent separation from the sphere of power and politics: In summary, the WSF and its Charter of Principles seek to create a new imaginary ways of conceiving public space, politics, democracy and citizenship, an imaginary distinct from the politics of modernity. 10

He who pays the piper calls the tune?

The point of holding the WSF in Porto Alegre was that the Brazilian Workers Party held power both in the city and in the federal state, Rio Grande do Sul, where it is located. The state is the richest in Brazil and hardly typical of the global south. Indeed, in 2002 the municipality of Porto Alegre provided \$300,000 and the state of Rio Grande do Sul \$1 million for the second WSF. In 2003, however, the electoral defeat of the PT in the October 2002 state elections led to a slashing of support for the WSF.

Nevertheless the city government of Porto Alegre and the newly elected federal government of Inacio Lula da Silva made up for loss. By the fourth WSF in 2005 the PT had lost control of Porto Alegre too, which meant a further cut in funding by the incoming right wing city administration. Other major sources for funding the WSF have been the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the European Union.

Similar reasons underlay the holding of the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 and Paris in 2004. Various municipalities controlled by the left in Italy - the Democrats of the Left (PDS) and Rifondazione Comunista, plus left-wing Catholic institutions, were willing to fund the Florence ESF, and in Paris a year later the Socialist Party mayor Bertrand Delanoë and even Jaques Chirac helped fund it. In London in 2004 the role of the London Mayor and his entourage was equally vital to the funding and facilities - though clearly the funds made available (half the £1 million of the total cost) resulted in a stark contrast with the preceding ESFs - Paris had a sliding scale by income from €3 euros to 50 euros, most people paying towards the bottom of the scale. In neoliberal London, however, entrance costs were £20 if paid in advance and £30 on the door. The unemployed and students were offered a generous discount of £10 on these prices.

Thus it is clear that the support of the WSF and ESF by forces that are an integral part of administering capitalism, that are at best social liberal in their outlook, acts as a real constraint on what the organisers are prepared to let the social forums become. In the words of Marx, social being determines consciousness or in a more vulgar expression he who pays the piper calls the tune.

The European Social Forum in Crisis

The European anti-neoliberal left, which formed at the European Social Forum in November 2002, has over the past year entered into a real crisis. The reasons for this lie in the political trajectory of its major

component - the parties which compose the European Left Party (ELP), the former or reformed Communist Parties.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC) in Italy was at the centre of the Florence ESF in 2002, the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) at the Paris Social Forum of 2003, Synaspismos at the Athens Social Forum in 2006, and the Party of Democratic Socialism-Left Party (PDS-LP) will be central to the anti-G8 protests at Rostock in Germany in June 2007.

The degree to which the wheel of the ELP's reformism has come full circle can be seen in the case of Rifondazione Comunista. At Florence its leader Fausto Bertinotti drew thunderous applause when he criticised himself for having supported the Olive Tree Coalition government of Romano Prodi in 1996-98. Prodi went on to design the Lisbon Agenda, the programme of neoliberal counter-reforms adopted by the European Union in 2000. "Never again!" cried Bertinotti. RC representatives attended all the international meetings of the ESF, advocating an anti-neoliberal alternative to Lisbon.

So when Rifondazione entered another neoliberal Romano Prodi government a year ago, the Italian No Global and antiwar movements went into decline. Prodi has survived two major crises over the occupation of Afghanistan and the expansion of the huge American airbase at Vicenza. He survived both thanks to Rifondazione's support in parliamentary votes of confidence.

Indeed, he extracted a promise from RC's parliamentarians not to vote against the government again. Fearful of the return of the corrupt Silvio Berlusconi, even Rifondazione's left wing - including Franco Turigliatto, a member of the Fourth International - did not dare to reject his blackmail.

Rifondazione and the Democrats of the Left have ceased mobilising on the streets, supported sending Italian troops to Lebanon and tolerated their supposedly humanitarian role in Afghanistan. Only 30,000 answered the call of the ESF to demonstrate against the war in March.

In France in the second half of 2006, the powerful "No" of the Left Bloc, which mobilised to reject the neoliberal European Constitution in the referendum in May 2005, shattered over the issue of the 2007 presidential elections. The uprising of the oppressed youth in the suburbs - banlieues - in November 2005 and the mass youth and worker revolt against anti-youth employment laws - the CPE - the following spring, reached the scale of a nationwide rolling strike, terrifying the government who backed down, leaving a hole in its neoliberal agenda.

Yet when it came to the elections, the attempt to mount a "unity" candidate shattered. The PCF refused to renounce participation in a neoliberal Socialist Party government. The pathetic 1.5 per cent vote for its candidate, Marie-Georges Buffet, was fair punishment.

In Germany, too, the movement to create a new working class party was shipwrecked by the split from the Social-Democrats (SPD), the WASG (Labour and Social Justice - The Electoral Alternative). Rather than representing the militant resistance to the neoliberal Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV attacks (Germany's implementation of the Lisbon agenda), they fused with the PDS-LP, which was already in coalition with the SPD in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and carrying out neoliberal cuts and privatisations. Linksruck, the German section of the International Socialism Tendency (the international organisation run by the British Socialist Workers Party), support the fusion and denounce those who seek to challenge it from within the left of the WASG, including the German supporters of this journal.

As in France and Italy, the lure of office, even at the cost of signing up to neoliberal reforms, exposes the fraudulent "anti-neoliberalism" of the European Left Party's component national parties.

The European Anticapitalist Left - a supposed far left alternative to the ELP - has also failed to rise to the challenges of leadership. Its parties too have been seduced into seeing the question primarily in electoral terms. In Britain Respect, a creature of the Socialist Workers Party, has opted for a populist electoral machine, helping to abort moves to create a new working class party after 10 years of neoliberal Labour government.

They have created a cross-class bloc with moderate Islamists and Muslim businessmen in the chase for parliamentary and council seats. Add to this the self-destruction of the Scottish Socialist Party - also a member of the EAL - and it is clear that in Britain the wishes of vanguard fighters to build an alternative to Labour have been badly let down by these 'leaders'.

This all represents a criminal frittering away of the enormous waves of anti-neoliberal and anti-war struggles of 2000 to 2006. The ELP is totally unfit to lead the anticapitalist movement; and the European Anticapitalist Left offers no consistent alternative to it, often working to shield it from effective criticism.

Yet there are repeated signs that mass resistance to imperialist war and neoliberalism in Europe has not disappeared. Time and again it is regenerated by the bosses' attacks, by the threat of new wars, by EU and government legislation.

The 1.5 million votes for Olivier Besancenot of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire in France (a section of the Fourth International), who spoke out in defence of the rebellion by the youth of the banlieues and for the anti-CPE movement, shows that militants preferred him to the PCF, and also to Lutte Ouvrière and Attac, both of which were marginal to these struggles.

In Spain this March, 400,000 demonstrated against war. In Greece there have been large-scale, sustained and militant student demonstrations against the neoliberal educational 'reform'. In Austria in January, youth and trade unionists protested against the social democrats' sell-out of its own election programme in order to enter a coalition with the right.

The regular setbacks in Europe, their failure to result in new organisations, are a direct result of the crisis of leadership, in particular the left reformist and post-Stalinist parties centred on the European Left Party. The 'far left' forces regularly demonstrate their unwillingness and inability to present a principled opposition or practical alternative to them. The urgent task of revolutionaries is to combat reformism and centrism and fight for political and organisational forms for consistent anticapitalism: revolutionary communism.

The spectre of a Fifth International

In the face of persistent calls for the WSF and the ESF to go beyond a talking shop and coordinate action, the right wing have often issued a threat to cow the softer of their left-wing opponents. If you want the WSF to evolve beyond a space into a movement and to take political initiatives, then before you know it you will have a fifth International.

François Houtart, the Belgian antiglobalisation writer, in a discussion of the alternative directions for the World Social Forum in 2003, with heavy irony described them as a 'fifth International or activists' Woodstock'.

The Brazilian and French 'leadership' of the World Social Forum have also repeatedly used the idea as a bugbear to frighten and silence their opponents.

Thus four years ago Bernard Cassen, then honorary president of Attac, declared himself firmly opposed to what he calls the 'throbbing temptation of the Fifth International'. 11 He went on:

?The holders of the conception of the Forum as movement have tried constantly, in all the leading bodies, to nibble or circumvent the conception of the Forum as space, without openly acknowledging it.?•

The ?left?• in the WSF and ESF have been forced by these attacks to take up the issue, albeit to deny the charge. Writer Michael Lowy noted that a French bourgeois newspaper had spoken recently of ?the danger of a Fifth International?• but insisted he preferred a new international ?without name or number?• ? odd, you might think, for a member of the Fourth International.

South African author Patrick Bond in the book, *The New Politics of Empire*, has a section of his essay called ?Next steps: towards a fifth international?•. Welcoming the rise of the anticapitalist movement, he argues: ?The time may well arise for a formalisation of the movement?s character in explicitly political terms, such as within the traditions of international socialism - for which the four internationals provide a host of lessons.?•

More strikingly still in August 2006 Samir Amin, a celebrated author of anti-imperialist and third worldist works since the 1950s, wrote an article entitled *Towards a Fifth International?* In it he posed the question:

?Should we conclude that a new International is needed to assure the convergence of the struggles of the people against capital??•

He answers: ?I do not hesitate to give a positive answer to this question, on the condition that the envisioned new International is conceived in the same way as the First, but not as the Second, the Third, or the Fourth Internationals. It should be a socialist/communist International open to all who want to act together to create convergence in diversity. Socialism (or Communism) would thus be seen as the product of the movement, and not as something that is deduced from a previous definition.?•

It is certainly useful when prominent writers start a debate on this question, on the need for a new or even a fifth International. Indeed it is high time to debate this question. The time is long gone when any fighting worker can accept an activists? Woodstock, an open forum celebrating diversity rather than forging unity between different forces. The deadly earnestness of struggles since the murder of Carlo Giuliani in Florence in 2001 have posed time and again the need to unite in action across a range of issues - war, privatization, debt and poverty, climate change, racism and précarité.

That is why in Florence in 2002, the predecessor of the League for the Fifth International, together with the socialist youth movement Revolution, submitted a resolution to the Coordination that prepared the Assembly of Social Movements. It read:

?Starting with a Europe-wide day of action against the war ? we will continue to campaign:

? by means of mass demonstrations, civil disobedience and obstruction of the ?war effort?•;
? by means of boycotts of the state and corporate institutions of the perpetrators and supporters of this war;
? by campaigning for strikes in workplaces, schools and colleges.

Our aim is to prevent a war being launched. If we fail in this we will campaign by militant means to force its cessation and the withdrawal of the attackers. We hope our actions will encourage the resistance of the Iraqi, Palestinian and Arab peoples and help them to defeat the imperialist attack. To them - from Florence - we send a message of solidarity and encouragement: you are not alone! We will do everything in our power to strike the weapons of mass destruction from the hands of ?our own? rulers.?•

We argued for a series of key demands that would take the ESF forward. These included:

? a co-ordinated campaign of mass demonstrations and direct action against the war with a central orientation to winning the labour movement to strike action solidarity with any Iraqi resistance to invasion and with the Palestinian Intifada

? a Europe-wide campaign against all closures and redundancies stemming from the economic recession, centring on the FIAT workers

? a Europe-wide campaign against the neoliberal privatisation policies of the European Union and its member governments

? a campaign against state and far-right racism in the EU, in solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers, demanding their free entry and full civil rights

? a co-ordinated campaign in solidarity with the peoples of Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia under attack from the IMF and groaning under the burden of debt to the western banks and with workers in struggle for jobs, trade union and democratic rights and a living wage.

Though the decision of the Assembly was nowhere near as clear about the need for ongoing and escalating direct action to actually stop a war or to bring about the defeat of the imperialists, it did call for a worldwide day of action for 15 February 2003. This was its most progressive step, one it has unfortunately never repeated.

The Paris ESF in 2003 had much less of the heady enthusiasm of Florence. Whilst 15 February was a remarkable triumph, with more than 20 million demonstrating worldwide and huge demonstrations of millions in Spain, Italy and Britain, the leaders of the antiwar movements - largely the left wing leaders of ESF - failed to agitate for strike action by the trade unions and failed to criticise the inaction of the leaders of the biggest unions, many of whom came near to pledging such action on the platforms of the 15 February demonstrations. The IST and the Fourth International, so delighted to have formed a bloc with the union leaders, were willing to back down on calls for immediate mass strike action, letting the leaders off the hook and leaving the movement unable to halt or even seriously to obstruct the war when it came.

However, in some respects, the Paris ESF saw the closest involvement of trade unionists yet. Prominent in many sessions were members and leaders of the more radical wing of the European union leaders: the CGT and G10-Solidaires of France, CGIL, FIOM and COBAS of Italy, the RMT of Britain, IG Metall and verdi of Germany, and so on. The crucial issues at this Forum were first to revive the antiwar movement in the form of militant opposition to the occupation of Iraq and support the growing armed resistance there, and second to coordinate the growing resistance to the Lisbon Agenda of neoliberal reformism across Europe. The 500-strong meeting of the German delegation had many rank and file trade unionists present from IG Metall and verdi. The opportunities for the Assembly of Social Movements to launch coordinated action were not taken. Why? Out of fear of a conflict with the bureaucrats of the larger trade unions and the reformist parties.

On Iraq, the strongest thing the organisers of the Assembly would commit themselves to was the statement that: ?We are fighting for the withdrawal of the occupations forces from Iraq and for the immediate restitution of sovereignty to the Iraqi people?•.

And on the fight against the Lisbon onslaught, which had seen major struggles that year in France and Germany, the assembly said only: ?We engage ourselves to take part in all the actions organised by the social movements, in particular to build for a common day of action supported by the social movements, notably by the European trade union movements.?•

In 2004, the London ESF was in all respects a disastrous missed opportunity. It was strangled by the bureaucratic control of a thoroughly unsympathetic London mayoralty, burdened with an exceptionally high entrance price, formally backed by trade union leaders who did absolutely nothing to inform or mobilise

their members to attend.

Still 20,000 to 25,000 people turned up, despite an almost complete absence of publicity. Yet still the far left forces, especially the Socialist Workers Party, refused to break their alliance with the left union leaders and the Mayor, shielding them from any practical criticism and opposing all attempts to get the Assembly of Social Movements to adopt a fighting campaign for coordinated European action.

Dead Grasp the Living

If the global movement that developed after 1999 showed the potential and the need for the development of a new International, it also proved that the fragments of the old Internationals still exist. What these forces brought to the movement was not the lessons of the great achievements and gains of the first four Internationals, but rather a contemporary expression of the self same political errors and weaknesses that had destroyed each of the four Internationals as world parties of social revolution.

Each of the four Internationals represented a great gain for the anticapitalist workers of the world. In their heyday they represented a deadly threat to the exploiters. This meant that the capitalists used every possible means to divert them from their anticapitalist goals and break them up.

By means of direct pressure from without, and from bourgeois and petit-bourgeois forces within, each of these Internationals collapsed as an effective instrument of social revolution. As a result, what remain of them today, the anarchist, social democratic, Stalinist and centrist ?Trotskyist?• traditions, represent their period of degeneration and betrayal, still misleading working class struggles.

Anarchists - with their prejudices against mass organisation, phobias about politics, leadership, decision-making, and confusions as to what constitutes the working class, represent the degeneration phase of the First International. ATTAC, the PT of Lula in Brazil, continue the class collaboration of the Second International after 1914, just as Rifondazione Comunista and the French Communist Party (PCF) do with the class collaborationist ?people?s front? policy of the Third International under Stalin.

Today, the Fourth International and its fragments - from the French LCR to the British SWP - continue the unprincipled policy adopted in 1951 of adapting systematically to the programmes and leaders of the Second and Third Internationals, in the hope that they will automatically evolve in the direction of revolution through the unfolding of a disembodied ?process?•. They convert the active programme of Leninism-Trotskyism into passive adaptation, placing onto ?history? (in fact onto the existing reformist leaderships) the very tasks that fall to the revolutionaries themselves: actively to work to expose and break the hold of the reformist apparatuses of treason over the workers, not just on the page, but actively at the heart of the struggle.

These forces of the dead grasp hold of the living at the crucial point of every struggle, holding us back from settling final accounts with our historic enemy. We need a new leadership, a new instrument of struggle, a new world party. Everything essential and vital in the early years of the previous four Internationals can be preserved and restored only by founding a new Fifth International.

On the basis of the lessons to be learnt from the previous four Internationals, and by analysing the new reality of globalisation, predatory war, mounting inter-imperialist rivalry and revolutionary upheavals that we face today, a new programme must be elaborated and a new international fighting party must be built in every country.

The next steps

We have to fight openly at the Social Forums and the Assemblies of Social Movements for a new formation

that gathers together the fighting battalions of the world movement. This needs to break with the paralysis and 'lowest common denominator' approach of the Assemblies of Social Movements, let alone abide by the rotten Porto Alegre Principles.

But there is no need to wait for the next meetings of the World or continental Social Forums.

The anti-imperialist forces which crystallised at the Athens ESF as a left wing opposition to the official leadership; the sections of the trade union movement resisting Prodi in Italy; all those in France who want to fight Sarkozy's offensive in the workplaces and on the streets; the fighters against the foreign and domestic plunders of their countries across Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and South Asia: these are the forces that can and must convene an anticapitalist conference to adopt a real programme of action and at the same time debate out the strategic principles of a permanent worldwide organisation for fighting capitalism.

In order to express the real historic interests of the working class movement, and to challenge the essence of capitalism, and not just this or that expression of it, these movements will need to agree to struggle for political power. The new International will therefore be a political party or it will not be an International at all.

A strong working class International will not bring the era of broad global movements of the rural and urban poor, of indigenous peoples and oppressed nations, of women and youth, of persecuted immigrant communities to an end. To suggest this is what effective leadership and democratic centralisation means is to mistake Stalinism for Leninism. Instead, we should stand in the tradition of Lenin's 'What is to Be Done', which insisted that a revolutionary must be 'the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects, but will deepen it and raise it to a higher level'. And in the tradition of Lenin who gave the Communist International its slogan 'Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World Unite'.

While the pro-bourgeois elements will undoubtedly withdraw from such a formation, this would be no loss. Those anarchists, too, that put their individual autonomy higher than collective action, for whom a democratically arrived at decision by a majority is a hateful tyranny, can remain in their little communes trying to change capitalism behind its back. Such 'losses' would be more than compensated by the tremendous attractive power that the strength of workers action can bring to all campaigns and initiatives.

Forces within the social forums have demanded a radical change from the 'open space' approach. Writers such as Arundhati Roy and Samir Amin, well known activists like Trevor Ngwane, have correctly stigmatised the paralysis and called for a new organisation, even a new International. These organisations and individuals need to progress beyond appeals to the leaders to change. The servants of big capital will never willingly relax their grip. Nor will their libertarian dupes stop trying to block any political decision making, content with playing the role of jesters at the court of capital. Their grip on the world anticapitalist movement must be broken.

What does this mean immediately? The genuinely anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist left needs to gather its forces and plan how to achieve this. We must unite the left in the ESF and WSF, in the regional and national social forums and gatherings like Rostock, to fight for the creation of permanent delegate-based, elected, coordinating bodies that can:

(a) issue calls to action on the burning issues of the international class struggle

(b) prepare the way for a structured Congress in which organisational and programmatic issues can be debated out, amended and adopted.

In Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia there are massive struggles unfolding. The forces calling for such a change today are many and varied. We can take real steps together to win the mass forces to the project of a new, fighting International. In the process they can achieve greater programmatic clarity, hammering out a strategy for world working class power, the communism of the 21st century. Along this road a Fifth International can and must be built.

Endnotes

- 1 The leftward development of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela has been an important exception to this: see Fifth International volume 2 issue 2.
- 2 Bernard Cassen, *Tout a commencé À Porto Alegre: mille forums sociaux!* (Everything began at Porto Alegre: a thousand social forums), Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2003.
- 3 For example, Lyotard said, "The idea of progress as possible, probable or necessary was rooted in the certainty that the development of the arts, technology, knowledge and liberty would be profitable to mankind as a whole. After two centuries, we are more sensitive to signs of the contrary. Neither economic nor political liberalism, nor the various Marxisms, emerge from the sanguinary last two centuries free from the suspicion of crimes against mankind? What kind of thought is able to sublimate (aufheben) Auschwitz in a general (either empirical or speculative) process towards a universal emancipation?" in Lyotard, J., F., *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Minuit, Paris
- 4 *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*, Vol. 3, Penguin, New York, pp. 449 - 453
- 5 The full quote: "is one right to revolt or not? Let us leave the question open. People do revolt; that is a fact?" in Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?", *Power*; *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*, Vol. 3, Penguin, New York, pp. 449 - 453
- 6 Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens
- 7 Brazilian Organising Committee, *World Social Forum Charter of Principles*, http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2 ^[1]
- 8 Francisco Whitaker* <http://www.fsmt.org.co/eng-origen.htm> ^[2]
- 9 Antonio Gramsci, "The Modern Prince, Antonio Gramsci; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*,
- 10 ("An Introduction?", from *Summit Sieges and Social Forums - A Rough Guide to the Anticapitalist Movement*, League for the Fifth International, 2004.)
- 11 Bernard Cassen *Tout a commencé À Porto Alegre?..Mille Forums Sociaux!* Paris, October 2003)

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Links:

[1] http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2

[2] <http://www.fsmt.org.co/eng-origen.htm>