

World Social Forum

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The World Social Forum owes its origins to the counter-conferences initiated by ATTAC held in Switzerland as an alternative to the World Economic Forum whilst it was meeting in the millionaires' ski-resort of Davos. Two Brazilians, Oded Grajew and Chico Whitaker, who attended the anti-Davos in January 2000 had the original idea of holding a world social forum.

Having been impressed by the powerful mass mobilisations of Seattle in November 1999 and the 'practical' (ie reformist) alternatives of Anti-Davos in January 2000, they came up with the idea of a positive (i.e. non-confrontational) but mass gathering which would spread anti-neoliberal (but not anti-capitalist) ideas.

They took this suggestion to Bernard Cassen, director of the French bourgeois review *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and president of ATTAC-France. Cassen liked the idea and made a proposal to hold the Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, because it was the capital of a state that was steadily becoming known all over the world for its 'participatory budgets'.

In Brazil it was immediately supported by a sizable list of large organisations, including the 'Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship', plus the main Brazilian trade union federation, and the landless rural workers' movement MST, as well as ATTAC itself.

WSF 2001

Porto Alegre, Brazil

In 2001, the first WSF brought together some 20,000 people, around 4,700 of them delegates for a wide range of organisations from 117 countries.

It consisted of conferences around four themes, plus 400 self-organised seminars, workshops related to them.

- Area I ? Production of Wealth and Social Reproduction
- Area II ? Access to Wealth and Sustainability
- Area III ? Asserting Civil Society and the Public Realm
- Area IV ? Political Power and Ethics in the New Society

After the forum ended, the Brazilian-based WSF Organising Committee (now renamed the WSF Secretariat) commissioned a Charter of Principles.

In 2001 the WSF International Council (IC) was set up. The IC is supposed to determine the WSF's strategic direction. The IC was to preserve the World Social Forum as an open, democratic meeting space in which an international movement to develop alternatives to neoliberal might develop.

WSF 2002

The second WSF also took place in Porto Alegre from January 31 to February 5. The total number attending was estimated at more than 50,000, with 12,274 delegates present representing 123 countries. The same thematic areas as at the first Forum were covered in 27 conferences, 96 seminars and 622 self-managed activities (i.e., seminars and workshops organised by groups participating in the WSF).

WSF 2003

The third WSF once again was held in Porto Alegre from January 23 to 28, 2003, and this time drew close to 100,000 participants from all over the world. Some 20,000 delegates, from a total of 123 countries took part. Their numbers were swelled by the participants in the Youth Camp (around 25,000).

In 2003, officially organised activities included 10 conferences, 22 testimonies, 4 round tables (for dialogue and controversy including between parties and the social movements) and 36 panel debates. The number of self-managed activities (seminars and workshops) swelled from something like to about 1,300 in 2003. These activities were pursued in the following broad thematic areas:

- ? Democratic, sustainable development
- ? Principles and values, human rights, diversity and equality
- ? Media, culture and alternatives to commodification and homogenisation
- ? Political power, civil society and democracy
- ? Democratic world order, combating militarisation and promoting peace

Parallel Events

A number of other activities take place prior to or in parallel with the World Social Forum. These include the Forum of Local Authorities, the World Parliamentary Forum, the World Forum of Judges, the Intercontinental Youth Camp (from WSF 2003 onwards, part of the official programme).

Regional and Thematic Forums

In the course of 2002 and 2003, a number of Thematic and Regional Forums were held:

- ? Thematic Social Forum in Argentina: ?The neoliberal model in crisis?, Buenos Aires, August 22 to 25, 2002;
- ? First European Social Forum, Florence, Italy, November 6 to 10, 2002, attended by over 50,000 people and followed by a demonstration of a million people on the Saturday afternoon, it was marked by huge enthusiastic mass plenaries and seminars in the Fortezza and nearby venues, with much networking. Workshops scattered around Florence were by and large a failure. However the most remarkable success was the passage by a huge and enthusiastic meeting of the Assembly of Social Movements (ASM) and its call for a day of action against the impending Iraq war. Endorsed by the ASM held at the WSF in Porto Alegre, it led to demonstrations of between 20- 30 million people worldwide.
- ? Palestine Thematic Social Forum: ?Negotiated conflict solution?, Ramallah, Palestine, December 27 to 30, 2002;
- ? Asia Social Forum, Hyderabad, India, January 2 to 7, 2003;
- ? Africa Social Forum, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 2 to 7, 2003;
- ? Pan-Amazon Social Forum, Belem, Brazil, January 16 to 19, 2003; and

? Thematic Social Forum ?Democracy, Human Rights, War and Drug Trafficking?, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, June 16 to 20, 2003.

? Second European Social Forum 13-15 November Paris-Bobigny, Ivry-sur-seine and St Denis. 50,000 attended 625 plenaries, seminars and workshops with 900 speakers; a 100,000-strong march against war and social injustice was held on Saturday afternoon and on Sunday morning an Assembly of the Social Movements agreed only an inadequate action plan which left the date for a ?social 15th February? to the ETUC and other federations. No concerted action against the Lisbon Summit plans to decimate Europe?s pension and welfare system was adopted.

World Social Forum 2004

Held in Mumbai (Bombay) India; Over the six days of the forum over 100,000 people gathered from 152 countries attending over 1,200 plenaries and seminars on the themes:

- ? Imperialist globalisation
- ? Patriarchy
- ? Militarism and peace
- ? Communalism (religious sectarianism and fundamentalism)
- ? Casteism & racism (oppression, exclusion and discrimination based on descent and work)

The two traditional communist parties (CPI, CPI-M), several formations of leftist radicals and some socialist parties were present at the World Social Forum through their mass organizations (trade unions, youth and women groups).

Organisations and institutions that fund the WSF include: Oxfam, Cafod, Fundaç?o Banco do Brazil, Heinrich. Boll Foundation, Ford Foundation, Petrobras, Rio Grande do Sul State Government, Porto Alegre City Government, and a whole number of trade unions.

Eight organizations now make up the WSF Secretariat which coordinates the process of building and internationalising the Forum: the Brazilian Association of Non-Government Organizations (Abong), (Attac-Brazil), Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission (CBJP), Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (Cives), Central Workers Federation (CUT), Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies (Ibase), Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) and Social Network for Justice and Human Rights.

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