

Some proposals to get Social Forums moving forwards in the field of anti-globalization action

For the last 15 years, Social Forums have gone a long way towards promoting resistance movements against the oligarchies that rule over globalized capitalism.

They have helped these movements to get to know each other, to recognize the values and targets they share, to design and implement cooperation in the struggles. In one word, they have led the way to the acknowledgement of being part of a very wide movement, " the anti-globalization movement ". These movements have now grown and multiplied within a much wider context, thus proving the relevance of the Porto Alegre Charter, which sets a frame for Social Forums.

The growth of social movements in quantity, quality and diversity cannot however mask their inability to reverse the increasingly disastrous evolution of global capitalism. Time is short, if only because of the climate challenge : we have three ou four decades at the most to get something done. Hence the agonizing question grasping all the alterglobalists is : "How can we do it ?" and especially addressing social forums: "How can we be useful in meeting this huge challenge?"

Some people already seem to have answered that they do not believe Social Forums are of any use at all and have deserted them.

Others argue that the Porto Alegre Charter should be altered, that there should be more decision making in the Social Forums ; some even think that Social Forums should advocate political opinions.

Many more, probably, feel that **the Porto Alegre Charter is more modern than ever** since it is perfectly consistent with the dynamics of massive movements implying young people, such as the "occupy" movements. For these activists, **the real problem is to find a way of applying the Charter with practical initiatives in an attempt to answer the question:**

"How can social forums be made more useful in bringing more power to the people in the face of the oligarchies of globalized capitalism?"

With this idea in mind, I suggest the following 5 steps:

- URGENT : Redefine the International Council (Annex 1)
- WITHIN 6 MONTHS, build a very comprehensive website for social forums (Annex 2)
- HERE AND NOW : set up and use tools designed to record the "memory of Social Forums" ; this should start with "contactiva" (Annex 3)
- The International Council must launch a renewed call for the development of local social forums (Annex 4)
- Quickly build up an International Institute of Anti-globalization studies (Annex 5)

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Annex 1 : URGENT : Redefine the International Council

Who are the members of the International Council? How are they renewed? What exactly is its remit? Where is this role defined ? Where are the minutes of the meetings? How can they be accessed ?

This is a real mystery even for someone like me, an active field militant in social forums ever since the beginning ! Quite a scandal for a movement that should be at the forefront in terms of democracy and transparency!

This can't go on any longer ! It's killing what remains of Social Forums

- **First, it is absolutely essential that every effort is made here and now for the following emergency measures to be taken at the next International Council meeting in January 2017 :**

Immediate opening of a new section in the opensfm website entitled "International Council" where the following data can be found :

- Current composition of the Council with the quality of each member
 - Email contact for the International Council
 - The minutes of the last meetings
 - Dates of the next meetings
 - Draft statutes of the International Council which could be on the agenda for a brief discussion at the January meeting and the minutes of this discussion
- **Then, between the next meeting of the Council and the following one, an exchange forum on the Statutes of the Council will have to be opened on the opensfm website under the new heading "international council" so that the statutes can be adopted at the following meeting after a fully transparent process.**
 - **Finally, the renewal of the International Council – by then complying with the newly adopted statutes - must take place at the third meeting to come.**

Annex 2 : WITHIN 6 MONTHS, build a very comprehensive website for social forums

This site should not be yet another labyrinthine system which takes years to build and costs a lot of money.

A group of 3 or 4 volunteers should be able to do the job, almost free of cost, within a few weeks, and then ensure technical maintenance! The call for volunteers should be launched by the International Council at its next meeting in January.

Then the contents and updates should be provided by a group of International Council members. The following items should appear :

- A schedule of Social Forums planned all over the world whatever the geographic scale, whatever the issue or issues in question, with the e-mail of their contact and the address of their website. (At their next meeting, the international council must ask all Social Forum contacts to send this information, using all available ways and means)
- All information about the International Council following the reforms set out in Annex 1
- The texts resulting from all the previous WSF convergence assemblies
- A blog open to publishing any important information sent by movements taking part in social forums all over the World.

Annex 3: - HERE AND NOW : set up and use tools designed to record the "memory of Social Forums" ; this should start with "contactiva"

It is quite incomprehensible that, up till now, there has been so little concern that all the work done during the social forum events, first of all during the World Social Forums, should be made accessible to any organization or person in the world who could find it useful in their activity or struggle. A small local anti-globalization group took the initiative of setting up

www.wsf-contactiva.esy.es : a simple, reliable, well-tested tool, designed to ensure the dissemination of such information. But, despite all the efforts made by this group, we might have to

wait until the announced post WSF process before Contactiva perhaps starts being used officially!
At its next meeting, the International Council, must invite all Social Forums in the world to use Contactiva systematically even if the organizers of WSF2016 do not effectively call for using it.

Other additional tools, designed to supplement Contactiva, are being developed by other teams. Very good ! But this is no excuse for delaying the systematic use of contactiva.

Annex 4: - The International Council must launch a renewed call for the development of local social forums

Globalized capitalism took a leap forward with the mass utilization of computers and software. The same thing can be said – although the process is much slower - for the profound transformation of the way peoples are fighting against this global capitalism.

Until recently, the main forms of expression of the people and most of the major battles arose under the leadership of small groups of trade union leaders and other social movements, quite often at the national level.

Over at last two decades, it seems that this is no longer the case, and many great fights are the result of bringing local initiatives together. Whether or not they belong to national or international organizations, members of local groups connect and share their work via internet. Quite often, higher levels of aggregation either at a geographical level or as regards their field of action can only be achieved once a more limited aggregation process has taken place. This addresses the question of some centralized structures who consider their declining legitimacy aggravates the ideological delegitimization that they often suffer from. Is this trend the dawning of some features that could be specific to 21st century democracy ...?

However that may be, this development seems a fact and it is with these bottom-up dynamics that significant victories have been achieved in recent years.

Thus, social forums can only go on being useful if they fit in with this trend by facilitating mutual acknowledgement and understanding of the movements, their dialogue and their search of effective cooperation in their daily struggles, close to the people, that is to say locally.

A sufficiently rich network of these local social forums facilitates the extension of local cooperation to wider levels.

This is why it is highly desirable that the International Council launches, right from its next session, a well-argued call for the development of truly local social forums, both in cities and in rural districts.

Annex 5: - Quickly build up an International Institute of Anti-globalization studies

With the same major concern to quickly find ways of a significant rise of power against the oligarchy, the setting up of such an institute seems essential. Indeed, **a much more detailed knowledge of how contradictions develop within global capitalism certainly would allow us to see where and how to quickly concentrate forces to widen the breaches of the system and thus achieve the greatest efficiency possible.** But this knowledge can only develop under several conditions:

- It must first come from a group having a truly global scale, that is to say made up of members from all the continents (It is not necessary that they meet physically). The group should be composed of :
 - theorists from various fields (economics, sociology, history ...), not just economists!
 - animators who absolutely must have taken part in major fights on different fronts and in all continents. These two categories of active members have to work together to produce their texts collectively.
- The group must concentrate its work on revealing breaches in the system into which it is possible to drive wedges.

Here again, the International Council is the only body able to launch an effective appeal to build up such an Institute.