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FROM FLORENCE TO PORTO ALEGRE VIA HYDERABAD: A Year in the Life of the World Social Forum

By Walden Bello*

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On January 23-28, thousands of people from all over the world will converge on Porto Alegre, Brazil. The pilgrims will include African landless peasants, Filipino trade unionists, Palestinian liberation fighters, indigenous people from all over Latin America, and large delegations of civil society activists from India, North America, and Europe. The occasion is the World Social Forum (WSF).

This year's gathering, the third in a row in this city of 1.3 million, acquires special significance owing to the recent resounding victory of Luis Inacio da Silva, better known as Lula, in Brazil's presidential elections. Lula is the prime mover of the Workers' Party (PT), one of the organizational mainstays of the WSF.

The WSF or "Porto Alegre process," as it is also called, has become the prime organizational expression of a surging movement against corporate-driven globalization. Since the events of September 11, 2001, it has also acquired a strong anti-war dimension, and opposition to the US design to launch a war on Iraq is expected to dominate this year's proceedings.

The Porto Alegre phenomenon has had its share of critics, even among progressives. One prominent American intellectual has characterized it as a gathering mainly of people who want to "reform" globalization. Another has blasted it as a forum dominated intellectually and politically by Northern political and social movements.

FUNCTIONS OF THE WSF

These criticisms have not, however, deterred the WSF from drawing widespread adherence globally. This year, some 100,000 people are expected to show up, up from 75,000 in 2002 and 15,000 in 2001. Perhaps, the reason is that it fulfills three indispensable functions for the anti-globalization movement.

First, it represents a space—both physical and temporal—for this diverse movement to meet, to network, and, quite simply, to feel and affirm itself.

Second, it is a retreat during which the movement gathers its energies and charts the directions of its continuing drive to confront and roll back the processes, institutions, and structures of global capitalism.

Third, Porto Alegre provides a site and space for the movement to elaborate, discuss, and debate the vision,

values, and institutions of an alternative world order.

PRELUDE: THE ESF AND ASF

2002 was marked by an expansion and deepening of the WSF. Indeed, this year's meeting will be the culminating point of an exciting year-long global process. A number of cities, including Buenos Aires and Caracas, have held Porto Alegre-style social forums. It was, however, the regional social forums that were the exciting innovation of the year. The European Social Forum (ESF), held in Florence, Italy, on November 6-9, 2002, drew over 40,000 people, more than three times the expected number. Even more amazing was the ESF-sponsored million-person march on 9 November against the planned US war on Iraq, which took place with not one of the incidents of mass violence that scare mongers like Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci had predicted.

Equally impressive was the recently concluded Asian Social Forum (ASF) that took place in the historic city of Hyderabad, India, from January 2 to 7, which drew over 14,400 registered participants, mostly from the host country, though there was representation from 41 other countries.

The atmosphere was electric from the first day of the event. During almost every minute of the five-day marathon, drumbeats and chants of mini-rallies filled the air at the Nizam College grounds, the main site of the conference. There, and in around 40 other sites throughout the city, 18 conferences and plenary events, 178 seminars and workshops, a youth camp, and scores of cultural presentations took place. Topics included resistance to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Dalit (outcaste) rights, the threat of fundamentalist movements, women's empowerment, food sovereignty, big dams, the Palestinian struggle, natural resource theft, and alternative economics.

Militant struggle against militarism was the note on which the peoples' gathering began, with Nora de Cortinas, co-founder of the Argentine human rights group Madres de Plaza de Mayo, telling the opening plenary on January 2 that "We must not allow the US to launch its war on Iraq."

Opposition to the "venom of communal hatred" was emphasized by Mehda Patkar, head of the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, who called for the formation of a broad people's coalition against the government-supported fundamentalist forces responsible for the recent slaughter of over 2000 Muslims in Gujarat state.

Resistance to globalization was the clarion call of former President of India K.R. Narayanan at the

outdoor rally closing the event. “We want the world to be one but not globalized, ruled by one country,” he stated. “The world is pluralistic and will remain so.” Narayanan characterized the “voice being raised at the ASF” as a “voice for human rights, against violence, and against imperialism, and it is only right that it has come from India because it was India that sounded the death knell for an empire on which the sun was never supposed to set.”

As was the case with the ESF, the ASF had its share of logistical mishaps like non-functioning sound systems and workshop sites that took hours to find. Like the ESF, too, the ASF had its share of friction among the groups that put it together. The ASF was stitched together in less than a year by what noted Indian activist Minar Pimple characterized as a coalition that was “one third Gandhian socialists, one third left political parties, and one third independent organizations and individuals.”

Given the fragmentation of the progressive movement in both Europe and Asia, however, that the ASF and ESF came together magnificently in the end was a stunning achievement. ASF participant Nancy Gaikwad of the Oppressed People’s Movement summed up many people’s feelings when she said, “This is the first time in a long, long time that this has happened in India, for people from different political streams to be able to work together on a common platform.”

TOWARDS UNITY?

Indeed, one of the main reasons the Porto Alegre process is gaining such momentum is precisely that it provides a venue where movements and organizations can find ways of working together despite their differences. While the usual ultra-leftist groups remain defiantly outside it, the Porto Alegre process in Brazil, Europe, and India has brought to the forefront the common values and aspirations of a variety of political traditions and tendencies. The Porto Alegre process may be the main expression of the coming together of a movement that has been wandering for a long time in the wilderness of fragmentation and competition. The pendulum, in other words, may now be swinging to the side of unity, driven by the sense that in an increasingly deadly struggle against unilateralist militarization and aggressive corporate globalization, movements have no choice but to hang together, or they will hang separately.

PORTO ALEGRE AND LULA

As thousands of people converge on Porto Alegre in the coming week, there is another development that is equally significant. Since Seattle, the anti-corporate globalization movement has attained a critical mass globally, in the sense that its ability to assemble forces at significant junctures, such as the December 1999 Seattle WTO ministerial and the July 2001 Genoa

meeting of the Group of Eight, enabled it to impact on international developments and acquire a high ideological and political profile globally. Yet being a global actor did not necessarily translate into being a significant actor at the national level, where traditional elites and parties continued to be in a commanding position. Over the last year, however, the movement has achieved a decisive majority at the national level in a number of countries, most of them in Latin America.

Not only has espousal of neoliberal policies been a surefire path to electoral disaster, but political parties or movements promoting anti-globalization policies have achieved electoral power in Ecuador and Brazil, joining the Hugo Chavez government in Venezuela at the forefront of the regional anti-neoliberal struggle. Perhaps most inspiring is the case of Luis Inacio da Silva, or Lula, in Brazil, who won 63 per cent of the presidential vote last October. Lula is the prime figure in the Workers’ Party (PT) and, as everyone knows, the Workers’ Party is the main pillar of the WSF.

Not surprisingly, many of those trekking to Porto Alegre this year will be coming with one question uppermost in their mind: What can the victory of Lula and the PT teach us about coming to power in our countries?

Many personalities of the international progressive movement are slated to come to Porto Alegre. By far the most interesting, most popular, and most sought after will be Lula, the personification of the new Latin American left. And this year’s meeting will be, in many ways, a celebration of a movement that, by achieving a remarkable measure of political unity amidst diversity, has changed the face of Brazilian politics.

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A GREAT MOVEMENT IS BORN: Global Justice Movement Finds Fertile Ground at the Asia Social Forum

By Praful Bidwai*

This editorial was published in The Hindustan Times, January 10, 2003

The just-concluded Asian Social Forum (ASF) saw a unique confluence of grassroots social movements, people's organisations and radical NGOs which interrogate globalisation and counterpose equality, human rights and justice to the shop-worn agendas of transnational big business.

Even for a city of contrasts (consider Nizamshahi or information technology vs abject poverty or child labour), what Hyderabad witnessed this past week was unparalleled: on the one hand, a 'global partnership' summit of the Confederation of Indian Industry caucusing in a five-star hotel; and on the other, the Asian Social Forum, with 15,000 activists from all over the continent celebrating the spirit of solidarity in the Nizam College grounds.

The first event was dominated by a select group of dark-suited business potentates, foreign officials and Indian ministers from L.K. Advani downwards. The second was a riot of colours and a melange: of grassroots campaigners on livelihood issues and human rights, environmentalists and feminists, trade unionists and seed-conserving peasants, people's science-movement and healthcare activists, peaceniks and anti-displacement campaigners, writers and social scientists, radical theatre-people and filmmakers.

The first group came from leading corporations in India and the West, known for their successful brands and fat profit-lines; the second from the North-east, Asia and Afghanistan, Palestine and Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, as well as India. It comprised people known for their work against foreign military bases and occupation, for freedom from debt, for the right to food and free speech, for human security.

It is a telling commentary that when 400 volunteers from the second group peacefully picketed the venue of the first, they were arrested by the police of India's most business and IT-savvy chief minister.

The ASF began with a plenary addressed by firebrand activist Medha Patkar and ended with one presided over by former President K.R. Narayanan. Between the two were eight major conferences, 160 seminars, 164 workshops, scores of cultural events - and countless processions, demonstrations and tableaux. This sums up the awesome range and scope of the ASF and its rainbow- coalition character better than anything else.

The common theme running through these was

grassroots democracy, the fight against exclusion, the imperatives of equality, global justice, human emancipation and people-(not profit)-centred development. In one line, the message was: the anti-globalisation movement is here, and for real!

The ASF is part of the great global justice movement that began at Seattle in 1999, and took an organised expression through the World Social Forum's meetings in Porto Alegre, Brazil, with the slogan "Another world is possible!"

The global justice movement is one of the most spectacular mass mobilisations of our times. The WSF is a powerful forum of interaction between social activists and the liberal-progressive intelligentsia. The movement has shaken the leaders of global capital and its managerial institutions (the World Bank, IMF, G-8, OECD, etc).

But the ASF's own roots lie in the Asian soil, in the numerous movements which have grown over the past quarter-century or more in the continent - for survival with dignity, for peace, gender equality, decentralisation, for direct democracy, Dalit rights, for ecologically sound development and social liberation. These movements have reshaped societies from South Korea to Nepal, geopolitics from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Straits and development policies from Japan to the Philippines.

India occupies a special place here. As the great historian E.P. Thompson would say, India has witnessed an avalanche of people's movements and civil society initiatives like few other countries have. India is also the site of especially lively, organic, two-way interaction between popular movements and the radical intelligentsia.

However, there was a disproportionate number of Indians at this 'Asian' event: only 780 of the 14,426 registered participants came from abroad. One reason for this is that New Delhi cussedly delayed granting visas to hundreds of delegates. The worst example of this was the systematic deletion (by [Deputy Prime Minister] Advani himself) of well-known Pakistani activists' names from the almost-approved list, including Asma Jehangir, Pervez Hoodbhoy, I.A. Rahman and A.H. Nayyar. Ironically, they happen to be among the staunchest and best-known critics of Islamabad's hawkish policies - a point that couldn't have been missed by New Delhi's own hawks!

A valid criticism of the ASF programme is that it was far too India- (or India-Pakistan) -centric. Another is

that the ASF workshops were so physically dispersed (which Indian city can accommodate 15,000 people in multiple conference centres located close to one another?) as to lack connectedness and a centre of gravity. Yet, the ASF was a tremendous learning process.

It is hard to summarise the rich diversity of its deliberations - stretching from the sharing of experiences of different struggles against neoliberal economics and privatisation of natural resources, and for the defence of livelihoods, to drawing up alternative perspectives and programmes.

The ASF uniquely offered four platforms: the first-ever large-scale interaction between India's established mass organisations and its 'New Social Movements', a dialogue between them and movements from the rest of Asia, a forum to evolve common analysis and strategy, and a high-energy cultural intercourse that took on the appearance of a gigantic mela, a week-long festival celebrating some of the greatest causes of our times.

The ASF was a landmark event, an exhilarating beginning. It needs to be followed up - both through further dissemination of its core-ideas to grassroots levels, and laterally, through replication elsewhere, even as the Porto Alegre process maintains its own integrity and distinct identity. One sign of a great social movement is the variety of messages and appeals it contains, and the many organisational forms it can assume. Going by that criterion, the movement against unequal globalisation, and for a just world, has a great future - not least in Asia.

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PURGING PAIN TO FORGE A NEW WORLD

By Herbert V Docena*

HYDERABAD, INDIA - Miyoko Matsubara's breaking voice blared through the public address speakers. It has been a long journey from Hiroshima to Hyderabad. At 70, Miyoko has come a long way from 1944 when the bomb was dropped and she was among the few who survived. Now her voice, wavering still after countless times of retelling, rose above the dust over Nizam College grounds where the first Asian Social Forum was camped. She was crying again.

It was just the first day of the week-long forum. Elsewhere in the city, other people's voices were breaking. Deena Farhab from Afghanistan was close to tears as she recounted how the Taliban, the US' mercenaries during the Afghan war with the Soviet Union, took away, tortured, and brutally killed her husband. From Rajasthan, Murari talked about how four of his family members died from starvation.

Others' voices had been hardened. Abdel Jawad Saleh from Palestine angrily denounced the Israeli state's ill-disguised genocide of his people. Others spoke for those who could no longer be heard: Jeong Soo Kim of South Korea demanded, on behalf of the two teenagers who had been crushed to death by US tanks, for the immediate expulsion of US bases in Seoul.

Others didn't even have to speak. Nora de Cortinas, one of the founders of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an organization of the mothers of those who had been abducted and killed by the dictatorial regimes installed by the United States in Latin America in the 70s, said it all with a scarf she wore around her head. It was embroidered with her son's name.

It was not just another conference. Over 14,000 Indians and 700 other people from all over the continent, belonging to around 800 organizations and movements, had gathered in Hyderabad, a city known throughout India as the place where farmers and weavers had been pushed beyond the verge and had taken their own lives out of poverty and despair. It was the Asian leg of the World Social Forum, or what has been gradually emerging as the organizational embodiment of a massive global counter-movement against the kind of forces that bind people like Miyoko, Deena, Abdel, Jeong, and Nora. Its slogan is short, its aim grand: "Another world is possible."

For six days, the dusty grounds of Nizam College was turned to one big counseling room. The forum had become a thousand-person therapy session - an Alcoholics Anonymous-like meeting for Asia's dispossessed. Eight major conferences, 160 seminars, and 164 workshops gave people more than enough outlets for pouring their hearts out to people who, to paraphrase a line from a movie, were there to really

listen and not just wait for their turn to speak.

From Bangladesh to Burma, from Tibet to Thailand, intellectuals, activists, workers, farmers, rickshaw drivers, artists all came together to share their woes from as wide a range of problems as structural adjustment, ecological destruction, foreign interventions, authoritarian repression, gender violence, caste discrimination, fundamentalist exclusion...

People need to know that they're not alone. Before they can even imagine a future, before they can even start debating on the alternatives, people need to feel connected. In addressing this basic instinctive need lies the potency - and the necessity - of holding gatherings like the ASF. By giving people a venue where they can all figuratively weep together and console each other, the Porto Alegre process assures people that their suffering is not isolated.

In one conference on caste discrimination and globalization, dalits, or people who are considered "untouchables" in the Hindu caste system, shared the stage with the Burakus, a people considered "impure" by Japanese society. The dalits have probably never heard of the Burakus and the Burakus probably do not know about dalits. But it surely could not have escaped them how so strikingly familiar and recognizable the other's stories were.

You could almost see the Buraku's eyes widen when she heard that in Nepal, the dalits have been doing nothing else but wash the dishes and clean the toilets for the upper castes. They are not even allowed to sell water. How different is that from the Burakus' situation back home where the only work they're allowed to do is to wash the skin of dead animals and turn them to leather? You could almost see the dalits linking arms with the Buraku when they both heard how both of their governments' are increasingly lifting welfare assistance to them as part of austerity measures and structural adjustment policies.

By convincing people that there are others out there who have also went through what they are going through, the Porto Alegre process can prevent people from retreating into their own little corners in the world, obsessing about their own parochial concerns, or giving up altogether because they feel they're too little and there's no way they can possibly put up a fight. And there, in their isolated remote corners of withdrawal, they begin to doubt whether their sufferings are in fact real, whether they're not just exaggerating them, whether it's really as bad as it seems.

But then they come to Hyderabad. And there, seeing and hearing real people grieving, they remember that the pangs of hunger was real, the stigma of society's contempt was real, the unbearable weight on their chests when they lost

their son was real. For by giving people a real physical space where they can share their experiences, abstract concepts like "oppression" became real. Previously empty slogans like "American imperialism" became loaded with meaning. Remote and impersonal institutions like the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund became less distant.

Miyoko gave a voice to the horror of nuclear annihilation and to America's continuing disregard for the plight of innocent civilians caught in its wars of aggression. The embroidery on Nora's scarf gave a name to the continuing connivance between Washington and repressive ruling regimes. Deena gave a face to the US' complicity in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

In the end, it is the sharing of grief — and hope — that makes events like the Asian Social Forum different. The world's CEOs can share their surefire marketing strategies in their posh convention centers and five-star hotels. 'Neutral' academics can exchange their latest findings in conferences in their secluded universities. The world's political and business elites can have their Davos or Genoa. They can have their caches of cash and their arsenal of bombs. But Asia's dispossessed - they will have their Hyderabad and they will have each other.

For somehow, it is pain that keeps us united. Participants in the ASF may have carried a variety of passports, looked very different from each other, and espoused clashing ideological orientations and strategies. But is hunger from Pakistan different from the hunger felt in Palestine? Is the loss of a child less painful to a Maoist than to a Trotskyist? Are reformists less terrified of bombs than abolitionists?

In the end, it may yet be this purging of sorrow that will lead to the forging of that other world which is possible and - because the present one's share of misery has become unbearable and unacceptable - urgently necessary. For some, pain is a precondition for optimism: you cannot hope for something better unless you don't know how much worse it has actually been. In this sense, the ASF may well have been cathartic. Pain can lead to surrender, despair, and paralysis. But, through processes like the WSF, it can also be transformed to hope and translated to action.

Towards the end of her speech, the breaking voice of Miyoko - 70 years old, scarred but still fighting - became unwavering. On the final afternoon of the forum, thousands of delegates filed out of Nizam College, took to the streets, and gave expression to the abstract word "solidarity."

A group of psychologists have recently announced that ironically, the more you protest, the happier you become. The march was proof: what had at times become a forum of depressing testimonials culminated

with a joyous and festive parade. There was frenzied dancing and rousing chanting. Grief had turned to euphoria. For those who had previously felt forlorn and isolated, no sight could have been more comforting than that throbbing mass - burdened but beaming, and still marching on determinedly to another world that is possible.

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TWO statements came out of the Asian Social Forum process. The first is significant because it represents an important political breakthrough in building alliances between the traditional mass organisations, such as trade unions, and social movements. Focus on the Global South was involved in this process. The second statement came out of a parallel event organised by local and regional groups, also mobilising against globalisation. Spot the difference (if you can).

STATEMENT OF THE ASIAN SOCIAL MASS & PEOPLES' MOVEMENTS & ORGANISATIONS

7 January 2003

We, the social, mass and peoples' movements and organisations of Asia and the Pacific from diverse social, cultural and political backgrounds have gathered together on 2-7, January 2003 at the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, India. We are gathered here in the ASF to exchange our experiences and raise our voices against neo-liberal globalisation, imperialism, militarism, patriarchy and fundamentalism.

We are meeting in Hyderabad, the city that is claimed to be a symbol of cyber-world in India. But it is also the capital of the state known for tragic suicides by hundreds of farmers and weavers, besides starvation deaths, due to the impact of neo-liberal globalization in recent years. The real history of the state is one of valiant peoples' struggles.

In fact, today the whole of Asia is yet again the center of poverty, war and intolerance, with the mass of people facing starvation, impoverishment, displacement, indebtedness, and destruction of livelihoods.

Imperialism targets Asia with its militarist and economic offensives for making strategic gains, including the greed for oil. The looming threat of war on Iraq by the United States of America imperils all of us, who have witnessed the Gulf War, the bombing of Afghanistan, and the continuing occupation of Palestine. US political and military interventions in Asia under its so-called War on Terror - particularly in South, South East and East Asia - has brought us to the brink of nuclear war. Meanwhile, all over the region, citizens are kept in check by un-democratic and draconian laws imposed by colluding regimes. This has promoted a false discourse on terrorism and security while systematically marginalising and assaulting people's struggles for survival, livelihoods, rights, inclusion and self-determination. All these pressures are generating ever more virulent forms of

patriarchy and the oppression of Asian women.

The impact of capitalism and neo-liberal globalization continues to be felt across the region and affects the lives of every woman, man, youth and child. These effects are leading to widespread increases in levels of poverty and widening gaps between the rich and the poor. It has also led to the increasing degradation of the environment and ecology resulting in widespread disease and death threatening the very survival of the planet. Attacks on the economies of all countries in the region have led to total loss of self-reliance, de-industrialization, privatization and destruction of natural resources of land, water and forests, and the retreat of labor protections. Agriculture, village and small scale industries are collapsing due to imports and subsidy cuts. The promotion of capitalist property rights and indiscriminate mechanisation by governments and transnational corporations are destroying people's knowledge, skills and livelihoods. The combined actions of the World Bank, IMF, ADB, export credit agencies, ODAs and WTO are willfully and deliberately undermining our economic and political sovereignty while destroying local and national economies. Debt continues to be used by the international financial institutions and donor countries to keep our countries in financial and economic bondage.

Capitalism and neo-liberal globalization also jeopardize peoples' lives and accentuate multiple forms of exclusions for the marginalised sections. The worse affected are women, children, indigenous peoples, Dalits, ethnic minorities, tribals, unorganised sector and migrant workers and other socially excluded groups. These have led to the depression of wages, mass unemployment and price increases making people more destitute, leading to tragic consequences like increase in child labor and trafficking in women and children. Education, child care, health, transport all get privatised and subsidy cuts result in denial of services and food security for the poor. Meanwhile, instances of exclusions include the withdrawal of safety nets and affirmative action, rise in violence and discrimination against the vulnerable groups, flattening of social diversities that puts greater pressure on the minorities to conform to the dominant view and greater incidence of contrived conflict that pits these groups against one another.

There is a shrinking of democratic space within the nation-states as neo-liberal globalization with the rise of aggressively fundamentalist, intolerant and violent articulations of identities and an increase in the repressive powers of the state and the elites, leading to gross violation of civic and human rights.

We, therefore, resolve to carry forward and strengthen the solidarity for resisting imperialist domination. It will be necessary - and we will strive - in the coming days to include many more social movements into this

process of resistance and to evolve democratic and transparent processes for coordinating activities and actions.

We believe that not only is Another World Possible but that Another World is Necessary! We affirm our faith in alternatives based on equity, social justice, human rights and socialism!

In particular, we resolve to carry forward the campaigns and struggle and move towards common actions in the following areas:

Resist imperialism - the imminent US attack on Iraq, its escalating militarist interventions in the region, as well as, its possible unilateral declaration of war against any country. Specifically, we will organize a common day of protest action against the war in Iraq. We demand the total elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Resist the policies and undemocratic structures of neo-liberal globalization. Specifically, derail the next WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun.

Defend democracy, secular values and people's security.

Oppose religious fundamentalism and communal, ethnic, caste and gender-based violence.

Assert people's right to work, energy, food, water, land, other natural resources, education, health and public transport.

Oppose privatization, dis-investment and attack on labor rights.

Move away from development based on foreign capital and mobilize national resources to support the sustainable and equitable development of domestic economies and people's lifestyles. Demand the unconditional cancellation of debt.

STATEMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS ENCOUNTERS AT THE ASIAN SOCIAL FORUM

We, the people's movements of Asia have come together in Hyderabad from 3-7 January at the People's Movements Encounters at the Asian Social Forum. This encounter testifies to the increasing resistance of people against imperialist globalisation and that a New World is evolving. We are 35 movements representing Dalits, peasants, workers, women, Adivasis, indigenous peoples, fisherfolks, urban poor and the physically and mentally challenged.

Imperialist globalisation led by the G8 and the transnational corporations (TNCs), facilitated by the WTO and international financial institutions and supported by national elites, has devastated our lives, resources and the environment. As a result we are losing our livelihoods, shelter, land, water, forests and other resources. We have little or no access to food and employment resulting in hunger, starvation and famine. We are being displaced. We face unemployment and bonded form of labour, including forced migration. This has brought increased vulnerability to exploitation, oppression and subordination of our people and communities.

Our productive resources and means of production are being monopolised and concentrated in the hands of the landed elites and a few giant corporations through corporate agriculture. This form of agriculture is externally dependent and promotes hazardous technologies including pesticides and GMOs that threaten health, food safety and the environment. The dominance of corporate control is further entrenched by patents on life forms.

Fundamentalism through fascist forces has led to widespread communal tensions, violence and genocide of communities in Asia. It has eroded the unity of people, universal beliefs and divided people on the basis of religion, caste and race.

The US-led War on Terrorism is the continued global economic, political, social, and cultural domination of the G8 on the world, and entrenches their control of resources especially oil, gas and uranium. This war on terrorism is used by the State to violently suppress people's movements and resistance, and to criminalise and imprison movement leaders. It is used to dismantle all mechanisms that protect and promote the universal rights of people. It has also increased militarisation and the arms trade at the expense of people.

These same imperialist forces with the support of patriarchal institutions and values are further denying the reproductive and health rights of women; their land

and political rights; and right to housing. This has increased different forms of violence against women, forced migration, trafficking, violence against tribal and minorities, and has reduced their access to justice.

The society we live in is a caste society based on the purity and impurity concept hence the practice of untouchability prevails in communities. It has denied the Dalits equal status in society, and land and political rights. More than ever today the communities and people are raising their resistance against these imperialist forces and their lackeys at all levels. Women are resisting the introduction of machines that displace labour. Women have succeeded in preventing the construction of dams. Peasants are occupying lands. Dalits are asserting their rights. Agricultural workers are organising for the right to work and livelihood. Workers are also driving out transnational corporations such as Syngenta and Monsanto. Farmers are practising sustainable agriculture and livelihoods. These are only a few examples of the diversity of the resistance of Our New World.

No one else can speak for us except we in the people's movements. We have our victories, our culture, our political agenda and our aspirations. We have come together here in the People's Movements Encounters to further strengthen, consolidate and heighten our resistance within Asia.

We will forward our struggles with greater determination, force and strength. We therefore:

1. Reject WTO. We will derail WTO at Cancun. Towards this, we will develop actions and proposals at all levels. As a first step we want WTO out of food and agriculture and health. There will be a special Global Day of Protest to derail WTO.
2. Reject TNCs, and we will drive them out of our communities, our nations and in Asia. The resistance that has already been organized, will now be further strengthened and consolidated with special focus on TNCs that promote hazardous technologies particularly Syngenta, Monsanto, Aventis, Du Pont and Bayer.
3. Assert our people's food sovereignty i.e. the right of people to decide our own food and agriculture policy, founded on right to land and productive resources including water, seeds, forests, our knowledge and skills. We will only achieve food sovereignty when we are free and independent from all forms of foreign and local domination. We will take back the Panchami land (land allocated to Dalits by the government) and other lands and distribute land to the landless and women. We reject labour replacement technologies. We will expand sustainable agriculture and promote sustainable livelihoods. We will have fair prices for agricultural products where Trade will respect the rights of peoples and assert food sovereignty.

4. Protect and promote the rights, equality and dignity of women. We reject and resist the culture of violence and torture arising from repression and subordination, particularly against women. In our rejection of patriarchal values and institutions, we will strongly defend and promote reproductive rights and health of women. Land and other productive resources will be equally distributed to women. Recognising women's role and contribution in food production and use of resources, women are equal partners in the struggle.

5. Resist and will destroy Fundamentalist culture, values and forces through our struggles for democratic rights, equality and freedom. The discrimination and atrocities on Dalits should be immediately stopped and the caste system and untouchability practices eradicated with immediate effect.

6. Strongly oppose the US led war on terrorism. We demand the immediate withdrawal of US troops placed for the war against Iraq. We reject state terrorism on our people and demand the immediate release of all political activists from prison. We also demand transparency and accountability at all levels on the use of people's money, especially on arms trade and defence.

Towards this end we will build international solidarity with people's movements everywhere.

A PEOPLE UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED

WSF SOCIAL FORUM ON PALESTINE

"At least they didn't shoot us"

Herbert V. Docena*

Day after Christmas, around three hundred delegates from all over the world were set to fly to Israel not to celebrate Christ's birth in Bethlehem but to push for something still struggling to be born - the free and sovereign state of Palestine. The World Social Forum on Palestine was to be held - defiantly enough - in Ramallah, one of the most dangerous places on earth in the last few months.

Organized by the Palestinian NGO network, along with the Arab NGO Network for Development and other international supporters, it was to be a symbolic show of solidarity, a daring message that not only Muslims care about Palestine. People from across the globe, and even from a country as overloaded with problems as the Philippines, were set to march on the bloodstained streets of the West Bank and Gaza to protest Israel's continuing colonization of what remains of Palestine.

But it was not to be. The uninvited guest drove away the guests that the host invited.

TREATED LIKE ROYALTY IN TEL-AVIV

At the Tel Aviv airport immigration area, after a 20-hour journey from Manila through Frankfurt, I was led to a small room where I was interrogated and intimidated by a young police officer who indignantly told me I could not enter her country. I was not alone. Outside were a group of dejected-looking men and women, mostly Belgian and one French, who had just been told to take the first flight out of Israel.

It was a very warm welcome. We were subjected to the most intensive body search some of us have ever been through and all the pieces of our luggage were scrutinized with the most prying eyes and the most high-tech pieces of equipment. Escorted by one police officer each, we were then led to a detention cell with a small square hole for a window, three bunker beds, and the cold of winter seeping in from openings on the wall just below the ceiling. It was only there, in hushed tones, that we were able to confirm to each other what we had been suspecting: We were all going to the Palestine forum.

It turns out that the Israel ministry of interior had gotten wind of what was being planned and had ordered the immigration to thoroughly check out everyone who was traveling alone and to turn away all those visiting Israel for reasons other than to celebrate Christ's birth. Since Palestine is bracketed on both sides by Israel and Jordan the only way to enter is through Tel Aviv or Amman. Since Jordan has signed a peace pact with Israel, going through Amman is as risky as going through Tel Aviv. Delegates who came in groups on Christmas day managed to slip through;

some other groups of Germans and some Spanish delegates had already been turned back.

At the airport, we were locked up in the detention cell for eleven hours, guarded intently by an officer outside. When the time to leave came, we were taken to the plane in a convoy led by a police car. In Frankfurt after landing, we were shepherded by the German police to their airport headquarters for another round of questioning. Tel Aviv apparently sent the Frankfurt police a note saying we were denied entry because we were illegal workers.

AT LEAST THEY DIDN'T SHOOT US

And yet, despite being detained and driven away, we still felt like we were given royal treatment by Israel.

At least they offered us lodging for the night. The Israeli military has demolished scores of Palestinians' dwellings in the occupied territories, leaving many Palestinians homeless in the dead of winter. At least they offered us a piece of sandwich each for dinner. With Israeli tanks on their streets and with curfews enforced by the soldiers, many Palestinians have often not even been able to go to the stores to buy food, much less go their schools or their offices to earn some money by which to buy something to eat.

At least they left us alone in our cell. Amnesty International has documented thousands of young Palestinian men being rounded up, imprisoned, and tortured in detention camps. At least, they released us alive. Almost two thousand Palestinians have been killed since the latest round of conflict escalated. Of these, around 200 were victims of "targeted assassination," the official Israeli policy of singling out and shooting those whom it suspects to be "terrorists." Just on the day we arrived, the Israeli army shot dead seven Palestinians - including three unarmed teenagers. There are new areas in Palestine, now slowly being taken by Israel in a creeping invasion, that Israel has unilaterally designated as no-go zones for Palestinians. Should Palestinians stray in these zones, Israeli soldiers are free to shoot them on sight anytime.

At least - lucky for us who have been spirited away but continuing woe to the Palestinians who are still there struggling to stay - Israel is still kinder to its hosts' guests than to its host itself.

Not that the Palestinians have been less than gracious hosts. In 1993, the Palestinians recognized the existence of the state of Israel - and, in effect, sympathized with its people's historical affinity with their land - by virtually bequeathing to them 78% of what was once Palestine. In other words, their former guests they were now willing to see as their new neighbors.

All they ask is that they be given back what they lost in Israel's 1967 surprise US-backed attack. If it's not too

much, they plead that they be allowed to establish an independent state with the remaining 22% of their homeland. And if their former guests don't mind, that they both conform with UN resolution 1397 which calls for the creation of "a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders."

And if this is still not abusing the hospitality of their former guests, to please stop killing them. Because they can't help it when- in the face of Israel's overwhelming military might, funded by the biggest foreign aid given by the United States to anyone - their children decide to blow themselves up, to repay the kindness.

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A SPLIT SCREEN IN STRIKE-TORN VENEZUELA

Mark Weisbrot*

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Walking around Caracas late last month during Venezuela's ongoing protests, I was surprised by what I saw. My expectations had been shaped by persistent US media coverage of the nationwide strike called by the opposition, which seeks President Hugo Chavez's ouster. Yet in most of the city, where poor and working-class people live, there were few signs of the strike. Streets were crowded with holiday shoppers, metro trains and buses were running normally, and shops were open for business. Only in the eastern, wealthier neighborhoods of the capital were businesses mostly closed.

This is clearly an oil strike, not a "general strike," as it is often described. At the state-owned oil company, PDVSA, which controls the industry, management is leading the strike because it is at odds with the Chavez government. And while Venezuela depends on oil for 80 percent of its export earnings and half its national budget, the industry's workers represent a tiny fraction of the labor force. Outside the oil industry, it is hard to find workers who are actually on strike. Some have been locked out from their jobs, as business owners — including big foreign corporations such as McDonald's and FedEx — have closed their doors in support of the opposition.

Most Americans seem to believe that the Chavez government is a dictatorship, and one of the most repressive governments in Latin America. But these impressions are false.

Not only was Chavez democratically elected, his government is probably one of the least repressive in Latin America. This, too, is easy to see in Caracas. While army troops are deployed to protect Miraflores (the presidential compound), there is little military or police presence in most of the capital, which is particularly striking in such a tense and volatile political situation. No one seems the least bit afraid of the national government, and despite the seriousness of this latest effort to topple it, no one has been arrested for political activities.

Chavez has been reluctant to use state power to break the strike, despite the enormous damage to the economy. In the United States, a strike of this sort — one that caused massive damage to the economy, or one where public or private workers were making political demands — would be declared illegal. Its participants could be fired, and its leaders — if they persisted in the strike — imprisoned under a court injunction. In Venezuela, the issue has yet to be

decided. The supreme court last month ordered PDVSA employees back to work until it rules on the strike's legality.

To anyone who has been in Venezuela lately, opposition charges that Chavez is "turning the country into a Castro-communist dictatorship" — repeated so often that millions of Americans apparently now believe them — are absurd on their face.

If any leaders have a penchant for dictatorship in Venezuela, it is the opposition's. On April 12 they carried out a military coup against the elected government. They installed the head of the business federation as president and dissolved the legislature and the supreme court, until mass protests and military officers reversed the coup two days later.

Military officers stand in Altamira Plaza and openly call for another coup. It is hard to think of another country where this could happen. The government's efforts to prosecute leaders of the coup were canceled when the court dismissed the charges in August. Despite the anger of his supporters, some of whom lost friends and relatives last year during the two days of the coup government, Chavez respected the decision of the court.

The opposition controls the private media, and to watch TV in Caracas is truly an Orwellian experience. The five private TV stations (there is one state-owned channel) that reach most Venezuelans play continuous anti-Chavez propaganda. But it is worse than that: They are also shamelessly dishonest. For example, on Dec. 6 an apparently deranged gunman fired on a crowd of opposition demonstrators, killing three and injuring dozens. Although there was no evidence linking the government to the crime, the television news creators — armed with footage of bloody bodies and grieving relatives — went to work immediately to convince the public that Chavez was responsible. Soon after the shooting, they were broadcasting grainy video clips allegedly showing the assailant attending a pro-Chavez rally.

Now consider how people in Caracas's barrios see the opposition, a view rarely heard in the United States: Led by representatives of the corrupt old order, the opposition is trying to overthrow a government that has won three elections and two referendums since 1998. Its coup failed partly because hundreds of thousands of people risked their lives by taking to the streets to defend democracy. So now it is crippling the economy with an oil strike. The upper classes are simply attempting to gain through economic sabotage

what they could not and — given the intense rivalry and hatred among opposition groups and leaders — still cannot win at the ballot box.

From the other side of the class divide, the conflict is also seen as a struggle over who will control and benefit from the nation's oil riches. Over the last quarter-century PDVSA has swelled to a \$50 billion a year enterprise, while the income of the average Venezuelan has declined and poverty has increased more than anywhere in Latin America. Billions of dollars of the oil company's revenue could instead be used to finance health care and education for millions of Venezuelans.

Now add Washington to the mix: The United States, alone in the Americas, supported the coup, and before then it increased its financial support of the opposition. Washington shares PDVSA executives' goals of increasing oil production, busting OPEC quotas and even selling off the company to private foreign investors. So it is not surprising that the whole conflict is seen in much of Latin America as just another case of Washington trying to overthrow an independent, democratically elected government.

This view from the barrios seems plausible. The polarization of Venezuelan society along class and racial lines is apparent in the demonstrations themselves. The pro-government marches are filled with poor and working-class people who are noticeably darker — descendants of the country's indigenous people and African slaves — than the more expensively dressed upper classes of the opposition. Supporters of the opposition that I spoke with dismissed these differences, insisting that Chavez's followers were simply "ignorant," and were being manipulated by a "demagogue."

But for many, Chavez is the best, and possibly last, hope not only for social and economic betterment, but for democracy itself. At the pro-government demonstrations, people carry pocket-size copies of the country's 1999 constitution, and vendors hawk them to the crowds. Leaders of the various non-governmental organizations that I met with, who helped draft the constitution, have different reasons for revering it: women's groups, for example, because of its anti-discrimination articles; and indigenous leaders because it is the first to recognize their people's rights. But all see themselves as defending constitutional democracy and civil liberties against what they describe as "the threat of fascism" from the opposition.

This threat is very real. Opposition leaders have made no apologies for the April coup, nor for the arrest and killing of scores of civilians during the two days of illegal government. They continue to stand up on television and appeal for another coup — which, given the depth of Chavez's support, would have to be bloody in order to hold power.

Where does the U.S. government now stand on the question of democracy in Venezuela? The Bush administration joined the opposition in taking advantage of the Dec. 6 shootings to call for early elections, which would violate the Venezuelan constitution. The administration reversed itself the next week, but despite paying lip service to the negotiations mediated by the OAS, it has done nothing to encourage its allies in the opposition to seek a constitutional or even a peaceful solution.

Sixteen members of Congress sent a letter to Bush last month, asking him to state clearly that the United States would not have normal diplomatic relations with a coup-installed government in Venezuela. But despite its apprehension about disruption of Venezuelan oil supplies on the eve of a probable war against Iraq, the Bush administration is not yet ready to give up any of its options for "regime change" in Caracas. And — not surprisingly — neither is the Venezuelan opposition.

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“DEGLOBALIZATION”? SURE, BUT...

by Patrick Bond

My favorite haunt, Zimbabwe, is the delight of aggressive bourgeois commentators, one of whom wrote a month ago about that country's meltdown in the *Economist* (30 November 2002):

“An interesting economic experiment is being conducted in Zimbabwe. To the foes of globalisation, President Robert Mugabe's views are unexceptional. He argues that ‘runaway market forces’ are leading a ‘vicious, all-out assault on the poor.’ He decries the modern trend of ‘banishing the state from the public sphere for the benefit of big business.’ What sets him apart from other anti-globalisers, however, is that he has been able to put his ideas into practice.”

Aargh. The *Economist* wants readers to think that Mugabe is a deglobalizing anti-capitalist, and that the unfolding meltdown associated with his alleged rejection of the market is the necessary outcome of the policies those of us in the movement advocate. The reality is far different, as can be attested by many Harare and Bulawayo leftwing activists and students subjected to proto-fascist official brutality for more than a decade.

Perhaps the freshest antidote to *Economist* logic is Walden Bello's new book “Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy”. I've just added it to the required reading list for my main political-economic masters seminar at Wits University this year. Bello's book is part of the worthy Zed Press series called *Global Issues*. At 132 pages, it's an easy-reading companion to his other recent book, “The Future in the Balance”—a collection of 20 eloquent essays published in 2001 by Food First, the San Francisco advocacy NGO that he once directed.

Bello probably needs no introduction; his hectic schedule includes participation in virtually all confrontations with the global power structure; a professorship at University of the Philippines; leadership of a leftwing Filipino political party; and most importantly from the standpoint of international anti-capitalism, directorship of Focus on the Global South, a people's movement thinktank based at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (<http://www.focusweb.org>).

Humble and humorous, Bello—who holds a Princeton doctorate in sociology—has a long history of social mobilisation. Six months ago, the *New Left Review* published an engaging interview that explored his political trajectory, including an important break with the Communist Party of the Philippines (<http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25004.shtml>).

What are the main arguments for deglobalization? The

book opens by arguing, tightly and persuasively, that the existing world system is untenable, on several grounds captured by the first chapter's main subheadings: multilateralism in disarray; the crisis of the neoliberal order; the corporation under question; the degeneration of liberal democracy; the specter of global deflation; the rise of the (anticapitalist) movement; September 11; and “imperial overstretch”. Bello closes the introductory chapter with a hint that “progressive responses are coming together under the canopy of the Porto Alegre process”—though here the argument becomes distressingly vague, particularly in relation to previous traditions of anticapitalism.

Analytically, Bello is influenced by Robert Brenner's two major marxist studies of intercapitalist competition, resulting systemic overcapacity and declining profitability: “The Economics of Global Turbulence” in *New Left Review*, May/June 1998 and “The Boom and the Bubble” published by Verso last year. But Bello hesitates to more forcefully ground his anti-capitalism, beyond the coy signals and codewords.

Instead, Bello's great strength is the lucidity of a largely institutional critique. Although the second chapter reviews the half-hearted anti-imperialism of Third World governments through the 1970s and the subsequent rightwing reaction that has left most Southern leaders mere lackeys of Washington, it is a journalistic approach. (In contrast, I had hoped for something approaching the theoretical clarity that makes, for example, Robert Biel's book “The New Imperialism”, published by Zed in 2000, so rewarding.)

Bello's third chapter adds analyses of the World Bank, IMF and WTO. The fourth shows how these organizations—and global capitalism more generally—came to suffer a late 1990s legitimacy crisis. He demolishes both the actual “vicissitudes of reform” (Chapter Five) and the main bourgeois proposals for future restructuring of global economic governance, by commentators ranging from the UN to the Meltzer Commission to Bretton Woods System revivalists to the recently-convicted insider trader George Soros (Chapter Six).

Then comes “The alternative: Deglobalization” in Chapter Seven. Although the book is short, it is sad that only 11 pages carry the concrete strategic options for the anticapitalist movement, because they are worthy of amplification. Bello's description—“I am not talking about withdrawing from the international economy. I am speaking about reorienting our economies from production for export to production for the local market”—recalls the way, more than a decade ago, Samir Amin described his own conception of deglobalization: “Delinking is not synonymous with

autarky, but rather with the subordination of external relations to the logic of internal development... Delinking implies a 'popular' content, anti-capitalist in the sense of being in conflict with the dominant capitalism, but permeated with the multiplicity of divergent interests."

But this begs the question of whether to conceptualise the problem as one of deep-seated tendencies towards the commodification of everything under capitalist relations of production, or simply pernicious globalists and hostile, excessively powerful institutions. Indeed the weakest possible conception of deglobalization is Bello's suggestion at the 2002 World Social Forum that, as one option, we seek to reduce existing neoliberal institutions to "just another set of actors coexisting with and being checked by other international organizations, agreements, and regional groupings. These would include such diverse actors and institutions as UNCTAD, multilateral environmental agreements, the ILO, the EU, and evolving trade blocs such as Mercosur in Latin America, SAARC in South Asia, SADC in Southern Africa, and a revitalized ASEAN in Southeast Asia. More space, more flexibility, more compromise—these should be the goals of the Southern agenda and the civil society effort to build a new system of global economic governance."

Most anyone involved in local struggles in which these institutions play a role know them to be part of the problem, not the solution, as currently constituted. Thus Bello has come under sharp criticism from the left (e.g., Alex Callinicos, Victor Wallis and Ray Kiely), and for good reason in view of some past and ongoing advocacy gaffes:

* two years ago he advanced the idea that the international Left could "unite" (sic) with Republicans against the World Bank and IMF—which may have been merely a mistake in wording (if he meant simple tactical convergence), but which says volumes about clarity on alliances;

* in "Deglobalization", he suggests "a demand that has potential to unite a broad front of people is that of converting [the IMF] into a research agency"—this, after Bello has demolished the IMF, in "The Future in the Balance", for stupidity and blindness when it came to East Asia's crisis; and

* he also remarks in passing that deglobalization will entail more "microcredit schemes such as the Grameen Bank"—perhaps unaware that in late 2001 the Wall Street Journal wrote that, "To many, Grameen proves that capitalism can work for the poor as well as the rich" but then had to unhappily concede how Grameen's recent "steep losses" and unethical accounting practices had left the international microcredit industry "alarmed" (in spite of Grameen's more assertive debt collection method: removing tin roofs from delinquent women's houses).

These may be picky, outdated and largely semantic points. (On alliances, for instance, Bello and "Future in the Balance" chapter coauthor Anuradha Mittal blasted the AFL-CIO and some environmentalists for their "Faustian bargain" with the xenophobic right at the time of the Chinese accession to permanent normal trading nation status with the US.)

Indeed, Bello completely convinces me with the more radical components of the strategy, especially "deconstruction" techniques to defund and disempower global capitalist institutions. It was, in particular, his shift towards advocating the abolition of the World Bank in April 2000 that helped most to provide intellectual buttressing for the great militancy witnessed in that year's Washington and Prague protests.

But for the sake of intra-movement discussions, is there not a more expansive way to address deglobalization, by departing from dual-reformist notions of globalized-regulation and utopian-localization strategies? Would it be so difficult for intellectual leaders like Bello to mention the prospect of revolution—namely, defense of a takeover and total transformation of state power, in the manner carried out so often historically, but so rarely taken to fruition?

Wouldn't nurturing the economy and society of such a radical Third Worldist state presume the expropriation of key local/national assets and an immediate rejigging of the local/national economy towards meeting needs which had not been met previously? Would this revolutionary state not also automatically reject the World Bank/IMF and WTO, the French/British water companies, the international property rights restrictions on medicines, and most other international capitalist relationships, as a short-medium term strategy? In turn, would this not require capital controls, default on the odious debts left by previous regimes, and import/export management (of a very different type than was practiced under previous bourgeois Third World nationalist regimes)?

Such a project—which is not, as Amin puts it, synonymous with autarky along the lines of old Albania, Burma or North Korea—will necessitate breaking economic linkages to the worst forces of global finance, commerce, investment and capitalist culture. This could be one half of the future of the idea of deglobalization.

The other half is the struggle to implement "decommodification" at home by way of transitional demands flowing directly from organic social and labour struggles. Some of the most exciting in my hometown of Johannesburg involve the battles over access to electricity, water, land, housing, food and anti-retroviral drugs—topics for future updates because with my remaining words I want to testify to applied deglobalization activities that Bello and the Thai progressive eco-social movements are engaged in.

When I visited Bangkok a couple of weeks ago, I witnessed the sort of gathering that should really worry the international and Thai ruling elites: a seminar in which, as the year drew to a close, 70 invigorated labour, community, radical environmental, feminist and Trotskyist activists came together for strategic debate in two languages, hosted by Focus on the Global South—ironically, located within the country’s most bourgeois university, Chulalongkorn.

The same week, two combative protests unfolded: one was the heightening of pressure on the ghastly prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, by victims of the infamous Pak Mool dam project. Protesters had occupied space outside Government House until this week, when they were finally forced back to the hills by increasing state brutality, divide-and-conquer strategies, and paramilitary thugs who have destroyed the Pak Mool peasants’ temporary dwellings on two occasions. But the anti-dam activists certainly seem to have won hearts and minds across Thailand, and their activism has compelled Thaksin to consider writing off the hydropower project—though the battle is far from over.

The second was an amazing demonstration on December 20 during a Thai-Malaysia cabinet meeting at a luxury hotel in the southern town of Hat Yai. A thousand activists protested an ecologically-damaging Petronas gas pipeline between the two countries. As they sat down to eat and pray in an area that Thaksin’s main assistant had approved as a green zone, hundreds were clubbed by the police. Leaders were jailed and several dozen people (including police) were hospitalized in the ensuing melee. The Thai Forum of the Poor and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development were among groups offering solidarity.

These activists, amongst whom are the tough young staff at Focus (admirably connected into a variety of struggles across Southeast and South Asia), look up to Walden Bello for inspiration. Minor cavils aside, I certainly do too.

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