

Focus-on-Trade is a regular electronic bulletin providing updates and analysis of trends in regional and world trade and finance, with an emphasis on analysis of these trends from an integrative, interdisciplinary viewpoint that is sensitive not only to economic issues, but also to ecological, political, gender and social issues. Your contributions and comments are welcome.

Number 97, February 2004

By Isabelle Delforge

By Mary Louise Malig

Herbert Docena

By Alec Bamford

Ji Giles Ungpakorn

THE Mumbai World Social Forum was, by general acclamation, a Great Success. But what does success mean and where do we go from here? In this (delayed due to technical problems) issue of Focus on Trade we don't attempt to answer these questions but, in keeping with the post-modern character of the WSF, we have an eclectic collection of reflections: some of the pixels that make up the Big Picture.

(The WSF, by the way, is now immortalised in the latest novel of Britain's best-selling spy writer John le Carre — "Absolute Friends" — an angry (passionate, clumsy, compelling) shot at the New Imperialism of Bush and Blair. At one point, the shadowy but extremely rich Dimitri attempts to prove his capitalist-loathing anti-globalist credentials to the anti-hero Mundy by invoking the luminaries of the movement. "I have acquired many books on the subject," he says. "I have in mind such writers as the Canadian Naomi Klein, India's Arundhati Roy who pleads for a different way of seeing, your British George Monbiot and Mark Curtis, Australia's John Pilger, America's Noam Chomsky, the American Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz and the Franco-American Susan George of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre. You have read all these fine writers Mr Mundy?" The dialogue is as unconvincing as the character, but at least Le Carre knows (more or less) who is on the side of the angels (as his "absolute" character George Smiley would say). Is this counter-hegemony? Comments welcome.)

DON'T WAIT FOR "ANOTHER WORLD"

By Isabelle Delforge*

An Indian participant from Tamil Nadu stands up and asks the panelists "The WSF keeps repeating that another world is possible. But what world do you want?" The workshop has gathered delegates from all over the world on the issue of people's land rights and social change. Among the panellists, Kingkorn Narintarakul, an activist from Thailand, gives this answer "We only have one world. This is the world we live in. We have our own knowledge, our practices, our wisdom, our land. We don't need to find another world. What we need is to reclaim our world".

And this is precisely what several movements organising this workshop have been doing (1). In South Africa, in Brazil, in Thailand or in the Philippines, farmers have been occupying land as part of their long struggle for a genuine agrarian reform. "If the government doesn't distribute the land, we have to do it ourselves," said one farmer. For them, the alternative to the scandalous inequalities in land ownership is land occupation. They see it as the main driving force that allows them to feed themselves and to force political changes.

Itelvina Masioli from the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil explains this approach. "When we occupy a piece of land, we don't only physically take the field. We also start living there, growing fruits and vegetables. We organise the communities, share the resources and look for education opportunities for our children. Land occupation is a comprehensive alternative."

In a completely different encounter at the WSF, Felipe Van Keirsbilck, a Belgian unionist, also suggested that the WSF slogan "Another world is possible" had lost its power of mobilisation in the streets of Mumbai. "It sounds very much like a remote promise. It reminds me of the paradise that the Christians are expecting in 'an other life'. When we see the Dalits marching in the streets, the women staging street theatres at every corner representing oppression and liberation from oppression, we realise that we now need a stronger rallying cry. People are not going to wait for another world to materialise. They are busy asserting their rights to live in this one."

Jose Josivaldo de Oliveira from MAB, a Brazilian movement of people affected by big dams addressed thousands of Indian villagers and indigenous people at a large conference on development induced displacement organised by the National Alliance of People Movements (India). He explained that they had waited long enough to see an end to the policies of building large dams, evicting farmers from their land. His movement is now planning to open the dams and, if necessary, to break them in order to recover people's land, livelihoods and dignity.

Encounters after encounters, speakers from different movements and sectors voiced similar approaches to social change. At a round table on food sovereignty organised by Focus on the Global South, Shaktiman Ghosh of the Hawkers Shangharsh Committee in Calcutta said that street vendors were the alternatives to TNC's and large distribution chains. "We are taking over the whole food chain. Street vendors in our union have started to buy products directly from farmers' cooperatives and they sell them directly to consumers. We simply bypass the globalised food system."

Some people regretting the lack of alternatives at the WSF might have missed all those testimonies. Actually, the feeling in Mumbai was that the alternatives are already happening everywhere, and that they are an integral part of the struggle: in the struggle for land, forest, seeds or water, in the emancipation struggle against patriarchy, in the liberation process of the oppressed.

With the strong participation of people's movements and grassroots organisations at the WSF in Mumbai, a new wind has started blowing over the global movements. It suggests that the alternative to corporate globalisation and oppression is the actual space taken over by marginalized and affected communities. It is in the new practices and relationships that they are implementing. This movement is not so much about creating a new and ideal world, but about reclaiming an existing world, and transforming it radically.

(1) FIAN International, LRAM and FSPI

* Isabelle Delforge is a research associate with Focus on the Global South working on food sovereignty and "life without the WTO". She organised a roundtable on food sovereignty at the WSF.

THE WAR IS FAR FROM OVER

By Mary Louise Malig*

When George Bush declared the war on Iraq was over last May, with matching “mission accomplished” banners and jet fighter plane landing, he was asking for trouble. This whole choreography of US military might and supremacy was designed to display the awesome might of the Empire. But few were in awe. What it did do was to further fuel the people’s resistance not only in Iraq, but all over the globe.

Resistance against the war on terror since the massive worldwide mobilizations of February 15 has spread like wildfire. But despite the strong opposition, Bush and Blair went on to invade Iraq and this has caused many to say that the anti-war movement failed and had retreated into defeat. This quiet was not the silence of retreating and resigning to defeat; it was the quiet of gathering and strategizing.

In the days after the invasion of Iraq, several national, regional and international anti-war strategy meetings took place in Chiapas, Florence, Cairo, London, Geneva, Genoa, Jakarta and Cancun. These meetings produced numerous ideas and plans on how to confront the warmongers, end the occupations — not only of Iraq and Palestine— and link the struggles against the war with the struggles against corporate globalization. However due to lack of financial resources and other reasons, these meetings were relatively small and thus did not achieve the representivity it aimed for.

This prompted people to organize a General Assembly of the Anti-War Movement at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India. What better place to hold this Assembly, but at the biggest annual gathering of the world’s movements? It was after all at the last WSF in Porto Alegre, Brasil, where the idea of February 15, from the European movements gathered support from social movements around the world, was launched.

This Assembly was envisioned to be the most representative meeting since the invasion of Iraq and hoped to bring together the numerous anti-

war and anti-globalization campaigns. It also aimed to find ways to support one another and coordinate actions, possibly for an international day of action, March 20, the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

The Assembly convened for the whole day on January 19 at the WSF grounds starting with around 100 people and peaking to more than 400. The participants represented anti-war coalitions, social movements, trade unions and various campaigns spanning the globe. It opened with a number of speakers analyzing the current political situation with the aim of informing the day’s debates on campaigns and strategies.

Speakers included Walden Bello, a member of the Asian Peace Mission to Iraq, who said that “Iraq is becoming another Vietnam for the US, which is now seeking an honorable exit. The situation is becoming unmanageable and the factor that made the difference? The Iraqi people began the resistance!” Bello added that the resistance in Iraq has inspired many others to resist the US, even in the area of trade. He cited the collapse of the World Trade Organization’s talks in Cancun, Mexico and the stalemate of negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in Miami.

This was affirmed by the next speakers, Oupa Lehlere of the South African Anti-War Coalition and Amir Rekaby of the Iraqi National Democratic Coalition. “Armed with the experience of the last 82 years the Iraqi people have transformed the occupation into an impossible occupation,” Rekaby declared.

And lastly, British MP Jeremy Corbyn added that the movement must map its own way forward, “We must not allow our agenda on war to be decided by CNN, BBC and others. We need to focus on US/British occupation in Iraq but also take up these other ‘forgotten wars.’”

The rest of the day focused on strategies and campaigns. It began with a report back of different anti-war coalitions from Asia, Europe, the United States, Latin America and the Middle East. The strengths and weaknesses of the movements in different countries were recognized and assessed. This was followed by proposals and reports from other international anti-war campaigns such as the World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI), the No US Bases campaign, the Occupation Watch Center, the Caravans to Iraq,

the Civil Missions to Palestine, the Disarmament Campaign and the Boycott Bush Campaign.

Ayse Berktaç, WTI representative, explained the Tribunal process and how people could help in collecting evidence or finding witnesses, join the different hearings, and support the final Tribunal to be held in Istanbul in March 2005.

Lindsey Collen of the No US Bases campaign shared their plans and strategies on closing the bases, which include mapping local campaigns against the bases and sending flotillas to bases like Diego Garcia. Fabio Alberti of the Occupation Watch Center gave an update of their work in Iraq and invited people to come to Iraq and support the work there. Alessandra Mecozzi of the Caravans to Iraq explained that the Caravans' motto was "A Middle East without war and oppression is possible" and that this was one of the steps in mobilizing against the war and reaffirming that the movement has no borders. Nahla Chahal and Paul Nicholson shared about the Civil Missions to Palestine and invited first time activists to join.

Finally, Pol d' Huyvetter of the Boycott Bush Campaign came in with a lively march of around a hundred people wearing George Bush masks and carrying cardboard machine guns and "Boycott Bush" placards. They announced that the different campaigns around the boycott had come together at the WSF and formed one international campaign. They plan to produce Boycott Action Kits with lots of information and suggestions on how to get involved.

The multitude of George Bushes removed their masks to cheers from the festive crowd. The atmosphere was electric. After the presentations, everyone fiercely debated, discussed and proposed ideas, and alternatives. All this, and more, despite the heat beating down the open tent and the constant drumming from passing marches and performances, which at times made it nearly impossible to hear one another.

People from all over the world were getting up to the microphone and sharing their stories of resistance, campaigns or simply expressing their solidarity and amazement at the diversity of the participants present at the Assembly. Women from Iraq stood up and stated that they were liberating themselves from the Empire. A Church group representative declared their support for the resistance. Koreans shared their mobilization plans, complete with materials, posters and pins. American activists reassured the Assembly that they were at one with the

world in resisting the Empire.

The most unexpected intervention however came from a woman who had been quietly sitting among the participants in the Assembly, listening intently to everyone's ideas and proposals. Leila Khaled, the legendary Palestinian liberation fighter would not have even spoken had she not been recognized by one of the session's moderators and introduced to the rest of the Assembly.

Speaking in a quiet yet forceful voice, she said "You are the international law, it is not in New York." She continued, "You were there in South Africa during the apartheid, you were there in many other sites of oppression, and you won. Action will always speak louder than words and we will do it hand in hand with the Iraqis and the Palestinians."

The interventions at the Assembly were both invigorating and inspiring. There were fierce debates on issues such as the short and long term objectives of the movement. People argued about the various ways of supporting the resistance. Some raised their concerns on the perils of focusing too much on George Bush and in the process neglecting other equally menacing governments. Victor Nzuzi from the Republic of Congo, shared that there are 3.5 million deaths in his country and yet no one takes notice. "Everyone is pretending that the war is finished."

The Assembly ended on a determined note, with everyone committing to mobilize in their respective countries for March 20 and to support the various campaigns presented at the Assembly. And as Luciano Muhlbauer of the Italian social movements stated, "The problem is not how to sustain the resistance in Iraq – we should be the resistance against the war."

Becoming the resistance was the sentiment that carried through at the Assembly, resonating with the same spirit of Arundhati Roy's call during the opening of the WSF that "we must consider ourselves at war." Contrary to George Bush's claims that the war was over, it will now be waged on him and the rest of the coalition governments from all fronts.

As Chris Nineham declared at the closing ceremony of the WSF, on behalf of the Anti-War Assembly, "We wish to send a message to the warmongers that our movement will not rest

until we have buried the Project for A New American Century once and for all. We will all demonstrate for peace and justice on March 20.”

The full report of the Anti-War Assembly can be downloaded from www.focusweb.org or you can email marylou@focusweb.org

* Marylou Malig is a research associate with Focus on the Global South and was a key organiser of the Anti-War Assembly.

NO F-16s IN OUR GARDEN

Herbert Docena*

The idea was simple enough: If all of the US' 702 foreign military bases in 40 countries around the world were shut down, then the US wouldn't find it so easy to launch its illegal wars.

And who better to push for the closure of these bases than the people who've been forced to live around them? Those who've been enduring the sonic-boom from the F-16s 24/7, those who've been evicted from their islands so that the Army can build its barracks and spy stations on their farmlands, those whose neighbors have been raped by bored GI's out for a night of fun, those whose children are dying from previously unknown cancers because of the toxic water they are drinking — all those who could not plant flowers in their gardens because the Humvees keep crushing them. If there's one thing that could unite these people, it is the demand to keep those F-16s out of their sight and out of their lives.

Now, if they could only all meet, share what they've been through with others who know only too well what it's like, discuss how they've struggled through the years, and maybe come up with a common plan to confront the bases of their insecurity, imagine what all that could achieve.

The international conference against US bases during the recent World Social Forum was an attempt to do just this. It brought together veteran — but still very energetic — campaigners against US bases as well as young and new activists; grassroots and community based activists focused on foreign military presence together with those working on other related issues, such as globalization, human rights, democratization, etc.

Among those who participated were Corazon Fabros, who was instrumental in the spectacular and historic “No” vote in the Philippine Senate that finally drove out the American troops from one of their first colonies; Suzuyo Takasato, an untiring campaigner from Okinawa; Lindsey Collen who's been working

on the case of the refugees from Diego Garcia for years; Olivier Bancoult, himself a refugee from Diego Garcia; Reverend Myun, a revered anti-US bases activist from Korea; Joseph Gerson, author of the definitive anti-US bases text, "The Sun Never Sets"; and Myrna Pagan, who triumphantly spoke about the inspiring victory of the people of Vieques, Puerto Rico, over the US Navy, to name just a few. Even after the physical meetings in Mumbai, discussions about various ideas and proposals are continuing in a vibrant e-mail community that has gathered over 200 people working on the issue around the world.

The range of participants was an indication of just how widely scattered the US foreign military presence is around the world but it was also a sign of how global opposition is broadening.

And apparently expanding. At the beginning of the "speak-out" session, Joseph posted a big map of the world in front of the panelists' table, with all the countries hosting US military presence marked in red, just to have a visual reminder that the US has got the world covered. During the session, two women from Kyrgyzstan, whose participation were not expected by the organizers, took the mike and pointed out that their country should also now be in red. After the invasion of Afghanistan, Tolekan Ismailova reported, the US established bases in her country and it was approved by the parliament in two days. "It was the fastest decision it ever made," Ismailova said, pointing out that the local ruling elites who collude with the US must also be targeted.

During the strategy session, the participants began to wrestle with certain controversies and questions: Should we only target US bases? What about the foreign bases of other countries? What should be the perspective of the campaign, anti-imperialist or anti-militarist? Would it be effective to select a few key bases as strategic sites of struggle? What structure would best serve the objectives of the network? What value-added can an international group provide for local anti-bases activists? The network needs to be inclusive and expansive but to what extent can it be broadened without losing focus and without diluting the message? What now?

Some of these questions could become potentially divisive for this nascent community but they will need to be resolved implicitly or

explicitly for the network to move forward. This is just the beginning. But the first step in the process of building up the movement and its constituency has now been taken. What has emerged so far is a promising consensus on various points.

First is that the time is now. The "war against terror" has swung the spotlight back on the US overseas military network. Where did all those troops that invaded Iraq come from? Some from the bases in Kuwait; some came all the way from Sasebo in Japan; others may have been flown in from Ramstein, Germany or from Pine Gap in Australia. Now they want six bases in Iraq. Interestingly, the very same Halliburton that's been raking in billions from the destruction and reconstruction of Iraq was also the same corporation that constructed the military bases in Diego Garcia — home to 1,500 Chagossians who were forcibly removed and dumped on the dockside of Mauritius by the British, who then rented out the island to the US. Thanks to war on terror, "the task that never ends", people around the world are now looking for Diego Garcia in the map (just below India, northeast of Mauritius) and wondering what on earth American GIs are doing there. US bases have become visual aids for all those trying to educate people on the workings of imperialism.

There are very dynamic and very effective international networks and campaigns against Third World debt, against the World Bank and the IMF, against the WTO, etc. These are all integral but then, would the US really be able to enforce its economic agenda around the world without its massive military firepower backing it? Can one run an empire without military outposts?

Most of the delegates were in agreement that any campaign against US military presence cannot be isolated from the bigger struggle against corporate-driven globalization, against war, against empire. This is not about closing the bases for the sake of closing them down. The bases need to be shut down not just because they're noisy or so that we can build golf courses on the land instead. The people from Okinawa don't want to close the base in their island just so that it can be moved back to Olongapo. The US bases are a means to an end; an anti-bases campaign can't therefore be an end in itself. The equation is simple enough: No bases = no empire = no wars. The grass will grow again only when the Humvees have been pushed out of the fields.

For an anti-capitalist event, the WSF runs on

WHAT I DID IN MUMBAI

By Alec Bamford*

suspiciously free market lines. Apart from the 2-3 events organized by the WSF itself for each time slot, there were 133 other parallel venues. To be filled by an amazing smorgasbord of topics and organizations. From, to take a page of the programme at random, 'Science and Technology for the Implementation of a New Brazilian National Development Project' to 'Strategies of Struggle in Closed Industries' run by Ginri Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (you've never heard of them either?), to 'Transit of Venus Mass Experiment' (housed in Tent C96, so I can't think the experiment could have been that mass).

So along with Jose Bove, Arundhati Roy and Joseph Stiglitz, you also find people like Mr R P Saraf, proud publisher of Nature-Human Centric Viewpoint Publications, who, very politely, but very persistently, foisted on me a copy of "A Justice-Based World is Possible on the Basis of a Nature-Human Centric Agenda" (available also in Hindi and Punjabi). In other words, there is quite a bit of chaff before you get to any wheat.

And all touting for custom. If the events represent the competitive market-place, the currency in demand is bums on seats. More than one speaker decried the fact that only 30 of more than 100,000 participants had bothered to turn up to what was obviously a presentation of crucial importance (presumably because s/he was giving it). And what does it say for the street cred of an NGO to attract an audience of 300 (plus pigeons) in a disused warehouse capable of seating 2000? Better perhaps to pack 250 in a sackcloth and scaffolding tent designed for 200. Nothing attracts a crowd more than a crowd spilling out of the doorways.

You could plan your day from the programme that resembled a small telephone directory, but this was only available 2 days after the thing started and required the skills of a dedicated catalogue shopper. There were e-mail blizzards ahead of time for those on the right listservs. But most NGOs attempted to get an audience by means of that carbuncle on the arse of capitalism - advertising. So every wall, tree and post was soon festooned with notices and the dust was littered with thousands of discarded flyers. Could the WSF be a cause of alternative deforestation?

But what if some of the more brazen features of neo-liberalism were borrowed? This is all in the cause of participation and solidarity, is it not? Well, yes, but it depends how much solidarity you can imbibe from yet another stageful of talking heads. And how much participation you can enjoy from the most repeated phrase I heard in the events: "Due to lack of time, we will not be able to take any questions or comments from the floor." By the end of Day 4, we were all so used to this that when one efficient chair did manage to keep time, the call for questions met with silence. (Apart from the nth drum-banging social movement galvanizing the masses on the roadway outside, that is.)

No, all in all, I think there needs to be some alternative thinking about this alternative event before we can truly call it a World Social Funfair. No, hang on, that's wrong. World Social Free-for-all. No, that's not it either. What's the 'F' word? Where's me dog-tag, it's on there. Ah, yes. World Social Forum. I'll try to remember that for next year.

When I won't go.

* Alec Bamford is the Thailand country director of the Canadian volunteer service, CUSO.

A NEW LEFT EMERGING FROM THE OLD?

Ji Giles Ungpakorn*

Generally, it was felt that the World Social Forum in India was a gathering of the “Left”, in a plural sort of way, not some neutral space for academic discussion, and for many people who attended, the open debate and shared experiences should result in some sort of action towards building a better world. The fact that it was acknowledged that it was “the Left”, is a welcome development when compared to the “peoples’ assemblies” in Thailand.

The WSF reflected the tensions between the “old” and the “new”, which are found in any fast-growing progressive movement.

WITHIN THE WSF: There were differences of approach to the organisation of meetings. Large meetings with full platforms, which allowed for little if no time for any serious debate and discussion among ordinary delegates were of limited benefit. It was noticeable that one important concrete decision, the 20th March world wide action against the war, came out of a different kind of forum: the general anti-war assembly, which involved much more participation and discussion by activists. Also my experiences of excellent political debates with many Indian comrades came from meetings organised in seminar rooms by the International Socialist Tendency. I’m sure other delegates had other similar experiences.

REFORM VS REVOLUTION: This was very clear, say, in the debate between people like Joseph Stiglitz and Dita Sari over their attitudes to the WTO, IMF and the capitalist system as a whole.

BETWEEN THE WSF WORLD WIDE AND THE THAI PEOPLES MOVEMENT: What was noticeable was the way people took it for granted in the WSF that the imperialist war in Iraq was linked to neoliberalism and that the anti-war struggle would hit the US government at its most vulnerable point and thus help spur the anti-neoliberal struggle. This is not something understood generally by the Thai movement which has suffered from an “apolitical” position, mainly as a result of the legacy of Maoism and the influence of conservative NGOs. Many Thai delegates to the WSF were unaware of the anti-war meetings and any of the decisions (eg

20th March) and do not seem to understand the importance of organising for the 20th March.

ORGANISING: The Asian anti-war march on the final day contrasted very strongly with marches organised “from above” by professionals, which are the general rule in Thailand. Young Indian radicals were drawn into the march by the vibrancy of the South Koreans who tended to lead themselves from below.

DEPRESSION VS HOPE: Even within the WSF there were those who talked of another world, but could not imagine such a world. The speaker from the European Green party, who spoke at the large meeting on parties and social movements, could not imagine any other form of political party other than one which “had to compromise” inside parliament. But at the smaller meeting on “Life after capitalism” speakers discussed how we could organise society in a completely different manner from today.

Finally, what filled me with hope was the unity meeting of 45 left-wing organisations, Maoists and Trotskyists, which decided that we all need to work together in a concrete manner to contribute to a new socialist and non-sectarian world within the WSF process. One very important issue which the left must come to terms with is the attitude towards NGOs, especially in Asia. We must get away from narrow sectarianism and find ways to work with NGO activists in opposing neo-liberalism and imperialism, while at the same time never shying away from political debates. The failure of narrow sectarianism was clearly shown in the case of the isolated Mumbai Resistance 2004 which attracted a few thousand people compared to the 100,000 who attended the WSF.

* Ji Ungpakorn teaches political science at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok . He is also a member of Workers Solidarity.

