Launching a Major International Front Against the Extreme Right

Eric Toussaint of the the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM) is interviewed at February's World Social Forum in Nepal on future plans for an international movement against the extreme right.

Éric Toussaint interviewed by Sergio Ferrari on he World Social Forum in Kathmandu, Nepal, 15-19 February 2024.

At the end of another edition of the World Social Forum (WSF) held in Kathmandu, Nepal, from February 15 to 19, it's time to take stock. "It was a very positive event for the region. But we need to move forward and promote concrete initiatives in a complex international context marked by the far-right offensive," says Belgian historian and economist Eric Toussaint. Founder and spokesman for the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM), Toussaint took part in the WSF, where his organisation promoted seven events that were well attended.

***Sergio Ferrari**: What is your assessment of this latest edition of the World Social Forum?*

Positive, but…

Éric Toussaint (ÉT): It was very positive, mainly due to the participation of very diverse popular sectors and some of those most oppressed. I'm referring in particular to the Dalits, the untouchable caste, the native and indigenous peoples, historically marginalised but highly organised, the trade union forces and many feminists from the working classes. The majority came from Nepal and India. The organisers counted more than 18,000 registrations (from over

90 countries), and at the opening march on Thursday, February 15, between 12 and 15,000 people took part. No fewer than 10,000 people attended the conferences, workshops and cultural activities each day. It was an excellent decision to come to Nepal. This is an incomparably better result than the WSF in Mexico in May 2022.

However, the WSF as such has not achieved the same level of participation as in the first decade of its existence since it was first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001. There were very few participants from Europe, Latin America, Africa or North America. In short, there was a good level of regional participation but a weak presence from other continents. This shows how difficult it is for the WSF to take global initiatives that have a real impact.

There is no mobilizing international dynamic

***Sergio Ferrari**: Do you think the last major pre-pandemic gathering for the 2019 WSF in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, was a success?*

ET: Not exactly. If we think about this edition in Salvador de Bahia, although it was well attended, it was essentially reduced to the north-east region with participation from a few other regions of Brazil. Unfortunately, the presence of other continents was weak in Salvador de Bahia.

Today we see a contradictory reality. On the one hand, the World Social Forum is no longer a real force of attraction and impetus. On the other hand, it is the only global space that still exists. That's why it's still important for international networks like the CADTM to take part.

I am convinced that if the WSF had real strength, such as we had in February 2003 when we called for major mobilisations for peace and against the war in Iraq, its power today would be significant, both in confronting the genocide in Palestine and in helping to build a broad check on the growth of the far

right that can be seen in many parts of the world.

When I say this, I am referring, among others, to Narendra Modi in India, a violent nationalist, anti-Islam and anti-Muslim; to Ferdinand Marcos Junior in the Philippines, heir not only to the family dictatorship but also to the repressive Rodrigo Duterte; and to the reactionary regression of the regime in Tunisia, increasingly similar to the former dictatorship of Ben Ali before the Arab Spring. In Europe, there are extremist, warmongering governments like Vladimir Putin's in Russia, Giorgia Meloni's in Italy, Viktor Orban's in Hungary and Ukraine's neo-liberal, pro-NATO right-wing government. I'm also thinking of the real threats posed by Chega, a new far-right party in Portugal that is aiming to win 20% of the vote, whereas it was absent from the electorate between 1975 and just three years ago; the possibility of a victory for Marine Le Pen in France in the next presidential elections; VOX in Spain; the electoral victory of the far-right party in the Netherlands; the advance of the AFD in Germany…

In Latin America, presidents such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador or Javier Milei in Argentina have a more radical economic and social program than Pinochet himself in the Chilean dictatorship. All this in the global context of a possible electoral victory for Donald Trump in the forthcoming US presidential elections. Not to mention the fascist government of Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, promoting a racist, genocidal and colonialist project.

In search of better proposals

***Sergio Ferrari**: If the World Social Forum doesn't have the strength to be a force for impetus and union in a global reality that you describe as dramatic, the question is obvious: what do you think progressive sectors should do?*

ET: I think that the formula of a WSF with only social

movements and NGOs but without progressive political parties (as defined in the 2001 Charter of Principles) does not allow for an adequate fight against the extreme right. Faced with the rise of far-right and fascist projects, we need to look for a different kind of international convergence. With this in view, the CADTM, along with other social actors, has contacted the PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party) and the PT (Workers' Party) in Porto Alegre, the birthplace of the World Social Forum since 2001, to propose the creation of an organising committee that would convene an international meeting in May to discuss the way forward, with a view to a major gathering in a year's time. With a broad vision to integrate social movements of all kinds—feminists, climate justice activists, progressive believers—with a view to reflecting on the best way to resist the far right. Major forces such as Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST) could play an active part in this. If they have achieved success in Brazil by breaking free from Jair Bolsonaro with a broad policy of political and social alliances, it is essential to draw concrete political lessons from this. The World Social Forum could continue, but we are convinced that a new framework of forces capable of remobilizing is needed.

***Sergio Ferrari**: There are initiatives like the International Peoples' Alliance that are already thinking along these lines…*

ET: Of course, it should be involved and play a role. But we need a new, broader United Front initiative. We think that this first meeting could be convened in May 2024 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and it would be conceivable, for example, to have a strong presence from Argentina, radical left forces with the left of Peronism, trade union organisations such as the Central de Trabajadores de Argentina and even the CGT (Confederación General de Trabajadores) and very diverse social and feminist movements. This would be a first step towards a major conference in 2025 in Sao Paulo, for example, if the left-wing alliance (PT, PSOL, etc.) wins the municipal

elections in 2024.

The construction of this new international initiative would be broad and diverse, incorporating various revolutionary currents, from the 4th International to social democracy via the Progressive International, across the whole range of left-wing sensibilities. As well as progressive organisations and personalities in the United States (e.g., Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the UAW auto union, which won a major victory in 2023). And left-wing parties and movements in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Arab region. We also need to broaden participation to include committed figures from the cultural world who are making their own contribution. It is necessary to convince as many forces as possible, including those who have to overcome historical differences and divisions and who understand and accept the great priority challenge of the moment, namely the fight against the extreme right. We know that such an appeal will be neither simple nor easy to put into practice; it requires great generosity and strong political will. The complexity of the historic moment and the dangers facing humanity and the planet mean that we must try to make it happen.

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Photo: Protest at WSF in Nepal, CADTM.
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