# Is Convergence Possible?

The nineties was the decade of formal networking leading to the formation of regional, national and transnational solidarity structures. They have been our hope, and our despair.

In these early years of the New Millennium, there is a quiet stocktaking of what such solidarity is about; and whether all the movements that gave us such hope, and helped us keep the Faith, amount to anything much.

Together with such convergences, we have also witnessed much fragmentation and dispersion. Why don't the Good get along?

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**It's Time to Build a Mass Movement ,***Bruce Dixon,* Znet, July 06, 2005. http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=8237 [C.ELDOC1. 0605/DD1-Its-Time-to-Build-a-Mass-Movement.html]

**Weavers Movements: A New Social Movement in response to Globalisation in India***, Shambu Prasad***,** 30 January 2006. [C.ELDOC1. 0605/DD1-weavers-movements.html]

**Create Alternative Centres of Power,** *Shalini Umachandran,* The Hindu Magazine, Sunday, Jan 29, 2006. http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2006/01/29/stories/2006012900180200.htm [C.ELDOC1. 0605/DD1-Create_alternative_centres_of_power.html]

**Interview - Teivo Teivainen,** *Carta Maior,* lists.athens.fse-esf.org 26 January 2006. http://lists.athens.fse-esf.org/pipermail/general-gr/2006-February/000081.html [C.ELDOC1. 0605/DD1-interview-teivo-teivainen.html]

There are no answers, in as much as each of us really has an answer that finally begs the question. Are there any objective conditions that make such solidarities impossible? Is there something happening on the ground that gives us some clues as to where all this convergence is really taking us?

**Bruce Dixon** says the time is ripe for mass movements to flourish, and analyses some of the elements necessary for this to happen. He distills the lessons we can learn from some well-known movements.

**Shambu Prasad**, in a yet to be published piece, identifies a weavers' movement as the unheralded example of what a New Social Movement could look like.

Both **Douglas Allen** and **TeivoTeivainen** aver that we need to build alterntive institutions to promote alternative centers of power. Re-emphasising what Dixon says–power will never be given it must be taken.

# It's Time to Build a Mass Movement

*Bruce Dixon*

"Democracy... does not come from the government, from on high, it comes from people getting together and struggling for justice." - Howard Zinn, Spelman College commencement address, Atlanta, 2005.

Politicians are elected and selected, but mass movements transform societies. Judges uphold, strike down, or invent brand new law, but mass movements drag the courts, laws and officeholders all in their wake. Progressive and even partially successful mass movements can alter the political calculus for decades to come, thus improving the lives of millions. Social security, the new deal, and employer-provided medical care didn't come from the pen of FDR. The end of "separate but equal" didn't come from the lips of any judge, and voting rights were not simply granted by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. All these were hard-won outcomes of protracted struggle by progressive mass movements, every one of which operated outside the law and none of which looked to elected officials or the corporate media of those days for blessings or legitimacy. It's time to re-learn those lessons and build a new progressive mass movement in the United States.

**Mass movements are against the law**

Mass movements exist outside electoral politics, and outside the law, or they don't exist at all. Mass movements are never respecters of law and order. How can they be? A mass movement is an assertion of popular leadership by the people themselves.

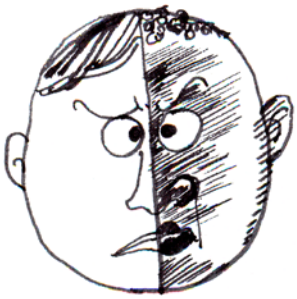
A mass movement aims to persuade courts, politicians and other actors to tail behind it, not the other way around. Mass movements accomplish this through appeals to shared sets of deep and widely held convictions

among the people they aim to mobilize, along with acts or credible threats of sustained and popular civil disobedience.
Not all mass movements are progressive. The legal strategy of "massive resistance" to desegregation on the part of southern whites, in which local governments across the south threw up thickets of lawsuits, evasions and new statutes, closing whole school systems in some areas rather than integrate, was implemented in response to and backed up by the historically credible and ever-present threat of armed, lawless white mobs long accustomed to dishing out violence to their black neighbors and any white allies with impunity. They operated in a context of popular belief in white superiority and black inferiority that was widespread among whites of that region and time. Undeniable proof of the existence of a violent, white supremacist mass movement was broadcast around the world when thousands of local white citizens showed up to trade blows, insults, and gunfire with federal marshals in places like Little Rock, Arkansas in '57 and Oxford, Mississippi in '62.

Likewise, courts and public officials who enforced desegregation orders were under relentless pressure from a civilly disobedient mass movement for equality and justice. 89 leaders of the 1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott could not have been surprised when they earned conspiracy indictments for their trouble. Tens of thousands of mostly southern, mostly black citizens defied unjust laws and were jailed in the waves of mostly illegal sit-ins, marches, freedom rides and other mostly illegal actions that swept the South for more than a decade. This movement in turn relied on the deep convictions of all African Americans and growing numbers of whites that segregation and white supremacy were evils that had to be fought, regardless of personal costs. For many, those costs were very high. Some are still paying.

**Mass movements are politically aggressive**

Mass movements are kindled into existence by unique combinations of outraged public opinion in the movement's core constituency, political opportunity, and aggressive leadership. The absence of any of these can prevent a mass movement from materializing. In a January 20,



2005 BC article occasioned by the death of visionary James Foreman, one of the masterminds of the mid-century movement for civil and human rights, which contains many useful insights on the characteristics of mass movements, David Swanson recalled a recent lost opportunity in the wake of the 2000 presidential election: "Various small groups did act, and Rev. Jesse Jackson became a leading spokesman for those objecting to a stolen election. The coalition cobbled together was surprisingly successful in moving Congress Members and Senators to at least give lip service to the matter. The seeds of something may have been sown. But a mass movement was not organized. Civil disobedience was not used."

Democratic party leaders instructed Jesse and the crew to go home and await the results of court decisions. The black leadership acquiesced, and a chance to galvanize a civilly disobedient mass movement around issues of voting rights was missed.

Mass movements are based on widely held beliefs, reinforced by dense communications networks. Mass movements are nurtured and sustained not just by vertical communication, between leaders and constituents, but by lots of horizontal communication among the movement's constituency. This horizontal communication serves to reinforce the constituency's and the movement's core values. It emboldens ordinarily non-political people to engage in personally risky behavior in support of the movement's core demands, and builds support for this kind of risk-taking on the part of those who may not be ready to do it themselves.

Forty and fifty years ago, African American print media like the Chicago Defender, the California Eagle, Baltimore Afro-American and the Pittsburg Courier carried news of resistance to Jim Crow to millions of

black readers. Like white communities of that era, black neighborhoods supported and were supported by a dense network of voluntary and social organizations. Large numbers belonged to fraternal societies such as Masons and the Eastern Star, and many more blacks than today belonged to labor unions. Within these networks, the freedom struggle was on everyone's lips as far down the chain as youngsters at Boy Scout meetings in church basements on the south side of Chicago in 1964.

It was in places where these networks were weakest, or where institutional gatekeepers like pastors could not be persuaded to take part that the mass movement was slowest to take hold, as this passage from the January 20, 2005 cover story of BC illustrates: "Contrary to current mythology, the Black church was never a great fountain of social activism. More often, suspicious and small-minded clergy shut their doors against the winds of change. In the years following the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, church doors were slammed shut in King's face throughout the South. As a preacher-led organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) required a local church base in order to set up operations. The same problems of Jim Crow and brutality existed in every southern city, yet in town after town, King could not find a single church that would open its doors to the SCLC. The 'movement' was sputtering. Rather than mounting a grand sweep through the region, King found himself hemmed in by the endemic fear and even hostility of Black clergymen."

The current environment presents a different set of challenges to those who would build the dense horizontal communications networks needed to support a mass movement. Far fewer Americans belong to social, civic and voluntary organizations now than 50 years ago. Sprawl forces us to live further from and travel more hours getting to and from work, school and shopping than ever before. To lift a revealing quote from www.bowlingalone.com, the website of Robert Putnam's highly recommended book of the same name, "...we sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet, know our neighbors less, meet with friends less frequently, and even socialize with our families less

often. We're even bowling alone. More Americans are bowling than ever before, but they are not bowling in leagues."

If a progressive mass movement is to be built in this era of sprawl and locked down media monopolies, organizers must develop and deploy alternative communications strategies to get and keep the movement's message into a sufficient number of ears to sustain its influence and momentum.

**No mass without masses and no movement without youth**

Mass movements don't happen without masses. A mass movement whose organizers cannot fill rooms and streets, and sometimes jails on short notice with ordinarily non-political people in support of political demands is no mass movement at all. Organizers and those who judge the work of organizers must learn to count.

A progressive mass movement is inconceivable without a prominent place for the energy and creativity of youth. The finest young people of every generation have the least patience with injustice. SNCC was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, after all, and included high school and college students across the South. The average age of rank and file members of the Black Panther Party was 17 to 19. SCLC's leading ministers in the early 60s were mostly under 30. The 1960s

movement for civil and human rights was spearheaded, and often led, by young people. Neither Martin Luther King nor Malcolm X lived to be forty. Fred Hampton was only 21.
Any mass movement aiming at social transformation must capture the enthusiasm and energy of youth, including the willingness of young people to engage in personally risky behavior.

**What is a mass movement?**

Mass movements are creations of the political moment, rooted in the shared values of their core constituencies, nurtured by dense communications networks among a supportive population. They are sustained by aggressive leadership and youthful enthusiasm. Mass movements inevitably employ civil disobedience, and the civilly disobedient components of mass movements must be carefully calculated in such a way as to maintain support from broad sectors of the population it aims to mobilize, and to increase support if they are violently repressed.

To enumerate some of the typical qualities of mass movements:

Mass movements have political demands anchored in the deeply shared values of their core constituencies.

Mass movements look to themselves and their shared values for legitimacy, not to courts, laws or elected officials. A mass movement consciously aims to lead politicians, not to be led by them.

Mass movements are civilly disobedient, and continually maintain the credible threat of civil disobedience.

Mass movements are supported by lots of vertical and horizontal communication which reinforces the core values of the constituency and emboldens large numbers of ordinarily nonpolitical souls to engage in personally risky behavior in support of the movement's political demands.

Mass movements capture the energy, enthusiasm and risk - taking spirit of youth. Nobody ever heard of a mass movement of old or even middle- aged people. In the absence of any of these characteristics, no mass movement can be said to exist.

**Applying the mass movement yardstick to real-life cases**

*Reparations?*

The reparations movement undoubtedly speaks to widespread beliefs among African Americans. But the last big reparations demonstration in Washington, DC might not have drawn ten thousand souls. A mass movement should be able to fill rooms in neighborhoods, not just in whole cities. With no broad masses in motion over reparations, no civil disobedience, and not much traction among black youth, it's safe to say that there is no mass movement for reparations.

*The anti-war movement?*

With the ability to put hundreds of thousands in the streets several times a year in New York City, in DC, and the Bay Area, one to twenty thousand in scores of other US cities and towns, and hundreds more vigils, demos and meetings still happening each week the anti-war movement passes the numbers test. But in contrast to a generation ago, today's anti-war movement has so little respect for itself and so much reverence for the two-party system that it practically shut down months before the presidential election to allow most of its leading lights to actively campaign for a pro-war candidate. There is not much evidence of broadly popular anti-war civil disobedience yet, either.

When the anti-war movement loses its reverence for judges and elected officials, and discovers some creative and popular ways to break the law, it will be a mass movement.

*The Million Man March and the Millions More Movement?*

While certainly big enough, the 1995 MMM was only a single day's event. Although the still-existing policy of selective mass incarceration of black men was in full swing, the MMM made absolutely no demands for the transformation of society. It was, its leader said, all about "atonement." There was no civil disobedience, and no intent to sustain any militant action. Organizers of the MMM remembered to collect money, but somehow neglected to pass around a signup sheet, something even the most amateurish organizer knows must be done. What an organizing tool a million man mailing list might have been!

The organizers of the 1995 affair who are driving the bus again this year, haven't criticized themselves for not taking attendance, or for coming to Washington to ignore political issues like health care, voting rights and mass incarceration, or for excluding gays and women. What kind of mass movement excludes women? Neither version of the MMM looks like a mass movement.

*Labor?*

Union rights, pensions, social security and health benefits were won by a struggle with all the hallmarks of a mass movement. But that was two or three generations ago. Today's labor movement isn't capturing youth, doesn't do civil disobedience, is unsure of what its core values are, and collects dues to give to the "least worst" politician instead of trying to make politicians follow its lead. Whatever else it is, labor is not a mass movement any more.

*The women's movement, pre-Roe v. Wade*

Both in 1970 and a hundred years ago, this had all the characteristics of a mass movement. Political demands, big numbers, leaders not afraid to call politicians to account, and a fair amount of public, popular civil disobedience. They eventually forced courts and politicians to follow them rather than the other way around, and with some of their key demands met, creative civil disobedience ceased, replaced by reliance on courts, elected officials and corporate sponsorship. Right now, there


is no mass movement for the full equality of women. A new Supreme Court, if it overthrows Roe v. Wade, will make the re-emergence of such a movement much more likely.

*The religious right*

The religious right possesses a mass base, along with ambitious and profoundly scary leaders. With corporate support it has been successful in building its own communications networks and influencing or seizing outright control over many civilian and military institutions. The religious right does not follow politicians. Politicians pander to it. Whenever the religious right starts being civilly disobedient, we will see a mass movement with the potential to take us far down the road toward fascism.

There is only one place America's next progressive mass movement can come from. There is only one identifiable constituency with a bedrock majority of its citizens in long-term historical opposition to our nation's imperial adventures overseas. This is America's black one-

eighth. While majorities of all Americans do believe in universal health care, the right to organize unions, high quality public education, a living wage, and that retirement security available to everyone ought to be government policy, and many even believe America is locking up too many people for too long, support for these propositions is virtually unanimous among African Americans.
More than two years ago, Black Commentator named this phenomenon the "Black Consensus":

"African Americans remain in remarkable, consistent agreement on political issues, a shared commonality of views that holds strongly across lines of income, gender and age. The Black Commentator's analysis of biannual data from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies confirms the vitality of a broad Black Consensus. Most importantly, the data show that Black political behavior has not deviated from recent historical patterns, nor is any significant Black demographic group likely to diverge from these patterns in the immediate future.

"In newspaper terms, there is no "split" among African Americans on core political issues..."

The original article, from which the above paragraph is lifted, is well worth reviewing in its entirety. It is the statistical persistence of the Black Consensus over decades of polling data and across classes, generations and regions which marks out America's black one-eighth as the likely origin, and the first indispensable core constituency of any progressive mass movement to transform American society. If such a mass movement is to succeed, it must not allow itself to be contained within the black community. But that's where it has to begin, around the core political demands of the Black Consensus.

Hence African American elected officials and candidates for office on every level, from the Congressional Black Caucus to local sheriffs and prosecutors must be forced to address themselves to the Black Consensus. They must be summarily judged for their positions on such

issues as racially selective mass incarceration, the unjust war in Iraq, American complicity in the apartheid-like policies of Israel, universal health care, equality of educational opportunity, and voting rights, and these judgments made to stick. Mass movements do not and cannot follow political office holders. A mass movement is an assertion of popular leadership by the people themselves. It makes politicians into followers.

The Black Consensus and the cohesive communities of color from which it arises must give birth to America's next progressive mass movement. Laying the intelligent groundwork for such a movement will be the task before us in our next historic meeting - "Going Back to Gary."

14

# Weavers' Movement: A New Social Movement In Response To Globalisation in India

*Shambu Prasad*

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the Rashtra Chenetha Karmika Samakhya (RCKS) was started in 1991, known more for the beginning of economic reforms in India. The RCKS has over the years been one of the most dynamic social movements in the country, unfortunately not known to most Indians. December 14, 2001 is better known in India as the day parliament was attacked by terrorists and the event, rightfully, received a lot of attention. The same day a massive non-violent rally was organised by weavers from across the country under the leadership of RCKS with a view to sensitising parliament and through them it the whole nation of to the continued plight of handloom weavers. The event and the cause received no mention in the media.

Why is the work of RCKS so important? I think the work of RCKS signifies several shifts in the thinking on social movements in the era of globalization. While there has been a lot of attention of scholars to the new social movements, these references rarely take into account non-conventional political forms of organizations such as those of weavers' movements. RCKS started as a response to a crisis in the weaving industry with several cases of starvation deaths in the early nineties with increasing yarn prices in the wake of liberalized policies of the government of India.

While most political parties that were opposed to liberalization were looking only at the organized factory work force, the voices of the rest were caught in the catch – all phrase of 'unorganized labour' – a phrase that often meant unskilled labour. Historically the forms of organization of weavers have, if at all, been on caste or community lines.

Though strong in themselves, they have rarely been able to take up the issues of the weaving industry, as they have often been caught in the debate on reservations for backward classes and the need for weavers in the scheduled lists or demands for greater representation in electoral politics.

RCKS chose neither of these forms but believed in the membership-based forms of organization, a first within the weaver community. Ever since, RCKS has been in the forefront in the articulation of the issues of the weaving community. At a time when most organizations have preferred to follow the rather rapid path of building pan-national identities, RCKS is an example to demonstrate that the effectiveness of alternatives to globalization need to be rooted in local and regional struggles. There have been attempts to form weavers' organizations across the southern states in India. However, these movements have suffered due to wavering donor support. The strength of RCKS as a new social movement lies in its fierce independence and strong local support, core strengths that have always come through in their larger struggles. In May 2000 when several thousand weavers came to carry out a march in Delhi, this character of the movement was very evident. Most of the weavers had not moved out of their district, let alone state, and they managed the whole event with little party or donor support. Later struggles had larger numbers of weavers with greater organisation in the Hindi belt of India. However, the work of RCKS has always stood out for its resilience, membership base and nuanced articulation of issues.

The new social movement of the RCKS is to be understood in terms of its continuous refinement and updating of the articulation of the weavers' causes. Government officials have been forced several times to revisit their thinking about poor weavers when they hear Mohan Rao and others bring out skeletons from the closets of government schemes and promises. I have seen few social movements in India that have shown a willingness to learn from diverse groups. The work of RCKS is not just about politics but of the articulation of politics through constructive work. A visit to any of the weaver colonies and their

constant efforts to talk to several stakeholders, designers, NGOs, marketing agencies, machine manufacturers, etc. indicates their interest and ability to shape a new future for the weavers. The closest parallel that one could think of in the Indian context in recent times is the work of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha under the leadership of the late Shankar Guha Niyogi.

The work of RCKS is significant for the way new social movements need to reconfigure the debates between non-party political spaces and party politics, local and global struggles, the relationship between a constructive agenda and political struggles. RCKS has strived to increase the shrinking political space for groups such as weavers.


New social movements have often been coloured by western readings of political articulation of the gay and lesbian movements, whereas the work of RCKS has shown that in pluralistic India new social movements might be actually newer groupings of older and hence neglected communities such as the handloom weavers. And importantly, that all this can be done through democratic people's movements. In an era where several groups have strategically used the media to bring about changes, it is important to realise that there are several issues that cannot be captured in two-minute capsules for the fleeting time spans of

consumerist India. Several organisations have chosen the easy path of forgetting democratic functioning internally and opting for strategic negotiations. RCKS on the other hand, is one of the few people's organisations that has stuck to its commitment to democracy, independence and non-violence. It is indeed unfortunate that there is so much crowding of political spaces in India today that the work of RCKS that rightfully belongs to and should be seen as a new social movement are is being viewed with suspicion by a state that is increasingly intolerant to dissent of any form, non-violent included. The recent harassment of representatives of RCKS by the Andhra Pradesh state government in a desperate and futile attempt to link them to the Naxals needs to be condemned by all citizens of this country.

It is indeed significant that Chirala has been the home of articulation of such an important awakening of new social movements in India. Chirala – Perala were at the forefront of the non-cooperation movement in 1922-23 with a spontaneous uprising of people. Eighty - odd years later, RCKS represents the same spirit of constructive dissent in the Indian political space which I am sure would lead to greater recognition and respect not only for a community that has been responsible for solving with dignity the unemployment problem in India, but also to several other artisanal groups and disadvantaged communities. RCKS has in the past leveraged its work with weavers to articulate for greater recognition and respect for other artisanal classes through the regional traditional science congress in 2001. RCKS's work on setting up the decentralised spinning unit with Vortex engineering and Dastkar Andhra is an excellent example of the possibilities of involvement of new social movements in constructive work. I am glad to know that this year's weavers convention would also involve several organisations working with cotton growing and I do wish the convention all the very best and I do hope that the work of RCKS and like its minded organisations will be given their - rightful due by scholars of new social movements in future and will point to the need to look at these movements in India differently. For understanding RCKS and recognising what is it represents is reinforcing the role of non-violent constructive dissent in India, something that we as a nation can ill afford to forget.

# Create Alternative Centres of Power

*Shalini Umachandran*

*As a young Fulbright scholar and teacher of English at Banaras Hindu University in the 1960s, Douglas Allen studied Indian philosophy, religion and culture. Deeply interested in the Civil Rights Movement, he realised that he needed to understand Mahatma Gandhi to understand what drove Martin Luther King. And thus began a lifelong fascination.*

*A professor of philosophy at the University of Maine, Douglas Allen has been a peace activist and scholar for nearly 40 years. He is now involved in the movement opposing U.S. global policies since 9/11 and the Iraq occupation.*

In India recently to participate in an international conference, he stopped in Chennai to catch up with friends. Excerpts from an interview given to Shalini Umachandran.

**Shalini Umachandran(SU)**: *You're currently editing a book 'Philosophy of Gandhi for the 21st Century.' Is Gandhi's philosophy relevant for the 21st century?*

**Douglas Allen (DA)**: Gandhi is a catalyst, someone who gets you to think and challenge status quo. Gandhi's philosophy has to be integrated to suit today's needs. His was not a static way of looking at the world.

***SU:*** *Even in times of terror, as in the title of your other book?*

**DA:** In my other book, Comparative Religion and Philosophy in Times of Terror, I've written a chapter about what Gandhi would have to say about terrorism post - 9/11.

Today, we talk about violence in narrow terms of assault, rape or murder but Gandhi brings out the multi-dimensionality of violence — economic violence, educational violence, the violence of power and

control, the violence of poverty, the violence of status quo, and how they interact with each other. This opens up whole new ways of analysing things. Gandhi spoke of terrorism; he knew terrorists, but he didn't look at them as George Bush does, as evil, or cowards, or threats to freedom. Terrorism is not just about individual suicide bombers — they are a manifestation of power equations and unfair control. Gandhi tries to understand the root causes of terror and hatred — domination, exploitation, humiliation, why the terrorists' cause resonates with ordinary people. In that way I find Gandhi very insightful.

***SU:*** *You've been coming to India since the 1960s. You must have noticed that Gandhi really isn't part of the average man's consciousness.*


**DA:** I first came to India in 1963. People felt the need to parrot Gandhian slogans but no one really followed his ideals. In the 1980s, it was mostly the politicians who used him. In the 1990s, I found that politicians could take an open anti-Gandhi stand and still win an election. People were openly critical of Gandhi, something you would not hear in the 1960s. But two years ago, when I gave a talk here on Gandhi there was less hostility. I like to believe it is because Gandhi still touches people. I have found that in the West, no matter how rich, famous or comfortable people are, Gandhi touches a chord. Because his teachings are of truth, love and the interconnectedness of life. Often they're not living these eternal values, though they still believe in them and are searching for them.

***SU:*** *Is this `search for values' responsible for the rise of right - wing fundamentalism in the U.S.?*

**DA:** Partly, yes. If you look at religious groups in the U.S., the fastest growing is the right - wing evangelist fundamentalists. They are the most powerful lobby and are very loyal to the Republican Party. They see things in black and white, and want to remake the world according to their image. Most Americans don't support their view, but unfortunately these people — the voices of reason — don't have power. Most Americans don't support George Bush, they just don't have a choice.

All political parties represent the same narrow power structure. No one is presenting the issues that Americans would like represented, and only a small percentage of people vote. In the U.S. we've moved further and further from democracy than at any other time. And the bad thing is this American style of politics is being exported across the world.

***SU:*** *Opinion has shifted faster than it did in the 1960s during the Vietnam War...*

**DA:** Yes, it took us many years — until 1968 — to come out against the Government. There was a small group of us who were protesting in the beginning but we were treated so badly, it was an environment very hostile to peace. But now people are better informed.

***SU:*** *Do you think the Civil Rights Movement influenced the scale of protests for the Vietnam movement?*

**DA:** Yes, it did in a huge way. But our peace movement now is not small. It's just less visible. Recently, 300,000 people took out a march in Washington, but it didn't really get reported in the media. We have also learnt how to mobilise opinion from our experience with the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and the feminist movement.

This time the war is also costing us a lot and people are realising that


we're losing out on health care and education.

***SU:*** *So that means the Bush administration is, in a way, a blessing for the peace movement?*

**DA:** In one way, the Bush administration is a horrible blessing for the peace movement. He gives us an agenda. But Bush is very worrying because he is taking away all the gains we have made for civil rights, human rights, women's rights, and environmental rights.

***SU:*** *Will a change of leadership help?*

**DA:** Electoral politics do not change history. The media and history books attribute changes to politicians but that is untrue. My view of history is that all great things — the eight-hour workday, the abolition of child labour, the removal of slavery, the women's movement — did not come about because of politicians. In fact, politicians opposed such `radical' ideas. People empowered themselves, mobilised public opinion and created structures strong enough to make politicians listen to them. They created alternative centres of power.

We have to build such alternative centres based on people's participation outside of dominant political and corporate structures. But creating alternative spaces involves resistance. We aim to develop an

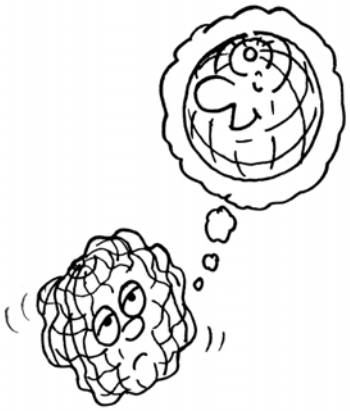
alternative community based on principles of peace, tolerance and non-violence. This is what democracy is really about.

# Interview - Teivo Teivainen

*Carta Maior*

*The WSF needs to seriously discuss its relationship with political parties and states.*

*For Teivo Teivainen, Director of the Program on Democracy and Global Transformation at the University of San Marcos in Peru, it is not possible to seriously discuss the building of "another world" without facing dilemmas of the state, power, and political representation.*



*The Americas event of the World Social Forum held in Caracas in January 2006 has made the relationship between social movements, political parties, and governments a key issue. The experience of the Chávez government and the sympathy it has gathered from social movements in Latin America, as well as the changing political landscape in the region with the election of many left-wing governments, have turned this agenda into a necessary debate. Furthermore, the discussion on what could be the 21st century socialism represents a political and theoretical challenge for the participants of this process that began back in 2001 and that wants to build "another possible world".*

*Chair of the Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD), an organisation he represents in the WSF's International Council, Teivo Teivainen (Finnish, but living in Peru) believes that the Forum needs to overcome the depoliticisation that it has faced up to these days. "The*

*WSF process has been facing difficulties with answering a question whose answer should offer us much more than just repeating that 'another world is possible'", he says.*

*The question is "How is this other world possible, and how can we get to it?" Such questions, for Teivainen, need answers that go beyond depoliticised understandings of civil society, "a politics-free concept", and that can overcome the near-absolute dichotomies that have been constructed between social movements and political parties.*

*In an interview to Carta Maior magazine, he exposes the most important political challenges of the present phase of the WSF, relating them to the debates on Latin American integration and about the building of a new socialist paradigm for the 21st century. When asked what this new socialism should look like, Teivo says that its most important feature should be the radicalisation of democratic practices.*

**Carta Maior (CM)**: In your opinion, what are the main political challenges that the World Social Forum faces now that its sixth edition is taking place?

**Teivo Teivainen (TT):** One of the main challenges that the WSF faces these days is how to move beyond a certain lack of political involvement it has been experiencing until now. The WSF process has been facing difficulties answering a question whose answer goes beyond simply repeating "Another world is possible". The question is: "How is this other world possible, and how can we get to it?" Such questions need answers that go beyond depoliticized ideas of civil society. We are today living in a situation in which, more than ever, the relationship that the Forum has developed with states, particularly with Venezuela, in this year, is a reason for much polemical debate. At this point, we have a dilemma to solve. On the one hand, I share the idea that the Forum has to become more political and take more seriously the question of relating to political actors, actors that include political parties and states. On the other hand, I also share the doubts and fears about the possibility that the relationship with the state will eventually cause too

much state intrusion into the Forum, affecting the Forum's autonomy. This, I believe, is the most important dilemma that the WSF will have to face in Caracas.

**CM:** At this year's Forum, the question of involving states in the process of building another paradigm of relations between countries and peoples has grown much stronger in Latin America, due to the election of many Left-wing and progressive governments. In what ways does this new political landscape influence the dilemma that you have just mentioned?


**TT:** Comparing the political situation that existed when the first WSF took place in 2001 to the situation today shows that Latin America's geopolitical situation is considerably different, especially in regard to its relationship with the United States. We may say that the old Monroe Doctrine, according to which Latin American countries were supposed to follow politics imposed by the United States, faces a point of rupture. This scenery opens a new perspective for Latin American integration and for processes of social transformation in which, naturally, the WSF is involved, since the integration process is not only for states but also, and principally, for the peoples of Latin America. In this sense, the Forum faces one of the most important difficulties for the development

of this process: how to articulate political action by social movements with the integration processes that take place between the governments.

**CM:** Another outstanding issue on this Forum's agenda is the debate on socialism for the 21st century. What kind of socialism can we conceive for the present century, considering the socialist experiences of the twentieth century?

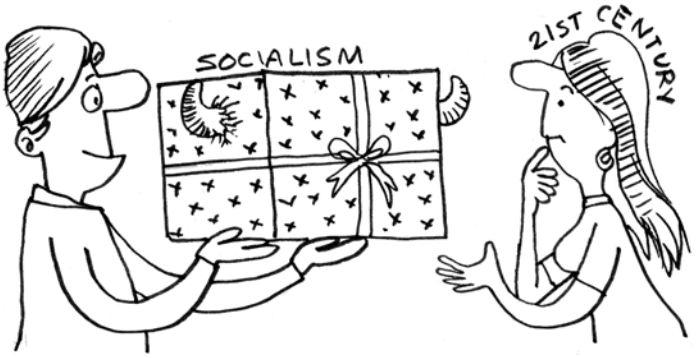
**TT:** For me, socialism is a project of radicalization of democracy. I think it is vital for the future of humankind that we fight for democratic spaces and values. One dimension of this project is about overcoming economist ideologies and capitalist power. This means doing our best to create a post-capitalist world. Obviously, there is a great lack of debate on this subject now. Taking into account the socialist experiences that actually took place during the twentieth century, the most important challenge is never to believe that once the state is conquered, the most important objective is achieved. If so, other struggles - those carried out by the feminist movement, the anti-racist movement, the defence of sexual diversity and for Native American people's rights - become subordinated to the defence of a single subject, the subject that has been traditionally defended by the Left.

The contribution of the Forum to this issue, until now, has been to assert that every struggle is important. Sometimes however, for my taste this leads to a relativism that is too fragile, where all we can say is that the feminist, anti-racist, and other struggles are equally important in the struggle for another world. I believe that the present moment demands a learning process within different movements, so that we can think - in a political, strategic, and democratic way - that in given situations, some struggles may be more important than others, and support them.

It will be very interesting to follow the development of Evo Morales' government, in Bolivia, in terms of what kind of hegemonic reactions he will face and how social movements will react. If we think in terms of the Forum’s contribution to this, until now it has been important to open the

debate on the question of how the construction of a twenty-first century socialism can be one in which the different dimensions of the world democratic process have to be taken into account, without subordinating them to a single historic subject. On the other hand, we need to seriously consider the fact that we live in a capitalist world and, if we want to create a socialism that will overcome capitalism, we need to discuss how to face this capitalist power and how to articulate different movements and different dimensions of our struggle in this task. Therefore, we cannot only take a relativistic position that merely repeats that we are against every form of fundamentalism and that every struggle is equally important. It is necessary to strategically think how we will build this other world.

**CM:** What stage is this debate at, at the international level?




**TT:** Twenty-first-century socialism is a key issue for discussing our relationship with states, also in a sense that we need to identify a project with a global dimension. I agree with those who believe that it is necessary to think, debate, and build new global institutions. Socialism in only one country is not possible. But the debate about a socialist project at the global scale is still in its infancy. My organisation, the Network Institute for Global Democratization, and I are involved in this debate, by

analysing different proposals for the world's democratisation, which social actors can support these processes and which forces oppose them. This debate is important, among other things, in order not to feed illusions. For example, discussing a reform of the United Nations without taking into account the disciplining power of world financial capital is a major illusion. A radical transformation of the world cannot be born from there.

Thinking strategically about the power of financial capital is a fundamental task for the struggles related to external debt, to financial capital taxation, and to the defence of greater autonomy for different states. It is necessary to think about these issues so that it can become possible, among states, social movements, and different actors, to build a process of world transformation and to create a new sort of democratic institutionality, one that should not be conceived as a “World State”. To build 21st century socialism, we need a new global political institutionality and new concepts of political agency.

**CM:** This relationship between the spheres of state power and the WSF has been controversial since the beginning of the WSF movement. It also involves a relationship with political parties. If we look back since the beginning of the WSF process, has the debate about the relationship between social movements, NGOs, and political parties advanced, or has it remained at the same point?

**TT:** At the beginning of the WSF, the relationship with the Workers’ Party (PT) in Brazil was, obviously, fundamental. When we analyze this, we need to take into account the particularity of the Brazilian context, where more than in any other country, there was a left-wing political party that was hegemonic among the social movements. In that Brazilian context of 2001, it was easy for the organizers of the Forum to avoid debating the relationship with political parties, because the PT, to a certain extent, was
already inside the process. When the Forum went to India, where there was no political party like the PT, so hegemonic and so admired by the social movements, there was a more intense debate about the

representation of different tendencies, of different political parties. Now this debate has emerged much more strongly in the Forum process.


I think that limiting the Forum by not permitting the participation of political parties is somewhat artificial. There are some political parties that
behave like social movements and some social movements that are more bureaucratic and hierarchic than many political parties. This dichotomy is an illusion. The justification for the exclusion of the parties is the idea that the Forum represents a new political culture. But this new culture - one that can generate social transformation - needs to be well thought out, also reflecting on what kinds of political actors might emerge from it. Working with dichotomies such as 'political party / not political party', in my opinion, does not correspond much to our reality, especially in terms of the challenges that will face those who try to change the world. To that end, political parties are important actors, and this is why we need to overcome illusions of an absolute dichotomy between civil society and political parties.

**CM:** There is an idea associated with this issue, expressed in the title of a book by John Holloway, *Changing the World Without Taking Power*.

Do you believe that it is possible to change the world without taking power?

**TT:** No, it is not possible. To change the world, it is necessary to take power, but taking power cannot mean only conquering the state. In this sense, Holloway's slogan is a welcome antidote against projects that concentrate only on taking state power through political parties, with all the dilemmas that this method has revealed. Still, saying that it is possible
to change the world without taking power is false. It is dangerous poetry for social movements to follow. We need to face the issue of power. One of its dimensions is conquering state power. But perhaps a much more important dimension is about the struggles that aim to overcome different centres of power, of capitalist power, and of political, cultural, and economic institutions. Holloway, in his book, starts by saying it is possible to change the world without taking power, but in the last page, he concludes he does not know what then needs to be done to change the world.


I participated in a debate with Holloway last year, in the Porto Alegre WSF. When asked about which in his view would be the institutions of the future, he said two things: First, his vision of the future does not include institutions; and second, that this does not matter, because the only thing that matters is the struggle here and now. Even if Holloway's insightful analysis contains many valuable elements, I believe that this particular idea is false and dangerous. It is absolutely

necessary to think about the future now, and also about the future institutions that will be needed. If we want to replace the existing capitalist institutionality, we must imagine and construct an alternative institutionality, one that can be socialist only by being radically democratic.