

## **THE THIRD EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM UK 2004**

**ESF, LONDON, 14-17 OCTOBER 2004**

**(A Brief and Personal Report)**

### **ANTECEDENTS**

I was enabled, literally at the last minute, to participate at this important event, thanks to the organizational and partial financial support from SFR, NKFFU and CETAL. Without this required logistic support it is impossible to continue our "glob-reg-nat-local" (GLOBREGNATLOCAL) efforts to articulate our work for democracy, justice and peace, at the local, national, regional and global levels. Efforts concerning the long-range struggle to effectively respond to the dominant and challenging conditions of our times, characterized by the kind of global violence, insecurity, injustice, undemocracy linked to the neoliberal capitalist world (dis)order, constructed after the second world war under US and G-8's global hegemony, to maintain control over the uneven distribution of most of world resources among the privileged few.

### **The European Social Forum/World Social Forum –vs- the World Economic Forum**

The European Social Forum (ESF) is one of the various regional forums in the world, inspired by and roughly organized under the principles of the World Social Forum since 2001, along shared lines with the rapidly emerging local and national social forums under construction all over the world. The World Social Forum was constructed as the first transformative global social movement of the new century and millenium, being envisioned as a proactive and alternative response to the global hegemonic and destructive global project of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The WEF refers to the think-tank, originally conceived by the powerful Wallenberg and Rockefeller transnational economic interest groups, meeting yearly with the main players of global capitalism and various international organizations under its influence, to coordinate and implement its political-economic and military global project at Davos, Switzerland.

### **The World Education Forum and the Paulo Freire Institute (IPF)**

The World Education Forum (WEF) was also created in 2001, inspired by the pedagogical legacy of Paulo Freire and supported by the Paulo Freire Institute (IPF) of São Paulo, intended to provide the educational support required by the transformative social change goals and tasks of the WSF. Last Saturday 20 November, we jointly organized a rather successful and lively Freirean afternoon, with IPF, ABF, CETAL, NKFFU and UEF/USF, with myself and Hans Abrahamsson from PADRIGU, Gothenburg University in the program. Hans lectured on "Confrontational Dialogue in Conflict-Resolution," a topic that he will also address at one joint session we have organized at the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre.

Personally, I have been privileged to participate in all of the four world social and educational forums since 2001 and belong to the internacional council (IC) of both the WSF and the WEF. I attended the first ESF in Florence 2001, commissioned by the Paulo Freire Institute to inform about the existence and significance of the WEF, a feature not yet properly known by many participants in the WSF and other social forums around the world.

We are all aware of the significant impact of both the WSF and the first ESF in Florence, resulting in the largest international peace march and global anti-war demonstration ever in world history, estimated at over 10 million persons all over the world, on 15 february 2002, against the US-led invasion war of Irak; which took place anyway, argued for with acknowledged public lies by Bush and Blair, in defiance of the good sense and the will of the majority of the peoples of the world.

## **Uppsala Social Forum (USF) and Uppsala Education Forum (UEF)**

Aware of the fact, that without the implementation of local social forums in all countries of the world, the main objectives of the WSF are unattainable, some of us took the initiative, first within the Uppsala Network on the Culture of Peace (NFFFU) and later, with the organizational support of attac-Uppsala, CETAL and ABF-Uppsala, to create both the Uppsala Social Forum (USF) and the Uppsala Education Forum (UEF) within the structure of USF. We have already successfully organized USF 2003 and USF 2004, and have started to plan the activities and realization of USF (and UEF) 2005.

## **Towards a National Network of Swedish Social Forums (SSF)**

In that respect, I have also participated in most of the various meetings to coordinate and create a national network of swedish local social forums, to learn and support each other, in addition to debating our position and contribution to both the ESF and WSF. The last such meeting took place last Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November with USF as its host and its main conclusions and suggestions can be read in the enclosed attachment.

## **Two "forum" responses from the Established Political Forces to the WSF as a perceived threat.**

I became aware of the above mentioned "counter-responses", while participating as part of the swedish delegation invited to the so-called First Meeting of the World Civil Society 2002 in Geneva. An event which pretended to be a follow-up meeting of the UN's Peoples' Millenium Forum, yet not being the case in my estimation, a view shared by other swedish participants as reported by Eva Björklund. Illustratively, were not for the active democratic input from a small number of participants, the latinamerican working group would have been coopted by a disciplined team of Miami Cubans (!). My own attempt to account for the motives and organization of this global forum attributes them to the international political conservative forces, meaning to distract attention from the WSF. Its organizers claimed that it was "not a political event as the WSF", actually revealing its own political motivation and, moreover, falsely pretending "to represent the world civil society." A position explicitly rejected by the WSF, due to the impossibility of claiming due democratic representation of the immense diversity, implied by whatever interpretation one might have of the term "*world civil society*."

## **Demanding Fair Procedures within SFR**

Last year, while participating of the working meeting in Gothenburg, along with various delegates of swedish local social forums, to prepare for the second ESF 2003 in Paris, I was unable to participate in the latter event, due to the lack of support from the SFR as requested, which distributed its scarce funds in a very skewed manner, unfairly financing three members of the same organization within SRF, who had not even attended the preparatory meeting to the Paris ESF previously mentioned.

As you all know, I explicitly protested and condemned such undue procedure, in a written statement for the record, in a personal letter, hoping it is not repeated in the future. If we claim to work for peace we must work for fair distribution of scarce resources "at home" so to speak. Otherwise, we contradict in practice what we preach to others.

## **The articulation of local and national peace activities: SFR, NKFFU and USF 2004**

Leaving bruised feelings aside, we continued working within the structure of SFR, aware of the continuing need to coordinate our peace efforts at the national and local levels, as illustrated by Bo Wirmark's participation at the USF 2004, and also by including within the latter event a session on global militarization, led by a researcher from the Polaris Institute (Ontario, Canada), as proposed by Agneta Norborg (SFR:s vice-president), during USF 2004, which was well attended even though organized at the last minute.

## **The First "Global Progressive Forum" 2003 in Brussels**

By attending the first so-called "Global Progressive Forum" in Brussels, November 2003, an event organized by the socialist block at the European Parliament, led me to believe that this sector of the political establishment might also feel threatened by the WSF. Prompting it to organize yet another alternative global and european forum. My own critical appraisal of this latter meeting, whatever its merits, is available on request, where I question the intentions of its organizers, organizing this parallel forum just one week after the Paris ESF meeting. Let us ponder briefly about the scarcity of financial resources, time and energy demanded by such large international organizational efforts.

## **Is Another ESF possible?**

I recommend to read about the organization, problems and general features of the ESF UK 2004, in a critical, informative and comprehensive article written by Martin Holmquist, which was published by Stockholms Fria (30 November 2004), from an "autonomous" (syndicalist) perspective.

## **Focused Participation at the ESF UK 2004**

I decided to concentrate my participation in this event on three main fronts: Network of Local Social Forums, Education and Peace, Non-Violence and Anti-War sessions. Guided by these intentions, most of my time was invested in the following activities:

- (1) At the sessions organized by the European Network of Local Social Forums, whose first session I was invited to "facilitate." The swedish presence was well represented in this realm and my feeling is that we constitute a valuable input for democratization and transparency of the ESF as a social organizatory process and movement. As earlier mentioned, without the local social forums and their global and regional networking, the WSF remains an abstract ideal. Along this line of work, USF has jointly organized an "open space" intended for local social forums around the world, to exchange experiences, reflections and support each other, at the fifth WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre (26-31 January 2005), coordinated by Tim Sandgren.
- (2) At the sessions dealing with education, from the perspective of the WEF, whose Letter of Porto Alegre 2004 was distributed among participants (see attached materials).
- (3) At several sessions dealing with peace, non-violence and anti-war, including the large peace and anti-war march against the occupation of Irak, estimated at over 100,000 participants, in spite of the rain and some minor upsets, mentioned by Martin Holmquist.

Also attended some sessions of the Network of Social Movements and one of the film sessions.

## **General Observations and Comments**

At the practical level, it was a disadvantage to have activities fragmented around different parts of the city, that made it difficult and expensive to travel back and forth.

As you might have read in the news, the organization of the ESF 2004 in London was widely criticized for various problematic organizational features, which was used by Martin Holmquist to account for (and justify) the "autonomous spaces" which functioned in parallel with the more official ESF. Something which in fact has taken place at all world social forums and for similar reasons. Yet, the real picture is rarely black and white. One case in point is precisely, the "Local Social Forums Network", where the Swedish presence was strongly felt. It was actually organized with a foot at both places so-to-speak, at the larger ESF associated with the activities at the Alexander Palace, while also at the "Solidarity Village", initially conceived as a "autonomous space" and yet eventually also coordinated and having a session at the ESF (Conway Hall).

One should acknowledge the severity of the problem and the incredible challenge implied by trying to "democratize" and enhance the transparency of the WSF and the ESF process. In that respect, one should be careful not to judge in haste, "moralizing" from as yet "pure" and unexisting democratic perspective; or even worse, from a distant and unengaged perspective. In other words, what we really need at this juncture, from my viewpoint, is to find out the minimum platform that unite us around the shared values and strategic objectives of the WSF, while cognizant of our diversity of views.

At the very personal level, it was also very difficult to sleep on the floor at the Millenium Forum, not only because it was hard and cold, but because of the noise and smoke all over the place. I had no sufficient money to pay for a hotel. The organization of similar events in the future should take into account such environmental and related concerns.

On the positive side, sleeping at the Millenium forum gave the Swedish participants at the ESF UK 2004 a chance to get to know each other better, something which I consider to be very important in cementing the human dimension of our local and national efforts within the world social forum movement.

Uppsala, 30 November 2004

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