

Another world is possible

Kenny Bruno
writes from Porto Alegre, Brazil

"Um outro mundo possivel." (Another world is possible). That's the slogan of the World Social Forum undertaken in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Or, as they said in Seattle, "This is what democracy looks like." While thousands chanted that slogan in Seattle, Washington D.C., Chiang Mai, Melbourne and Prague, they were being tear gassed, pre-emptively arrested, harassed and generally denied their rights by an enormous show of state force on behalf of undemocratic international institutions. In Porto Alegre, this is what democracy looks like: During a march of thousands against neo-liberalism I counted 10 police officers. When 200 Brazilian anarchists broke off from the march to throw white paint on a McDonald's, about six police stood by.

The next day, an ex-cop explained it this way, "We police were instructed to form partnerships with the social movements." By comparison Davos, Switzerland, where the World Economic Forum meeting, became a fortress.

Porto Alegre was an appropriate setting for the World Social Forum, while authorities have shut down the roads to Davos, deported activists, and banned marches. In Porto Alegre, the Governor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, gave the opening speech. In fact, his government was a major funder of the Forum.

In Porto Alegre, hundreds of young people were camping nearby apparently without ever sleeping - virtually without police presence. For 12 years, Porto Alegre's budget has been decided made by hundreds of well-organised community and worker groups. There was no

corporate sponsorship of the World Social Forum. No ads telling us how sustainable Shell is, or how clean Dow is, or how concerned for the poor Philip Morris is. No Nike swooshes. Just a few banners for the national bank of Brazil, saying "It's better because it's ours." The most ubiquitous logo around was that of the Workers' Party, on flags everywhere.

The humid rooms, over-packed with people, listening for the umpteenth hour to plans to stop new free trade agreements and models for local economic democracy. There were lots of unionised workers present. The state of Rio Grande do Sul has twice as many union members as the national average. The entire state of Rio Grande do Sul has been declared GMO-free, although some Roundup Ready soy has been smuggled in from Argentina, according to one knowledgeable government official from Brasilia. A few days ago activists travelled with French farmer/activist Jose Bove four hours out of Porto Alegre to tear up a few illegal acres of Monsanto's Roundup Ready Franken-soy.

The World Social Forum was the first significant post-Seattle gathering where the goal was not to disrupt the meetings of undemocratic institutions, in what has become a series of travelling protests. Rather it was a space for activists to think, talk and imagine another world a more just, democratic world. The anti-corporate globalisation movement has come to "an important stage in the counter-offensive that began in Seattle," says Walden Bello, Executive Director of Thailand-based Focus on the Global South.

Naturally, the rhetoric of democracy in Porto Alegre cannot be

transferred everywhere, especially not to the US. In the opening ceremony, during introductions of the 120 countries represented by delegates, Cuba received the loudest ovation, while the US and Israel got a smattering of boos. There is occasionally a flavour of old-style leftism that sounds irrelevant to most US ears. And, as one should expect in a gathering as large and diverse as this one, there are significant differences of opinion on policy and strategy.

For example, some participants are working to incorporate social and environmental clauses into the WTO, others insist there must be no new round of the WTO. Nevertheless, the overall feeling here is of fresh air coming into the debate over globalisation especially compared with the stale rhetoric in Davos. From Porto Alegre, the concept that a gathering of the rich and powerful is the answer for the poor and dispossessed, that the World Economic Forum has somehow transformed itself into a global poverty programme, seems too absurd to bother debunking.

Yet neither is the Social Forum a poverty program. And that is one of most refreshing aspects of the gathering. It is not about money. It's not about growth, "sustainable" or otherwise. It's not even really about developmenta concept that has perhaps been hopelessly perverted by institutions like the World Economic Forum and the World Bank. Still, economic issues were prominent in the discussions here. Rather the Forum was about democracy. Not the democracy that comes from more money and therefore more choices of things to buy, but rather the democracy of participation in local and society-wide economic decisions.

Even the most ardent supporters of the current form of globalisation acknowledge that it is a web of powerful and unaccountable forces. They say the best we can do as individuals and as nations, is to prepare ourselves to flourish in this lightning-fast, hyper-competitive world, grabbing what we can for ourselves - mobility, wealth, markets, computers.

The folks were not interested in this individualistic and competitive vision of society, even if the powerful institutions controlling globalisation were to reduce the inequities and provide a safety net for those left out. There are many challenges for the World Social Forum. Midway through the gathering, participants had not decided where, when and if there will be another one (it seems likely). Nor had they settled on producing a statement or manifesto (it seems unlikely). Activists must stay alert to the cooptation of our language and ideas by the World Economic Forum, by the WTO and World Bank.

Seattle was the pivotal moment in the first plank of this complex movementprotest and resistance. Porto Alegre will, I believe, come to be seen as an important step in moving forward the second part - innovation and alternatives. It is important that many protestors have gone to Davos to continue to expose the injustice of the World Economic Forum. But I'm glad I came to Porto Alegre. As Walden Bello, a veteran of Davos meetings, says, "Davos is the past. Porto Alegre is the future." And the present is a collective dream of the thousands gathered here: Um outro mundo possivel.

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Recalling Abraham Lincoln

A K Roy

TODAY, February 12, is the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the legendary US President and lawyer.

Here is a graphic picture of Lincoln, the lawyer, by those who had the privilege to know him from very close quarters:

Joseph Gillespie, a fellow lawyer, said of him, "If was not in his nature of assume or attempt to bolster up a false position. He would abandon his case first. He did so in the case of Backmaster v beams and Arthur, in our Supreme Court, in which I happened to be opposed to him. Another gentleman, less fastidious, took Mr Lincoln's place and won the case."

General John H Littlefield, who studied law under Lincoln, tells this anecdote of him. "All clients know that with old A be as their lawyer, they would win their case if it was fair. If it was not, it was a waste of time to take it to him. After listening some time one day to a would-be-client's statement, with his eyes on the ceiling, he swung around in his chair and exclaimed "Well, you have a pretty good case in technical law but a pretty had one in equity and justice. You'll have to get some other fellow to win this case for you. I cannot do it. All the time I would be thinking, while talking forget myself and say it out aloud."

"Much of the force of his argument," writes Judge Scott. "lay in his logical statement of the facts of the case. When he had in that way secured a clear understanding of the facts, the Jury and the Court would seem naturally to follow him in his conclusions as to the law of the case. His simple and natural presentation of the facts seemed to give the impression that the Jury were themselves making the statement. He had the happy and unusual faculty of making the Jury believe they, and not he, were trying the case. Mr Lincoln kept himself in the background and apparently assumed nothing more than to be an assistant counsel to the Court or the Jury, on whom the primary responsibility for the final decision of the case in fact rested."

Judge Stephenson A. Douglas said of Mr. Lincoln, "As a pleader before the Jury, he seems in congenial relation at once and before any Jury that I have seen him address, there was little use for any lawyer to oppose him except in matters of fact and in those he always conceded the truth in the cases which he tried; but as an advocate, he has no equal before a jury, and if he had ever met one, I have never heard of it."

In 1850, Mr Lincoln prepared a few notes for a law lecture which he expected to deliver before young lawyers. Among these notes are found the following principles which guided his own practice of his profession:

"Discourage litigation: Persuade your neighbours to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often the real loser, in fees, expenses and waste of time."

"As a peace-maker, the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough. Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this."

Did you ever hear of a lawyer

return the fees to his client, because he never deserved so much? Listen to Ward Lanon, who was one of Mr Lincoln's numerous circuit partners:

had tried he refused it. The fee was too large. Mr Lincoln said, part of it must be refunded or he would not accept a cent."



"Lincoln frequently fell out in the matter of fees not because he was underpaid but because he was being over-paid. On one occasion, I had charged and received a good-sized fee for a case which both of us

Judge David Davis, afterwards Justice of the United States Supreme Court, heard of the transaction and calling Lincoln to him, said: "You are pauperizing this Court, Mr Lincoln, you are ruining

your fellows. Unless you quit this ridiculous policy, we shall all have to go to farming."

But not even the ire of the Bench could move this staunch Hon'ble Lawyer, who still refused to accept more than he thought he was entitled to.

The framework of his mental and moral being was honesty and a wrong case was poorly defended by him. The tact which some eminent lawyers possess, of explaining away the bad points of a cause by ingenious sophistry was denied to him. In order to bring into full activity his great powers, it was necessary that he should be convinced of the right and justice of the matter which he advocated, and when so convinced, whether the cause was great or small, he was usually successful.

US Circuit Judge, Thomas Drummond said, "With a probity of character known to all, with an intensive insight into the human heart, with a clearness of statement which was in itself an argument, with uncommon power and felicity of illustration, often, it is true, of a plain and homely kind and with that sincerity and earnestness of manner which carried conviction he was perhaps one of the most successful jury lawyers we ever had in this State. He could hardly be called very learned in his profession, and yet he rarely tried a cause without full understanding the law applicable to it; and I have no hesitation in saying, he was one of the ablest lawyers I have ever known."

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