**Toward Global Peopleâ€™s Autonomy**

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**2nd wave of global anti-capitalism struggle**

My point of departure in imagining “another world” is that we are in the second wave of historical people’s movement against capitalism, the first wave being the 19-20 century communist-socialist movement concentrating on the seizure of state as the decisive instrument of social change. Here I can hardly go into historical assessment of that state-centered paradigm but it is obvious that the historic movement guided by that paradigm was tested and failed in a big way, leaving global capitalism triumphant, though in a miserable shape. The second wave is there to undermine and overthrow the capitalist regime in new ways, that is, ways not dedicated to the seizure of the state and establishment of the party-state. I believe that that is the major lesson learned from the failure of the first wave. The second wave struggle certainly requires new practice guided by new visions and using new means to achieve “another world.” What then should be the visions and strategies of the second wave?

Probably there is a consensus among many of us that the world today which we want to change is managed and ruled by a composite global power center to keep extremely destructive capitalism going. Empire or not, this is a *de facto* global center of rule consisting of diverse agencies, national and transnational as well as public and private, an organic formation into which nation states have been inextricably enmeshed. True, the global power is not monolithic but is divided by clashing interests among its components. But they come together when it comes to the point of defending their basic logic and rule as well as their interests against the actual and possible resistance from the popular forces. There is in fact no legitimacy for this power, nor is there any democracy in the way global affairs are managed. The second wave of anti-capitalism movement therefore has to be a political struggle to resist, undermine, and overthrow this global power structure, a struggle for global democracy of a new type. It is clear that global democracy we need is not a world government as resurrection of the sovereign nation state on a world scale. We are not struggling for a United States of the World, a universal state vested with the mission of abolishing capitalism from above.

What we envisage as “another world” must be a global autonomy of the people of the world that manages social and economic systems in non-capitalist ways. If this is to be our perspective, it follows that the key to bringing a change of this nature is the ability of the people of the world to organize themselves into global democratic autonomy, politically and morally forcing the capitalist power center to succumb to their rules and finally terminating capitalism. Is such a perspective grounded?

The first step toward answering this question is to recognize that as is there is no “people of the world” as potent agency of autonomy. It therefore follows that the possibility of bringing about “another world” depends on whether and how the people of the world will emerge as the body of global autonomy, more specifically, whether, and how, social movements can be instrumental to the emergence of global people exercising autonomy.

**People’s alliance and transborder democracy**

Let me take a look into this problematic using as a referent some of our pre-WSF experiences, namely, the People’s Plan 21 (PP21).

[[i]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_edn1)In hindsight, this program was a forerunner of the movement of movements for another world, projecting visions of global social change beyond the state-oriented perspective. I as a chief organizer of the program feel it is worthwhile to look back on it from the point of view of historical continuity as a contribution to the on-going discussion.

It was in August 1989, immediately before the fall of the Berlin wall, that we, a coalition of movement groups in Japan, took the initiative in organizing, together with popular movements and NGO friends from other lands mainly Asia, initiated a large international program titled the People’s Plan for the 21stCentury. It was a multi-issue, multi-sector movement project attempt to search for a 21st century planned and created by the people themselves, not by big business and elitist bureaucrats. The program held throughout Japan in the form of close to 20 thematic and sector-wise international events all over the Japanese archipelago joined by more than 120,000 Japanese 300 overseas participants culminated in a synthesis gathering in Minamata, known for mercury pollution that victimized hundreds of thousands of people and grassroots struggle against the polluting company. That struggle of the poorest of the poor in peripheral Japanese locality launched in the 1950s and culminated in the 1970s raising environment concerns in Japan and beyond. The purpose of the PP21 program was to get people’s efforts together to bring about “*janakashaba*,” a “world that does not stand like this,” an original phrase coined by fishing people victimized by pollution in the midst of the struggle. The synthesis conference adopted the Minamata Declaration, setting the keynote of the program and it was agreed that PP21 should be continued as people’s linking process. The second PP21 convergence was held in 1992 in Thailand and in South Asia in 1996, culminating in big mobilization in Katmandu. But later we failed to maintain the momentum due largely to internal difficulties. In 2002 we met last and decided to stop holding large multi-issue, multi-sector “convergences” so as not to duplicate the WSF that had been initiated. But ideas and linkages created through PP21 have left some imprints in the later movements. Unlike WSF, PP21 adopted declarations, beginning with the Minamata declaration in 1989 through Rajchadamnoen Pledge adopted by the Thai program in 1992 to the Sagarmatha Declaration in 1996 in Katmandu.

The key concepts we introduced then were transborder participatory democracy and global alliance of the people, posited as the people constituting themselves to exercise autonomy. Emphasizing that our hope for the future pinged on the formation of such a global people’s alliance, we called it “Alliance of Hope.” We envisioned both transborder participatory democracy and people’s alliance not as static institution or body but as dynamic processes of constant formation and renewal. In other words, we adopted these concepts as movement concepts. I believe that these concepts are relevant in designing our global strategies of today.

**The state of the global people**

We chose the word “people” to designate the body to self-rule, but as earlier said, our keen concern was that there was no such “people” as the actually existing body to exercise democracy as self-rule. On the contrary,

…they (people) are “divided into various groups positioned differently in the global hierarchical structures, divided by gender, ethnic, religious, geographical, class, cultural, and national borders” while the people’s identities are not static, but dynamically changing, overlapping, and mutually interacting. As such “these groups are being forced to live together under conditions imposed upon them.” We said that “state-supported global capital is organizing all these groups into a system of international and hierarchical division of labor” and that “this order is lauded as the world of interdependence.” Read interdependence globalization. “But it is an interdependence forced upon the people and permeated by hostility and division. The dominant system perpetuates itself by organizing internal division, and setting one people’s group against another.” We had in mind “national chauvinism, machinated communalism, cultural exclusivism, sexism, and the whole varied panoply of radical ethnic prejudices” that “serve the ruling elites well in their efforts to establish a great organization incapable of its own unity.” (My presentation to the PP21 Assembly in 2002? [[ii]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_edn2)

Currently capitalist globalization entails two parallel phenomena. On the one hand, the accelerated development of communication technology and networking beyond borders has created a cosmopolitan arena, in which people, especially the young, from far-flung cultural and political as well as geographical locations and milieus are communicating and sharing information, sentiments, and cultures. Actions resisting the capitalist global rule spread fast benefiting from this development. On the other hand, we witness serious divisions ripping the people into antagonistic collectives and causing conflicts among them. People are badly divided, segmented, and set to fight each other, often to the point of violence, even murderous conflicts. The divides run between collectives of various kinds as well as individuals. Religious and other “fundamentalisms,” jingoism, misogyny, racism, other hate campaigns, internal wars, and other forms of violence wielded by common people against one another are now part of the daily life on the surface of the globe. During the Bush war, Empire’s exercise of vertical violence bred, aggravated, and exploited horizontal violence among people’s collectives. How then can the people across the world autonomously rule themselves?

This perception leads us to the rejection of the notion of global civil society that sees the world society more or less as an association of homogeneous individuals. The “civil society” discourse, prevalent in the 1990s, reflected the rise of NGO culture over social movements as complementary to the neo-liberal offensive of capitalism. Similarly, we take exception to the idea advanced by some overoptimistic theorists who argue that the “multitude” under the hegemony of non-material labor already embodies the “common” and comes together preserving and benefiting from their singularities. I wish things were like that, but this postulate of predetermined harmony among people’s communities is not borne out by the people’s realities unfurling in front of our eyes.

**Bound together in hostile relations**

The capitalist globalization regime is dividing the people into conflictual situations in the same process that links them up in unequal global division of labor. The inter-people relationships thus made, characterized by antagonistic closeness and not made by the choice of the people involved breed inter-people violence and conflicts. But this same process, on the other hand, can, as often does, generate the urge and initiative among some of the people dragged into antagonism to create new mutual relations beyond the externally erected barriers.

[[iii]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_edn3) Both are products of the same capitalist globalization process.

Alliance building therefore relates to the effort to demolish from within of the structural and subjective barriers separating/linking the people’s communities. In other words, if members of the groups linked together into externally determined relationship begin to interact with one another, find that relationship not fatalistic, and discredit, weaken, and overcome it by creating new relationships of their own making, in which people from both sides find each other different than before, then the process to an alliance gets down to a start. In the PP21 program, we called it inter-people autonomy meaning that communities self-manage not only their internal affairs but also their mutual relationships. People’s alliance as a step toward global people’s autonomy emerges as people’s collectives and communities create new relationship of their own making.

Here I am talking about very diverse groupings of the global people with intersecting identities. Their diversity, instead of being developed as richness of human civilization, is exploited by the capitalist regime as the base of competition useful for capital accumulation. Alliance building is to give back life to diversity as the wealth of global society.

But what groups of people are we talking about? Global society is articulated into extremely complex, in fact infinite, sets of relationships, macro and micro, which are constantly changing, so it would be useless to try to enumerate them. They come to the surface as new resistance occurs asserting certain identity. But some of the macro divisions are historically present, brought forward by major movements of the oppressed people involved. Among such division lines are those relating to the North-South, gender, class, urban-rural, national, ethnic, cultural, and religious relationships.

These and numerous other burning issues are now closely intertwined precluding the likelihood of separate solution for each of them. Discussing this topic, I presented a sketchy view years ago, which I think may still have some relevance though it certainly needs elaboration and updating. Allow me to reproduce some relevant paragraphs from that paper.

[[iv]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_edn4)

  … globalization of capital supported by the global power center has not only made the world smaller, but also has telescoped major events and problems having arisen in the past centuries into the present. This defines the nature of alternatives we are committed to create. In other words, in resolving burning problems of today, we must undo history tracing back to where the problems originated. As it were, we face a single complex of problems. And the problems integrated into this single complex, having arisen at different times and settings in history, not only have been bequeathed to us unresolved, but have been fused in peculiar combinations so that the possibility of resolving those problems separately and one by one is close to precluded. To simplify, the present condenses in its midst at least the following problems and their legacies:

1. Thousands of years of domination of women by men;

2. Five hundred years of domination of the South by the North; the conquests of the people and their civilizations in the "new continent" legitimated the notion of conquest in general — the conquest of people by the "civilized" and the conquest of nature by human beings;

3. Two hundred years of domination of agriculture by industry (industrial revolution);

4. Two hundred years of domination of society by the modern state and inter-state system;

5. Two hundred years of the domination and exploitation of labor by capital;

6. One hundred years of imperialist domination of colonies;

7. Forty years of destruction of nature and diversity (homogenization) in the name of development.

You can add any number of "current" problems having survived through history. The point is that none of them has survived in its original shape. These have been brought into a deformed synthesis in diverse combinations. Modern capitalism, for instance, integrates (2) to (5) on the basis of (1) while (7) integrates all the preceding problems. Item (2), mediated by (1), (3), (5), and (6), produces (7) in the form of the widening gap between the North and the South.

Our alternatives address precisely this problem complex. Given the organic intertwinedness of the problems, the process to overcome it needs be a single process. "Single" does not mean "in one fell swoop." Nor do we anticipate an apocalyptic settlement. It means disentanglement in the same historical time and in interrelatedness. It means that trying to fully resolve any one of the problems as separate from the others won’t, after all, succeed in resolving even that problem. This is a crucial point. For instance, environmentalist movement will never succeed in preserving nature if it refuses to consider Southern poverty.

   The clue to disentanglement is to begin taking the side of the dominated in the above list: women, indigenous people, the South, agriculture, labor, (civil) society, nature, and diversity. Already, vigorous voices have been raised and demands presented by or on behalf of them. We have fairly active social movements on all of those issues. The starting point in our search for global alternatives is to go full lengths to work changes in line with the demands of the dominated on the dominating side — men, conquerors, North, capital, state, human species, and homogeneity. Without the prerogative of the dominated, there is no emancipating alternative.

   Through maximum of such efforts we shall find that an alternative world won’t be constituted by the mechanical summing up of such efforts. For there is no guarantee that alternatives evolved by different sectors and on diverse issues fall in predetermined harmony into a single picture of an alternative world. Alternatives pressed by urban citizens may collide with those developed by farmers. Feminist perspective may misgive traditional communities. Conflicts are bound to occur.

    But the differences and even conflicts can be constructive. They may be a driving force toward weaving comprehensive alternatives. If the conflicts end in antagonism, the current system will survive capitalizing on them. Mere compromise is postponement of antagonism. But if the differences are brought to a higher level of synthesis through dialectical interaction, then we have an Alliance of Hope with ever self-enriching alternative visions and programs that fully cope with the entirety of the historical problem complex.

**Inter-movement politics for inter-people alliance**

Social movement today, in my view, faces this kind of historic challenge. For alliance building, movement plays a decisive role in helping this process get under way. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, discussing the World Social Forum and the global left, noted that one of the salient features of WSF’s contribution was “the passage from a movement politics to inter-movement politics.”

[[v]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_edn5)By inter-movement politics he meant “a politics run by the idea that no single issue social movement can succeed in carrying out its agenda without the cooperation of other movements.” I fully agree. Inter-movement politics, however, is not complete in itself. Also it is not merely a matter between issue-based movements. In the people’s alliance context, it carries more general signification. A few important features involved include the following:

(1)  **Inter-people politics**: Inter-movement politics, if relevant, must involve inter-people politics. Meaningful social movements always have their respective constituencies of which they are organic part. Inter-movement politics can have significance only when it is integral to inter-people politics and is not closed within itself. In other words, inter-movement politics is tested by the degree to which it engenders inter-people interactive politics conducive to people-to-people alliance making.

(2) **Movement and constituency**: This does not mean, however, that a specific movement “legitimately” and monopolistically represents one constituency considered more or less homogeneous. The constituency itself is a mobile entity comprising complex identities. The relevance of inter-movement politics should prove itself by organic relationships it creates and recreates with the community. Inter-movement politics also works within the same constituent community which usually generates plural movement initiatives.

(3) **Interaction:** Interaction between people, as collectives and as individuals, in a positive context is one of the main modes of alliance building. Interaction in a hostile context would mean escalating hostility, distrust, and clashes, but we have abundant experience that people from usually unfriendly or even hostile groups, meeting in a favorable context, find each other just common human beings and friends.

(4) **Mediation:** Let me call this kind of interaction virtuous interaction. The other type is vicious interaction that aggravates conflicts. For virtuous interaction to take place, mediation is essential. Movement is expected to be an essential element of mediation. Assumptions under the old paradigm were that classes are represented by their parties and class alliances are deemed arranged when the parties representing them come together to sign a joint front agreement. Now we know movements, let alone political parties, do not represent the people’s collectives. It is the people’s groups themselves that interact and enter into alliance processes. And in these processes movements based in their constituencies play indispensable mediating roles.

(5) **Internal impacts**: Virtuous interaction can cause changes not only in the mutual relationships between groups, but also the internal power relationships and cultures within the groups involved in emancipating directions.

(6) **Structural changes:** We said that under the capitalist regime different communities and collectives of the people are bound together, even despite themselves, into antagonistic relationships, typically of hierarchical formation. Alliance building therefore would not continue, even if virtuous interaction is constituted, if the oppressing/oppressed, exploiting/exploited, dominating/dominated relationships that exist between collectives are allowed to continue. For alliance building to continue and develop, this process should entail processes mitigating and eventually abolishing the real and structural as well as subjective unequal power relationships.

(7) **Economic articulation:** This aspect of the matter takes us to a broader area of building another world, or another global society. In the classical Marxist-Leninist understanding, a worker-peasant alliance was not only the key to the formation of revolutionary power but also the basis of economic articulation in a new society between industry and agriculture, or urban and rural. The first wave experience (mostly negative) should be reassessed from this angle, namely, the economic aspects of class alliances and antagonisms. The people’s alliances we envisage, though they embody far more complex inter-group articulation than worker-peasant, are pregnant with some future economic articulation of another world. This means that the people’s alliances are not just a political partnership that is likely to collapse the moment political goals they are aimed at are achieved, but rather the baby in the womb of the society yet to come. Alliance building through interaction and relational transformation will involve processes of changing existing socio-economic patterns of articulation toward a better world.

(8) **Dialogue with nature:** Interaction should take place not only among the people. The alliance building process of necessity entails reflection on the whole course of capitalism-driven modern civilization, particularly its arrogance toward nature (including our bodies). Interaction – or dialogue – will be started with nature, learning particularly from wisdom of indigenous peoples, to find ways to undo the self-destruction we have willingly inflicted upon ourselves through redefinition of development and progress.

(9) **People’s charter making process**: Alliance building through positive and virtuous interaction is a dynamic process and therefore fluid and changeable. But at each phase of the process, the parties involved must negotiate terms of agreement at a given time on a certain basis. In other words, the permanent process needs times of punctuation. This will represent the formal aspect of alliance building. This means that we are coming up with inter-people social contracts at diverse levels. Some of them may be written out and signed on and others may be accepted as new habits observed and practiced. At a time when nation states are still there, the autonomous agreements may be institutionalized or even made into state laws or written into international covenants. Let me emphasize that these are processes already under way but not necessarily perceived as steps of alternative world building as they are seen only in issue-based contexts. Thus, in actuality, alliance building processes are, explicitly or implicitly, social contract making processes. The agreements and contracts are also renewable and actually being renewed reflecting new inter-people relationships. Movements are there as agency to remake them through inter-movement politics. If these numerous autonomous inter-people contracts and agreements proliferate and are accumulated, linking ever broader segments of global people’s activities, and begin to guide the course of events, then we approach inter-people autonomy whose shared basis will be a people’s charter composite of numerous agreements and in constant renewal process.

**Movement or space? – WSF as a new type of movement**

Now, I go back to the actual movement, “movement of movements” and its important arena, World Social Forum. I hear that for some time, whether WSF is a space or a movement has been debated as an issue relevant to the very nature of WSF. I have no doubt that WSF is a movement but should be consciously a movement of a new type. When Chico Whitaker, probably one of the strong proponents of “space,” says “movement and space are complete different things,” I disagree with this dichotomy. According to Chico,

A movement *congregates*people — its activists, as the activists of a party — who decide to organise themselves to collectively accomplish certain objectives. Its formation and existence entails the *definition*of strategies to reach these objectives, the *formulation*of action programmes, and the *distribution*of responsibilities among its members — including those concerning the direction of the movement. Those who assume this function will lead the activists of the movement, getting them — through authoritarian or democratic methods, according to the choice made by the founders of the movement — to take responsibility for their commitments in the collective action. Its organisational structure will necessarily be pyramidal however democratic the internal process of decision and the way used to choose those who will occupy different levels of management might be. On the other hand, its effectiveness will depend on the explicitness and precision of its *specific objectives*, and therefore, of its own boundaries in time and space.

[[vi]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_edn6)

Sure, WSF should not be, and cannot be either, a movement of the type Whitaker described. True, there may be some people who want to reorganize WSF in that image. But rejection of this type of movement would not justify the idea of WSF being a square rented for free use. In between the two poles is the possibility and necessity of a new type of movement. WSF I believe should develop itself as such a movement – **a movement devoted to generating and mediating interactions among diverse groups of people and deliberately igniting processes to build and develop inter-people alliances based on multilateral agreements that will form the body of the people’s charter for global people’s self-rule.**

Is such effort a movement? I think this is exactly what people call movement of movements. This coinage vaguely implies cooperation among various movements but can be understood as temporary, utilitarian cooperation. I think it can mean far more.

WSF has created excellent possibilities for a new type of movement to emerge. And in fact numerous workshops and other events in the arena offer various issue-, sector-, class-, gender- and otherwise based movements to meet, develop common platforms, and common action. But efforts to encourage inter- movement politics as WSF, it appears to me, have been absent or minimal. As far as I know, meetings of social movements which used to be held as one of the voluntary projects were not intended, nor appropriate, as an occasion to facilitate serious, patient discussion and negotiation for transborder alliance building. Setting dates of worldwide action and agreeing on general goals, it seems to be, was the utmost the social movement gathering could agree on. It is time for us to clearly recognize inter-movement politics, and for that matter inter-people politics, in its own right, as a new dimension of movement.

I think time is ripe for change. The Bush administration ironically gave us a focus – the war while WTO another focus – neoliberal globalization. WSF functioned as an effective arena where by the momentum of huge getting together people emerged as “another superpower” making their presence felt. But that stimulus is gone with the downfall of Bush, leaving Empire and global capitalism bogging down, so that hostile global focuses facilitating people’s mobilization too have become less visible. Instead of constituting ourselves chiefly by reacting to the global power, we need to find ways to constitute ourselves among ourselves through the medium of movement of movement.

[[i]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_ednref) The contents of the 1989 PP21 program covered in AMPO Vol.21, Nos.1-2 (“Steps into People’s Century”), of the 1992 Thai PP21 in AMPO Vol. 24, No. 3, and of the 1996 in AMPO Vol. 27, No.2, available from the Pacific-Asia Resource Center (PARC), Toyo Bldg. 3F, 1-7-1 Kanda Awaji-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0063 Japan; Phone: +81 3 5209 3455; Fax: +81 3 5209 3453; E-mail: ampo@parc-jp.org; Keynote address by Muto Ichiyo to the Minamata conference is reprinted in Jeremy Brecher et al.-ed, “Global Visions,” South End Press, 1993; major documents and declarations from 1989 through 1996 were published in a book form in Hong Kong in 1997. Copy availability can be checked with PARC in Tokyo; also for major statements from PP21 convergences go to www.ppjaponesia.org/

[[ii]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_ednref) Go to www.ppjaponesia.org for Muto’s paper to the 2002 PP21 general assembly

[[iii]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_ednref) Due to the nature of this paper, it is difficult to cite concrete examples of interaction among people’s groups. But as the most typical, large scale interaction, think of encounters between the Zapatista movement and the Mexican civil society as well as the inter-continental encounters organized by EZLN. Mediated encounters, interactions, and alliance building efforts are under way at milliards of levels from macro to micro, involving interim solutions of all kinds; even “conflict resolution” processes may contain lessons to be drawn; it is therefore important for us to study these instances from the perspective of people’s potentials to create and recreate social/political relationships of their own as against the imposed mutual relationships.

[[iv]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_ednref) Muto, “Alliance of Hope and Challenges of Global Democracy,” *Ecumenical Review*, World Council of Churches, Jan. 1994

[[v]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_ednref) Boaventura de Souza Santos, “The World Social Forum and the Global Left,” http://www.forumsocialmundial.org

[[vi]](http://www.zcomm.org/FCKeditor26/editor/fckeditor.html?InstanceName=body&Toolbar=Default#_ednref) Chico Whitaker, “The WSF As Open Space,” Jai Sen et al.-ed., World Social Forum: Challenging Empires, Viveka Foundation, 2004, pp.112-3