

MORE OF THE SAME

No doubt it's a new phase of political development on the left at a time when there is no leftist international centre of any kind. And yet its organisers would like to distance themselves from the prevailing political tendencies while pursuing, in all fairness, a policy of populism.

Utopia that the World Social Forum (WSF)—a gathering of voluntary groups and social movements that meets every year to search for appropriate strategy to confront global capital—generated at the initial stage seems to be vanishing very fast. It is somewhat paradoxical that WSF leaders want to address contentious political and economic issues with their apolitical approach making participants talk endlessly without any goal to reach. WSF came into existence as a response to neo-liberalism and unfair and unequal trade regime created globally by WTO, heavily biased in favour of America and the West. This was the 6th WSF summit and it changed the usual format from one centralised forum to a multi-venue one with sessions taking place in Bamako, Mali, Caracas, Venezuela and Karachi, Pakistan. But nothing concrete emerged from the gigantic showbiz. Not for nothing some people at this year's forum took the liberty to question the disturbing fact "that nothing seems to be coming out of these enormous efforts".

Kenya will host the next year's summit. Incidentally 2007 will mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of SLAVE TRADE. Slavery is gone, not wage slavery.

The have-nots in the third world cannot have any solution to their life-and-death question within the existing system. And the Forum is trying to establish itself as an alternative centre of people's power essentially imitating the leftists' turf without really taking the responsibility of taking to the streets.

'What does the WSF mean for the wretched of the earth?' Not much. In truth WSF has no global solution to globalisation. Anti-imperialist rhetoric is fine so long as it remains at the agit-propaganda level. WSF exercise looks too evasive about the enemy.

Brazil took the initiative in launching WSF. But the situation in Brazil illustrates the limits of non-class and non-partisan approach to an acutely contested class question. Once Lula de Silva of Brazil was hailed as a new source of inspiration against neo-liberalism. But the growing mass disillusionment with the accommodationist stance of Lula's Workers Party (PT) baffles even the diehard advocates of WSF. Strangely enough, PT came to power through decades of struggles by movements from below of metal workers, feminists, liberation theorists and the landless peasants. People like Lula who once scorned neo-liberal market culture are now enthusiastic participants in it. It is next to impossible to challenge neo-liberal policies within the WTO framework and Lulas and Chavezes are not going to defy WTO dictats despite their fire-fighting at WSF meets.

The prospects of 'revolution from above' as it appears from WSF conclave seem bleak. In India the communist and left parties, of late, are taking active interest in WSF, possibly to register their 'harmless' protest against global capital.

During the Soviet era it was non-capitalist path of development (or what may be called bureaucratisation of capital) that the communist left championed as penacea. And non-capitalist path was all about peaceful capture of parliament through ballot while compromising with local elites. With the collapse of Soviet socialism, the concept of non-capitalist path too collapsed. All are busy to explore virtues in the capitalist path of growth. Even the Chinese are practising capitalism to promote what they call Chinese brand of market socialism.

Socialism is not on the agenda of WSF. Nor does it theorise on strategy and tactics to sharpen class struggle. Yet it hopes to translate its ambitious slogan of 'another world is possible' into reality. One question that definitely begs answer is : "Who funds the WSF"? Seeing the extravaganza, many African delegates raised the issue of funding at the Mali Meet. Despite some bitter and adverse criticisms WSF is growing horizontally. As for its vertical development there is not much to cheer about. It is unlikely that the 7th WSF summit to be held next year in Kenya would go beyond rhetoric. ~~del del del~~