Coming Soon to a Place Near You!
NW Social Forum to Gather Thousands at Seattle Center Oct. 15-17

Another world—one of cooperation, inspiration, peace, and justice—is not only possible but also necessary for our survival. And it’s beginning to emerge through the World Social Forums (WSF) and now regional forums. The first Northwest Social Forum (NWSF) will be held at the Seattle Center in mid-October.

Started in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) has gathered more than 50,000 attendees from over 130 countries to share ideas, strategies, joy, and the determination to create a better world.

The NWSF’s key values are sharing, giving, peace, solidarity, and respect for the earth. “It’s a whole paradigm shift away from money values and violence to life and nonviolence,” says Kevin Danaher, one of the organizers. Robert Bullard, an environmental justice advocate, says it’s about finding out “what’s wrong and how to work together” to make things right.

The NWSF will gather folks from Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington as a catalyst for social change. Here’s how it’s being done:

- In the spirit of the WSF, people of color and other marginalized groups are central to the planning
- A horizontal leadership structure and open space process mean broad participation—anyone can offer a workshop that’s in line with WSF values (a workshop application will be on the website).

An initial planning retreat was hosted by the Positive Futures Network, funded by the Fetzer Institute, for three days of intense conversation among 40 Northwest activists. Consensus-building helped create a high level of trust, as well as a start on a ten-year vision of movement building. Currently, planning is well underway with the Key Arena and Northwest Rooms of the Seattle Center reserved. A website with a calendar and contact information (www.nwsocialforum.org) will help bring people together.

There’s now also an NWSF office in the Service Employees International Union building (Local 6) with Syd Frederickson hired to coordinate the efforts of volunteers. You can reach Syd at (206) 448-7348 ext. 342 or by email at info@nwsocialforum.org.

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In Porto Alegre, Brazil, roughly 50,000 people (including 10,000 official delegates) joined in nearly one thousand forums, talks, marches, and meetings for five days in 2002. Here’s what economist-activist Michael Albert learned there:

1. It’s possible to gather huge numbers of people and (despite the heat and a frantic pace) have overwhelming good feelings, mutual respect, and an unlimited exchange of information. It’s doable but not easy: it took about 400 volunteers working over many months.

2. The U.S. Left seems isolated from the rest of the world’s movements. Activists here are in the belly of the beast (the U.S.). Neither we nor the rest of the world can separately achieve what we must—we have to work together.

3. Movements abroad are ignorant about our situation believing there is no Left or believing we suffer immense repression.

4. Serious dissidents share similar values and aspirations about abolishing markets, solidarity, cooperation, self-management, and participation. Revolutionary ideas are percolating among us worldwide and we won’t settle for anything less than a new world!

5. The city of Porto Alegre and the Brazilian Left are inspiring. Their Participatory Budgeting, negotiated by cooperative people organized in assemblies, makes the government’s economic and social investment a public matter. This makes Porto Alegre the best place to live in Brazil (no one contests this).

6. The other side is scared. There are these rather odd media events like Bill Gates joining hands with Bono and calling on the rich to pay serious attention to the plight of the poor. Don’t be surprised if the World Bank starts asking us for advice.