



Northwest Social Forum

www.NWSocialForum.org

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Positive Futures Network/YES! Magazine

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Rosalinda Guillen, Retreat Coordinator
Bainbridge Island, Washington

Washington State Jobs with Justice

Lynne Dodson, Co-Chair
Seattle, Washington

Northwest Social Forum office:

150 Denny Way
206-448-7348 ext. 342
www.NWSocialForum.org

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Newsletter Issue 1

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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 Fredrickson hired to coordinate the efforts of volunteers. You can reach Syd at (206) 448-7348 ext. 342 or by email at info@nwsocialforum.org.

the landless workers' movement (MST): earth for the dispossessed—peasant resistance, farming, and food justice

Ramão Aldo da Silva Speaks in Olympia & Seattle

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST) is the largest social movement in Latin America and since 1985 it has earned land titles for 250,000 families living on more than 15 million acres of farmland. In 1999 alone, 25,099 families took over vacant, unproductive land—turning the earth into a much-needed source of food and income.

Ramão Aldo da Silva, who does political education for the MST, spoke in Olympia on August 5th at the Traditions Fair Trade Café, and in Seattle August 6th at the office of the Labor & Employment Law Organization (LELO). The talks were organized in part by LELO's Tyree Scott Worker to Worker Voice Coalition and in part by Lucilene Lira, field organizer for the Evergreen State College Labor Center.

To accomplish its goals, the MST has to struggle against trade agreements like the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). Such agreements permit subsidized corporate agriculture to undermine small subsistence farmers producing their own food. (Europe and the U.S. were recently forced to agree to eventually dismantle their agribusiness subsidies during WTO meetings, but a timetable and hard numbers are still up in the air.)

While governments negotiate through the WTO, the MST educates and mobilizes thousands of people, aiming to create a strong international movement through its Via Campesina campaign (www.mstbrazil.org) and the World Social Forum.

Como dicen en Latinoamerica, "La vida es lucha, y la lucha continua."

More than Joy: Learnings from the 2002 World Social Forum

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.