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cultural, and environmental policies are a disaster for most people in the world—while also claiming that “Another World is Possible.” How shall we develop this theme for our region and peoples?

Most Social Forum organizers share lots of values, like peace and equality and human rights, but the Forums don’t seek formal agreements on principles or strategies. Instead, they emphasize openness and networking: the sharing of information, experience, proposals, and analyses. Can we in Seattle share ideas and build relationships in ways that foster a successful long-term social movement worldwide?

There have already been two U.S. Social Forums, one in the Midwest (June 4-5, 2004) and in Boston (July 23-25, 2004). An Americas Social Forum just concluded in Ecuador.

What can we learn from these other forums about the challenges and possibilities? Here are some questions to consider:

1. Sometimes grassroots groups aren’t as involved or as key to Social Forum leadership as much we’d like. Why?

Is the leadership and planning done from the start by people from grassroots communities, people in touch with their broad common interests? Are we particularly careful to build connections among indigenous people and other movements? Do we talk and write in words that everybody shares? Are issues framed so that all of us can relate? Do we foster a sense of equality and participatory democracy even if we’re not making formal decisions together?

2. If the Forum avoids formal decisions for or against this or that strategy, how

can we help participants prepare to work together effectively after the event? Do we need more Social Forum opportunities for developing and debating strategies? How can we do this in cooperative, mutually appreciative ways?

3. Our problems are globally connected; what about our solutions? How and to what extent should we try to work together not just locally but also regionally, nationally, and globally? Can we coordinate in at least some ways with people working on the same issues but in other regions or nations? How can we make sure we don’t work against the interests of our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world? How can we help each other?

4. Social movements can work in four ways: to educate, to change governments, to undermine the present system, and to create a new world in line with our values. All ways are important, and sometimes social movements can combine all four. Can the Northwest Social Forum help individuals and groups figure out a useful division of labor and ways to work in harmony with people who’ve made different choices?

At this time in the United States, we may feel very confused, isolated, or discouraged. We might even be tempted to blame each other for “failures.” But each time we try, we learn something more; every new relationship across differences teaches us.

At the very least the Northwest Social Forum will give participants a superb chance to become better allies, to share ideas and learn from each other, and to envision how, eventually, we will succeed.



Northwest Social Forum

www.NWSocialForum.org

Northwest Social Forum Planning Committee

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Center for Social Justice

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Cindy Domingo, Board President
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Newsletter Issue 2

September, 2004

The How and Why of the NWSF: Diverse Voices in Relationship

by Cynthia L. Adcock

The people most harshly affected by the economic and cultural terrorism of globalization are also the people who’ve developed the strongest, most inspiring forms of resistance worldwide, according to Lucilene Lira, a member of the NWSF planning committee. She urges us to recognize that people of color, indigenous communities, and the poor are under attack—their livelihood and cultures threatened—but that they are also the ones who develop all of the different kinds of strategies against greedy corporations. “We must reclaim our resources and dignity so that human beings are at the center, not corporations,” says Lira. “The Zapatistas in Mexico, the Bolivian movement against the privatization of water, and Brazil’s Via Campesina are immensely strong, creative responses to corporate ‘genocidal policies.’”

Another member of the planning committee, Aaron Dixon, executive director of Central House, agrees: “People of color, poor communities, and the indigenous people of the area should be the stewards of this event, and our leading voices.”

But he’s concerned that time is very short for broad outreach to key regional grassroots organizations: churches, community colleges, non-profits working with the poor, and schools.

Linking activist efforts effectively region-wide is a long-term challenge, however, a journey of a thousand steps.

NWSF is based on the World Social Forum model (<http://www.nwsocialforum.org/?q=node/view/3>) developed originally by folks in Brazil and Paris as a way to create open space for diverse communities from all around the world to come together, learn about each other, discuss issues and strategies, and build relationships for the long haul.

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The NWSF: A Regional Response to Globalization

The Northwest Social Forum (NWSF), scheduled for October 14-17 at the Seattle Center, is modelled on the World Social Forums as an alternative to the World Economic Forum where corporate elites, financial institutions and government officials meet exclusively every year to design economic policies. The World Social Forums seek to put the needs of people, their cultures, and their environments first.

“It’s an opportunity for [people] committed to social justice to learn about each other’s work,” says Cindy Domingo, a member of the U.S. Women in Cuba collaboration and the NWSF planning committee.

It’s particularly exciting, she comments, because this forum has the chance to make this a very diverse grouping of people. There’s significant Native American and Latino involvement from various states, but organizers are looking for more involvement from youth,

communities of color, low-income folks, immigrants, and rural communities.

Domingo adds that NWSF won’t simply consist of workshops with regional, national, and international speakers, but that there will be cultural presentations too. The planning committee is also preparing a big parade for peace, justice, and solidarity on Saturday, October 16th. “We want to make it fun for families and children,” says Domingo.

Lucilene Lira, also a committee member, encourages everyone to think of the Forum “as a space to come together, mobilize your constituencies, have workshops, and energize the movement—especially before the elections.”

Story by Otts Bollisay, community development and operations manager at Project Alchemy, a Seattle-based nonprofit working to accelerate social change in the Pacific Northwest. Project Alchemy is providing technical assistance for the Northwest Social Forum.

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For the Seattle event, Dan Merkle, director for the Center for Social Justice, hopes there will be real opportunities to listen and learn from communities like the Farm Workers and Native Americans—communities that have experienced a tremendous amount of injustice. “In the U.S., the Global Justice movement, particularly coming out of the WTO events in Seattle, has been mostly white, while in other parts of the world it’s more diverse. There’s a strong need for progressive whites in this country to build relationships with communities of color and low-income communities. We need to take the time for listening to each other.”

“We need to do alliance-building and make sure that native folks attend the forum and can network across the issues and that the native voice is heard,” urges Shelly Vendiola, of the Indigenous Environmental Network. She’s especially interested in having “round tables for activists”—where people can connect directly with each other as equals.

As Lucilene Lira says, “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 and now regional forums.”

For more information on the Northwest Social Forum, visit www.nwsocialforum.org

Logistics Update & Growth of Our Venue

Space for the NW Social Forum is growing beyond early designs, according to Syd Fredrickson, Event Coordinator.

To accommodate the great work of organizers and track coordinators, NWSF staff are “growing the venue”—renting space from the Sacred Heart Church nearby, including its multipurpose room and kitchen. They’ll also rent tents and canopies and may create a geodesic dome, an “imagination space,” where people can feel at ease to create, envision, and share.

“We’re also putting people in touch with each other and asking them to collaborate or share space, to combine workshops on similar topics, and to cross-pollinate across issues and audiences,” says Fredrickson.

Themes for the NWSF event:

- Globalization, Economic Justice & New Economic Models
- Protecting the Commons & the Public Good
- Peace, Justice & Militarism
- Environment & Environmental Justice
- Human Rights, Racial Justice & Gender Justice
- Indigenous Peoples Rights & Immigrant Rights
- Indigenous Wisdom
- Music, Art & Culture of Resistance

September 17 is the extended due date for proposals for panels, roundtables, events, and workshops on these themes. The application form is on the front page of the website, www.nwsocialforum.org.

What Can Social Forums Accomplish? Questions to Ask Ourselves

by Cynthia Adcock, with thanks to Peter Marcuse of Columbia University

Are Social Forums useful ways to carry on our struggle, e.g. for equality in race and gender, for ecological wisdom, and against corporate domination of the global economy?

The World Social Forums (WSF) focus most on the perspectives of marginalized peoples whose experiences have helped them develop strategic wis-

dom that’s not “mainstream.” Most WSF attendees have come from diverse grassroots and advocacy groups and some labor unions. How can the Northwest Social Forum best evoke this wisdom, helping us all to speak up, listen, and learn from each other?

The main WSF premise has been that the present global economic, political,