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After Johannesburg, where to for the Movements for Global Justice?

PATRICK BOND

Progressive advocacy at Johannesburg's World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) culminated on August 31 (A31) in a formidable 10 km march of 20,000 local and international activists. They marched from Alexandra township up to the ultra-bourgeois conference site of Sandton. What was at stake, for the global political balance of forces? What was accomplished by the grouping calling itself 'Social Movements United' — community militants, Jubilee debt activists, landless people, pro-Palestinians, some trade unionists and various others?

Commentators searched, in both this 'anti-WSSD' (anti-WSSD) march and in the year of post-11 September mobilisations (mainly in mass protests in southern Europe) for nothing less than the heart and soul of the Movements for Global Justice, also known as anti-globalisation, anti-capitalist or new social movements. In contrast, a second rally and march 'against world poverty' and in favour of the WSSD had been called for the same day by the larger trade union and ruling African National Congress (ANC). It was endorsed by some of the international NGOs which attended the 'official' parallel summit of the Global Civil Society Forum. The Forum, held in the Nasrec Convention Centre, more than 45 minutes away from Sandton, was a site of great conflict from last December through February. The conflict was only temporarily resolved when pro-ANC labour and NGOs expelled the independent social movements.

In the event, the more radical Social Movements United trumped the official civil society and government forces. The small turnout (fewer than 5,000) to hear

South African president Thabo Mbeki in Alexandra stadium suggested that the ANC facing profound alienation. Moreover, there was a feeling that it makes little sense for the Global Justice Movements to ally with Third World nationalists — e.g., Mahathir, Mugabe, Obasanjo — who face enormous hostility from (and mete out repression to) progressive democrats at home.

Table 1 lists notable individuals associated with the various ideological currents that can be identified as operative over the past few years. Washington Consensus institutions which promote free-market policies (privatisation, trade and financial liberalisation, fiscal austerity, monetarism, user-fees for state services, etc) remain hegemonic, augmented on the far right by the Bush Administration's military-industrial-energy complex revival of imperialism. In the centre are the Post-Washington Consensus (Post-WashCon) reformers who have unsuccessfully peddled 'adjustment with a human face' for years and who received a second wind with the appearance of Joseph Stiglitz, the 2001 Nobel economics laureate and former World Bank chief economist who in late 1999 was fired by James Wolfensohn on orders from US treasury secretary Larry Summers. A slight resurgence of Third World nationalism gives the Post-WashCon a chance to ground their arguments in nation-states, although many of these are unreliable and dictatorially-run.

On the civil society left, the luminaries listed are merely faces of these movements, for the main point is that as an 'NGO-swarm' — to cite the Rand Corporation's frightened description — the networks of social-change activists do not have formal leaders who tell followers 'the line' or 'the strategy.' Any such personality list is merely indicative, given the lack of hierarchy in the best segments of the movements, but includes names of

internationally-renowned activists, scholars, commentators and politicians.

In general, the diverse justice movements have this in common: *they promote the globalisation of people and halt or at minimum radically modify the globalisation of capital.* Their demands, campaigns and programmes reflect the work of organisations with decades of experience. Their activists were schooled in social, community, women's, labour, democracy, disarmament, human rights, consumer, public health and Aids-activist, political, progressive-religious, environmental, and youth traditions. Their work spans an enormous variety of issues, organisational forms, and styles. In the Third World, high-profile justice movements at the turn of the 21st century include Jubilee South in various locations, Mexico's Zapatistas, Brazil's Movement of the Landless, India's National Alliance of People's Movements, Thailand's Forum of the Poor and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

The most dynamic forces within the movements have arrived at this formula because of high-profile battles between protesters and the police protecting elites in London and Seattle (1999); Washington, Melbourne, Prague and Nice (2000); Quebec City, Genoa and Brussels (2001); and New York, Barcelona, Johannesburg and Washington (2002). In addition, conditions remain that gave rise to 'IMF Riots' and massive anti-neoliberal protests across virtually the entire Third World over the past two decades.

For many Southern social and labour movements, Seattle was a catalyst to transcend what has been termed the "IMF Riot" (i.e., mass urban demonstrations catalysed by food price hikes, the end of transport subsidies and the like) as a knee-jerk protest against neoliberalism. Subsequently, mass-democratic activist responses characterised the Third World demonstrations, which have increasingly featured anti-neoliberal programmatic demands. In some instances, particularly

Table 1: Five reactions to the global crisis: An international snapshot (~2002)

Tendency -> Issue:	Global Justice Movements	Third World Nationalism	Post-Washington Consensus	Washington Consensus	Resurgent Rightwing
Main arguments	Against globalisation of <i>capital</i> (but for globalisation of <i>people/solidarity</i>): for fair (not free) trade, debt cancellation and generous social wage	For more global integration: i.e., join (not change) the system, but on fairer terms (debt relief, more market access)	Reform 'imperfect markets' and add 'sustainable development' to neoliberal framework	Slightly adjust economic <i>status quo</i> (transparency, supervision & regulation) and establish taxpayer bale-out mechanisms to improve stability	Restore US geopolitical hegemony and economic isolationism; punish banks' mistakes; and reverse globalisation of people
Key institutions	Non-reformist social/labour movements; environmental advocacy groups; radical activist networks; regional and national progressive coalitions; leftwing think-tanks; the World Social Forum	Self-selecting Third World governments: Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, Haiti, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and sometimes South Africa	Most United Nations agencies; International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (and AFL-CIO); many large aid-based NGOs (e.g. Oxfam); sometimes EU-member governments, Japan and sometimes South Africa	US agencies (Treasury, Federal Reserve, USAID), World Bank, IMF, WTO, World Economic Forum, Council on Foreign Relations, centrist Washington think-tanks, British government	Proto-fascist European political parties; populist & libertarian wings of Republican Party; think-tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation; aggressive imperialist sectors of US capital
Key proponents	Amin, Barlow, Bello, Bendana, Bove, Brutus, Callinicos, Chalmers, Chomsky, Danaher, Galeano, George, Kagarlitsky, Khor, Klein, Lula, Maathai, Marcos, Mittal, Monbiot, Nader, Ndungane, Negri, Ngwane, Njeh, Patkar, Pilger, Roy, Shiva	Aristide, Castro, Chavez, Gaddafi, Mahathir, Mbeki?, Mugabe, Obasanjo, Putin	Annan, Krugman, Mbeki?, Sachs, Schroeder?, Soros, Stiglitz, Sweeney	Blair, Brown, Bush?, Greenspan, Koehler, Moore, Schroeder?, Supachai, O'Neill, Wolfensohn	Buchanan, Bush?, Cheney, DeLay, Haider, Helms, le Pen, Lott

in Latin America (Bolivia and Ecuador), the activism reached a near-insurgent stage. In other sites (South Africa, Nigeria and India), many millions of workers became involved in mass strikes against neoliberalism in the months after Seattle. In yet other protests (South Korea, Argentina, Turkey), tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in waves of militancy between 2000-02 (<http://www.wdm.org.uk/cambriefs/DEBT/unrest.htm>).

In contrast to these mainly non-violent movements whose ambition is social justice, the most important reactionary Third World force that emerged at the same time was an ultra-fundamentalist, violent streak within Islam. Adherents included trained cadres associated with the Al-Qaeda network. Although there was absolutely nothing in common between the justice movements and Al-Qaeda's analysis, vision, objectives, strategies and tactics, there did emerge in the minds of some commentators a kind of 'competition' to make an impact — of a very different kind — on the global elite.

For example, James Harding, writing in the *Financial Times* (10 October 2001) under the provocative title 'Clamour against capitalism stilled,' anticipated that in the wake of the September 11 terrorist incidents, global justice movements would be 'derailed.' A spurious reason was 'the absence of both leadership and a cogent philosophy to inspire fellowship.' One counterpoint was obvious: hierarchical leadership is not necessarily a positive attribute for the kind of broad-based opposition to neoliberalism that is required, and that is bubbling up from all corners of Africa and the world.

British author George Monbiot described the global justice movements as beneficiaries of a reality check caused by the terrorist attacks:

Look, it's like the Peasants' Revolt. The peasants revolt, they meet the king, the

king promises them the earth and they all go home. Whereupon their leaders are hanged and nothing happens. If we follow that model, we're doomed, so you could say that 11 September, by putting a roadblock in the way of that model, did us a favour' (*The Observer*, 14 July 2002).

The favour was evident at the WSSD in Johannesburg, where the greatest potential risk to the movement was prevented: that of being co-opted into the UN process before the movement had come together strategically. In the event, there was an insufficient power-bloc of international NGOs to endorse the weak compromises on offer from Post-WashCon managers like Kofi Annan: e.g., working (fruitlessly) on agricultural subsidy and tariff barrier reductions, or forming 'Type 2' public-private partnerships with multinational corporations. While some opportunistic NGOs (such as Oxfam and Greenpeace, respectively) do pursue reformist-reformism along these lines, the Social Movements United argue that such compromises will strengthen rather than weaken the institutions and mechanisms of oppression. Instead, they are attempting to establish "non-reformist reforms". These include elements of a radical socio-economic programme that is feasible within the confines of global capitalist finance, technology and administration — but which will not be granted because it upsets capitalist/patriarchal/racial power relationships.

The core elements of that programme were on stark display in the WSSD host country, where charges of 'genocide' are made regularly by serious commentators against Mbeki's Aids policy; where land reform has been nonexistent; and where ten million out of 42 million South Africans have suffered water and electricity cutoffs due to inaffordability as basic services are increasingly privatised. As a result, the new social movements organise for the *decommodification* of these basic services,

and they are having moderate success with antiretroviral medicines, free lifeline supplies of water, the illegal reconnection of electricity, prevention of housing evictions, and occasional land invasions. A 'Basic Income Grant' for all residents and an end to education user-fees are also on the social/labour movement agenda. Without achieving socio-economic justice on these fronts, the search for peace, gender equity, human rights and political/civil freedoms will be impossible to achieve, as demonstrated by the last decade of zig-zags in Zimbabwe.

Mbeki typically reacts to these pressures from below by 'talking left' (while continuing to 'act right'). Perhaps most tellingly, he mooted the idea that the world's problem is 'global apartheid', and nearly got the phrase inserted into the final WSSD text before Northern governments rescinded it in fear of the causality thereby implied. Still, the central question now arising is whether Third World nationalists and Post-WashCon reformers will merely 'polish the chains' of global apartheid. The Global Justice Movements instead aim to break the chains, especially institutions like the WTO, World Bank, IMF and the most wicked multinational corporations.

A very heartening development just prior to the WSSD was the comment by Stiglitz that he now feels the IMF cannot be reformed, and a new institution must be started from scratch (*Financial Times*, 21 August 2002). However, that remark was probably an exception to a durable rule: the global elites will stick to their institutional power bases and try to fix, not nix these. Even Mbeki looks to the right for more substantive alliances, e.g., with Nordic countries and the G8 through his New Partnership for Africa's Development — a recipe for South African subimperialism — than he does attracting support on the left. The peaceful A31 march from impoverished Alexandra was initially banned because of the authorities'

fear of 'South Africa's Seattle', and other protests were violently disrupted by Mbeki's police.

Hence Mbeki's pitiable A31 rally told a larger story about the road from Johannesburg: it goes through Alexandra township and marches up to sites of wealth and power, with *no hesitation to criticise the UN, the South African government and any other reformer*. From A31 came this message: the time for talking-left, acting-right is over, and the Movements for Global Justice need not have any illusions in Post-WashCon or Third World Nationalists. They will have to take power in myriad other ways.

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Endnote

- 1 A purely illustrative (and by no means comprehensive) list of personalities would include Zackie Achmat (South Africa), Samir Amin (based in Senegal), Maude Barlow (Canada), Walden Bello (Thailand/Philippines), Alejandro Bendana (Nicaragua), Jose Bove (France), Dennis Brutus (France), Alex Callinicos (Britain), Camille Chalmers (Haiti), Noam Chomsky (US), Kevin Danaher (US), Eduardo Galeano (Uruguay), Susan George (France), Boris Kagarlitsky (Russia), Martin Khor (Malaysia), Naomi Klein (Canada), Lula Ignacio da Silva (Brazil), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Subcommandante Marcos (Mexico), Anuradah Mittal (US), George Monbiot (Britain), Ralph Nader (US), Antonio Negri (Italy), Archbishop Ngongonkulu Ndungane (South Africa), Trevor Ngwane (South Africa), Njoki Njehu (Kenya), Medha Patkar (India), John Pilger (Britain), Arundhati Roy (India) and Vandana Shiva (India).