

The World Social Forum arrives at Hyderabad

(Opposition to globalization)

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Globalisation, World Bank style, has followers world-wide among governments and the elite. But Globalisation has opponents world wide, too. Normally the opposition would have remained fragmented and unconnected, for the opposition forces do not have the wherewithal to come together. But over the last few years efforts are on to bring the opposition together at one place once in a while.

Such an effort would serve two purposes. One is that the powerful forces of Globalisation will be forced to see the spectacle of large numbers opposing their designs. The other is that diverse movements, organisations and people who oppose Globalisation for different reasons will come to one place and listen to each other. Normally they do not. When they talk at all, they talk over each other but never to each other.

There are leftist political groups of various shades of red who believe that Globalisation is only an intensification of capitalist exploitation, and that the fight against it is part of the struggle against capitalism. There are groups who confine their activity to opposing specific consequences of the neo-liberal economic policies and philosophy that Globalisation as a politico-economic tendency promotes world-wide. They include environment groups, artisan groups, housing rights groups, etc. Some of them may believe that a total global perspective on all aspects of capitalist exploitation is an unrealistic aim. Some may not want to take a 'political' sounding stand because they are financed by western funding agencies. And there may also be some who are not against capitalism or the market economy as such, but believe that in the form of neo-liberalism it lacks the minimal human concern that civilised existence demands. Now all of them should come to one place to express opposition to Globalisation and its principal international agents, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, without giving up the specifics of their point of view. Each can express their opposition in their own political idiom, but gather at one place to do so, so that the sheer volume of opposition to the dominant global economic policy idiom is made clear to all. And by the way they can talk to each other, and understand if not accept each other's view point.

The idea took birth at a place called Porto Allegro in Brazil, where opponents of Globalisation gather each year at the same time when the World Economic Forum of the big powers meets to decide how to divide up the world. It called itself the World Social Forum to make the point that social concern is missing from the economic policy prescriptions that the World Economic

Forum is imposing upon the Third World. It has rightly added 'discrimination' to Globalisation as the opposite pole against which it defines itself, for the marginalisation that neo-liberalism implies for the resource-less is accentuated by systematic discrimination on grounds of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, region and caste, in the Indian case.

The World Social Forum is protest against Globalisation going global. The idea being that the revolution in modern technology enables protest against its masters to go global too. It is an attractive idea, but there is only one source of unease. To go global requires funds, and globalisation of protest is liable to be dominated by those who have access to the requisite funds. In the good old days, when organisations had no more funds than what their members and sympathisers could contribute, this would have meant, more or less, that those organisations that have greater following and greater public support would dominate such an event. Of course, in those days any global protest of the weak and the vulnerable would have been unthinkable. As organisations became adept at raising money by means other than plain sympathy, a certain imbalance between degree of popular support and financial capability crept in, but it is only after the funded organisations entered the arena of people's movements that the imbalance has become pronounced. People's movements tend to be represented in international gatherings by those who have access to funds, who are not those who are truly representative of the ideas and aspirations of the masses. It is unlikely that the World Social Forum, an otherwise very attractive idea, will be able to totally overcome this imbalance. But it must make an effort to reduce it as much as possible.

The founder of the World Social Forum, Mr Chico Whitaker of Brazil, is in the city this Friday. He will be announcing that Hyderabad has been chosen as the venue of the Asian event of the World Social Forum, to be held next January. Delegates from all over Asia and of course all the Indian States will be here to hold seminars, workshops, public hearings, street theatre, book exhibitions and cultural programmes of various kinds to highlight the evil consequences of neo-liberalism, and to assert confidently that 'another world is possible'.

Let us hope it will make a qualitative difference to the protests that this State has repeatedly witnessed against World Bank imposed restructuring.

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