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The Anti-Globalization Movement and the World Social Forum. Is “Another World” Possible?

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Author's Introduction

This article was first published in 2013 focussing on the May 2013 Tunis World Social Forum.

This year the World Social Forum is being held in Montreal, regrouping committed social activists, anti-war collectives and prominent intellectuals.

Most of the participants are unaware that the WSF is funded by corporate foundations including Ford, Rockefeller, et al. Much of this funding is channelled to the WSF organizers under the helm

of the WSF International Council.

This is an issue I have raised on numerous occasions with progressive organizations and WSF activists: you cannot effectively confront neoliberalism and the New World Order elites and expect them to finance your activities. The corporations are funding dissent with a view to controlling dissent.

The Ford Foundation (which has links to the CIA) provided funding under its “Strengthening Global Civil Society” program during the first three years of the WSF.

When the WSF was held in Mumbai in 2004, the Indian WSF host committee declined support from the Ford Foundation. This in itself did not modify the WSF’s relationship to the donors. While the Ford foundation formally withdrew, other foundations positioned themselves.

More recently, the WSF has been funded by a consortium of corporate foundations under the advisory umbrella of Engaged Donors for Global Equity (EDGE).

This organization, which previously went under the name of The Funders Network on Trade and Globalization (FTNG), has played a central role in the funding of successive WSF venues. From the outset in 2001 it had an observer status on the WSF International Council.



A member of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund is on EDGE’s board of directors. A representative of the Ford Foundation sits on its Conference Program Committee, which defines funding orientations. The Wallace Global Fund which has a working relationship to EDGE, is specialized in providing support to “mainstream” NGOs and “alternative media”, including Amnesty International, Democracy Now (which supports Hillary Clinton’s candidacy for president of the US).

The following is the EDGE Communique. The donors not only fund the activities, they also determine the structure of the WSF venue. The decentralized and dispersed mosaic of do it yourself workshops.



We call upon participants of the Montreal WSF to raise these issues: the campaign against neoliberalism is financed by an alliance of

donors which includes corporate foundations firmly committed not only to neoliberalism but also to the US-NATO led military agenda. Why would they fund organizations which are actively campaigning against neoliberalism? The answer is obvious.

Michel Chossudovsky, August 9, 2016

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by Michel Chossudovsky

May 15, 20013

The World Social Forum operating under the banner of “Another World is Possible” was founded in 2001 at its inaugural venue of Porto Alegre. Brazil.

From the outset in 2001, the WSF has been upheld as an international umbrella representing grassroots people’s organizations, committed to reversing the tide of globalization. Its stated intent is to challenge corporate capitalism and its dominant neoliberal economic agenda.

The World Social Forum at its inaugural meeting defined itself as a counter-offensive to the World Economic Forum (WEF) of business leaders and politicians which meets annually in Davos, Switzerland. The 2001 Porto Alegre WSF was held simultaneously with that of the WEF in Davos.

Yet upon careful review, the WSF –rather than effectively confronting the economic and financial elites– actually serves their interests.

From the outset in 2001, the World Social Forum was funded by governments and corporate foundations, including the Ford Foundation which has ties to US intelligence.

The anti-globalization movement is opposed to Wall Street and the Texas oil giants controlled by Rockefeller, et al. Yet the foundations and charities of Ford, Rockefeller et al will generously fund progressive anti-capitalist networks as well as environmentalists (opposed to Wall Street and Big Oil) with a view to ultimately overseeing and shaping their various activities.

The mechanisms of “manufacturing dissent” require a manipulative environment, a process of arm-twisting and subtle co-optation of a small number of key individuals within “progressive organizations”, including anti-war coalitions, environmentalists and the anti-globalization movement. Many leaders of these organizations have in a sense betrayed their grassroots.

The Tunis 2013 World Social Forum

The World Social Forum gathered this year [2013] in Tunis. The March 26-30, 2013 venue included more than 50,000 participants from NGOs and people’s organizations from around the World. More than 4000 organizations from 127 countries were represented.

Members of the WSF International Council meets Tunisia’s interim Prime Minister Ali Larayedh



The International Council of the World Social Forum meets in downtown Tunis. (WNV/Marisa Holmes)

Many important issues were debated and discussed in separate workshops. The structure of the program –which included more than 1000 separate sessions– was that of a mosaic of different and separate initiatives. <http://www.fsm2013.org/programme/27/1>

impacts of austerity measures in the EU, environment, social justice, women’s rights, global warming, sustainable development, Palestine, the Arab Spring, among other themes

While the thrust invariably consisted in a critique of global capitalism and imperialism, the issue of US-led militarization was not addressed in a meaningful way. An aura of divisiveness prevailed, which was in part the result of the way the program was organized in a multitude of “do it yourself” workshops.

There was no united WSF position against US-NATO led wars, let alone Western intervention with a view to destabilizing sovereign countries. In fact quite the opposite: a session was held on how to overthrow the Syrian government, involving the participation of so-called Leftists:

...[W]hile four Syrian communist and two Kurd organizations discussed future action against the regime, supporters of al-Assad held a rally in the central square. The two groups did not cross paths, so no confrontation took place, but the tension was palpable.

Participants in the debate held by the Syrian communists and Kurds told IPS that they had agreed on a document recognizing

the importance of the individual and collective rights of all ethnic groups in Syria, which is especially significant for the Kurds, the largest minority.

They also agreed to hold a day of solidarity with the Syrian uprising, in the first week of May. ([See Common Dreams](#), March 30, 2013)

How US-NATO with the support of Israel, Qatar and Saudi Arabia was waging an undeclared war on Syria was not the object of a cohesive debate. Nor was the issue of Al Qaeda mercenaries funded covertly by Washington and Brussels.

While the "Arab Spring" was put forth as a revolutionary landmark, the US-NATO sponsored armed insurrections in Libya (2011) and Syria (2011-2013) were considered to be part of the "Arab Spring":

"Now, we are at a crossroads where retrograde and conservative forces want to stop the processes initiated two years ago with the [Arab Spring] uprisings in the Maghreb-Mashreq region that helped to bring down dictatorships and to challenge the neoliberal system imposed on the peoples. These uprisings have spread to all continents of the world inspiring indignation and occupation of public places. (Declaration of the Social Movements Assembly, see full text below)

The uprisings in the "Mashreq" and "Maghreb" referred to in the Final Declaration essentially pertain to Syria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The text of declaration is vague. It does not take a position with regard to US-NATO intervention in Libya and Syria.

What the WSF document intimates (by default) is that the US sponsored "Syrian opposition" is "also" a genuine grassroots pro-democracy movement, comparable to that of Egypt. Similarly the Al Qaeda affiliated Libya Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) which led the "Arab Spring" against the government of Muammar Gaddafi is also considered to be a revolutionary force. It should be noted that Libya under Gaddafi was the only country in Africa which rejected the neoliberal economic agenda implemented under the helm of the IMF.

Several workshops on Libya tacitly applauded Western military intervention. A session entitled "Libya's transition to democracy" focused on "whether [Libya was better off without Muammar Gaddafi](#)." Several "progressive" NGOs and "alternative media" which had supported NATO's humanitarian bombings against Libya were present in Tunis. No statement as to the criminal nature of NATO's humanitarian bombing campaign against Libya was made by the WSF.

The Libyan NGOs in attendance were funded by their government and by Western foundations, with the approval of the Libyan Ministry of Culture and Civil Society established in 2011 in the wake of the NATO led military intervention.

Sessions were also held on ["political Islam" as part of an anti-imperialist front](#) without addressing the broader issue as to how "Political Islam" was used in the course of The Arab Spring to further the goals of the Imperialist powers. The result was the installation of Islamic governments in Egypt and Tunisia and the reinforcement rather than the repeal of the neoliberal economic policy agenda.

The legitimacy of the US "Global War on Terrorism" is not an object of debate under the auspices of the WSF. Nor is the fact that Washington covertly supported key leaders of the Arab Spring movement, as well as several civil society organizations. The April 6 Movement in Egypt had the support of the US embassy, Kefaya (Enough) was funded by US foundations. Both of these organizations were present at the WSF sessions in Tunis.

Aminata Traoré, the former minister of Culture of the deposed government of Mali, speaking at the World Social Forum in Tunis underscored how military intervention was used to enforce neoliberal economic policy.

Traore stated that: "The war that was imposed today in Mali is not a war of liberation of the Malian people, but a war of plunder of resources." While addressing the WSF, she deplored that many WSF activists were supportive of France's intervention.

Generally speaking, an understanding of imperialist wars in support of a neoliberal agenda has over the years not been a central component of the WSF debate. Moreover, many of the participant NGOs are in fact supportive of NATO's "Responsibility to Protect" Mandate.

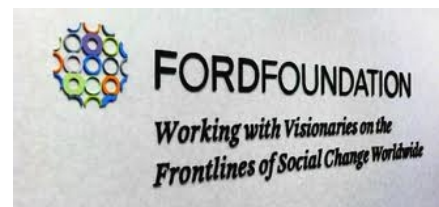
The Funding of the World Social Forum

The WSF is funded by governments and foundations. The Ford Foundation under its "Strengthening Global Civil Society" program provided funding during the first three years of the WSF.

When the WSF was held in Mumbai in 2004, the Indian WSF host committee declined support from the Ford Foundation. This in itself did not modify the WSF's relationship to the donors. While the Ford foundation formally withdrew, other foundations positioned themselves.

In addition to government support, the WSF has been funded by a consortium of corporate foundations under the advisory umbrella of Engaged Donors for Global Equity (EDGE). This organization, which previously went under the name of The Funders Network on Trade and Globalization (FTNG), has played a central role in the funding of successive WSF venues. From the outset in 2001 it has an observer status on the WSF International Council.

While channeling financial support to the WSF, it acts as a clearing house for major foundations. EDGE describes itself as "a unique and diverse community of donors, foundation officers and advisors across the international philanthropic landscape ... with shared



commitment to global social change.”

Shortly before the WSF venue in Tunis, EDGE Funders –together with the *Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme* (FPH)– convened in Paris a consortium of some two dozen WSF grantmakers. EDGE is also facilitating the presence of these grantmakers at the Tunis venue. (See <http://www.edgefunders.org/events/>)



In one of its key documents, entitled [A Funders Network Alliance In Support of Grassroots Organizing and Movement-Building](#), EDGE acknowledges its support of social movements which challenge “neoliberal market fundamentalism.” including the World Social Forum, established in 2001:

“From the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas (1994) to the Battle in Seattle (1999) to the creation of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (2001), the TINA years of Reagan and Thatcher (There Is No Alternative) have been replaced with the growing conviction that “another world is possible.” Counter-summits, global campaigns and social forums have been crucial spaces to articulate local struggles, share experiences and analyses, develop expertise, and build concrete forms of international solidarity among progressive movements for social, economic and ecological justice.”

But at the same time, there is an obvious contradiction: the campaign against neoliberalism is financed by an alliance of donors which includes corporate foundations, firmly committed to the free-market and neoliberal economic policy under the helm of the IMF.

A member of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund is on EDGE’s board of directors. A representative of the Ford Foundation sits on its Conference Program Committee, which defines funding orientations. The Wallace Global Fund which has a working relationship to EDGE, is specialized in providing support to “mainstream” NGOs and “alternative media”, including Amnesty International, Democracy Now.



The Rockefeller Brothers representative –who co-chairs EDGE’s program committee– is Tom Kruse. At the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Kruse is responsible for “Global Governance” under the “Democratic Practice” program. Prior to joining the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Kruse served as an adviser to the Bolivian government of Evo Morales on trade and investment policy, debt relief and macroeconomic reform. Rockefeller Brothers grants to NGOs are approved under the “Strengthening Democracy in Global Governance” program, which is broadly similar to that put forth by the US State Department.

From the standpoint of corporate donors including the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, “investing in the WSF” constitutes a profitable undertaking. It ensures that activism remains within the confines of constructive dialogue and critique rather than confrontation. Any deviation immediately results in the curtailment of donor funding:

“Everything the [Ford] Foundation did could be regarded as “making the World safe for capitalism”, reducing social tensions by helping to comfort the afflicted, provide safety valves for the angry, and improve the functioning of government (McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson (1961-1966), President of the Ford Foundation, (1966-1979))

The limits of social dissent are thereby determined by the “governance structure” of the WSF, which was tacitly agreed upon with the funding agencies at the outset in 2001.

“No Leaders”

The WSF has no leaders. All the events are “self-organized”. The structure of debate and activism is part of an “open space” (See y Francine Mestrum, *The World Social Forum and its governance: a multi-headed monster*, CADTM, 27 April 2013, <http://cadtm.org/The-World-Social-Forum-and-its>).

This compartmentalized structure is an obstacle to the development of a meaningful and articulate mass movement. It indelibly serves the interests of those who fund the WSF including the tax free foundations and the governments.

How best to control grassroots dissent against global capitalism?

Make sure that their leaders can be easily co-opted and that the rank and file will not develop “forms of international solidarity among progressive movements” (to use EDGE’s own words), which in any meaningful way might undermine the interests of corporate capital.

The mosaic of separate workshops, the relative absence of plenary sessions, the creation of divisions within and between social movements, not to mention the absence of a cohesive platform against US-NATO humanitarian interventions, in Syria, Libya and Mali: all of these are part of a strategy to “manufacture dissent”

“The limits of dissent” are established by the foundations and governments which ultimately finance this multimillion dollar venue. The financing is twofold:

1. Core financing of the WSF Secretariat and the Costs of the WSF venue.
2. Many of the constituent NGOs which participate in the venue are recipients of donor and/or government support.

What ultimately prevails is a ritual of dissent which does not threaten the New World Order. Those who attend the WSF from the grassroots are often misled by their leaders. Activists who do not share the WSF consensus will ultimately be excluded:

*“By providing the funding and the policy framework to many concerned and dedicated people working within the non-profit sector, the ruling class is able to co-opt leadership from grassroots communities, ... and is able to make the funding, accounting, and evaluation components of the work so time consuming and onerous that social justice work is virtually impossible under these conditions” (Paul Kivel, *You Call this Democracy, Who Benefits, Who Pays and Who Really Decides*, 2004, p. 122)*

“Another World is Possible” is nonetheless an important concept, which characterizes the struggle of the peoples movements against

global capitalism as well as the commitment of thousands of activists who participated in the WSF.

It cannot, however, be achieved under the auspices of the WSF which from the outset was funded by global capitalism and organized in close liaison with its corporate and government donors.

The important question for activists:

Is it possible to build "an Alternative" to global capitalism, which challenges the hegemony of the Rockefellers et al and then ask the Rockefellers et al to foot the bill?

Appendix

Declaration of the Social Movements Assembly – World Social Forum 2013, 29 March 2013, Tunisia

As the Social Movements Assembly of the World Social Forum of Tunisia, 2013, we are gathered here to affirm the fundamental contribution of peoples of Maghreb-Mashrek (from North Africa to the Middle East), in the construction of human civilization. We affirm that decolonization for oppressed peoples remains for us, the social movements of the world, a challenge of the greatest importance.

Through the WSF process, the Social Movements Assembly is the place where we come together through our diversity, in order to forge common struggles and a collective agenda to fight against capitalism, patriarchy, racism and all forms of discrimination and oppression. We have built a common history of work which led to some progress, particularly in Latin America, where we have been able to intervene in neoliberal alliances and to create several alternatives for just development that truly honors nature.

Together, the peoples of all the continents are fighting to oppose the domination of capital, hidden behind illusory promises of economic progress and the illusion of political stability. Now, we are at a crossroads where retrograde and conservative forces want to stop the processes initiated two years ago with the uprisings in the Maghreb-Mashrek region that helped to bring down dictatorships and to challenge the neoliberal system imposed on the peoples. These uprisings have spread to all continents of the world inspiring indignation and occupation of public places.

People all over the world are suffering the effects of the aggravation of a profound crisis of capitalism, in which its agents (banks, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, international institutions, and governments complicit with neoliberalism) aim at increasing their profits by applying interventionist and neocolonial policies.

War, military occupations, free-trade neoliberal treaties and "austerity measures" are expressed in economic packages that privatize the common good, and public services, cut wages and rights, increase unemployment, overload women's care work and destroys nature. Such policies strike the richer countries of the North harder and are increasing migration, forced displacement, evictions, debt, and social inequalities such as in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and the Spanish State.

They re-enforce conservatism and the control over women's bodies and lives. In addition, they seek to impose "green economy" as a solution to the environmental and food crisis, which not only exacerbates the problem, but leads to commodification, privatization and financialization of life and nature.

We denounce the intensification of repression to people's rebellions, the assassination of the leadership of social movements, the criminalization of our struggles and our proposals.

We assert that people must not continue to pay for this systemic crisis and that there is no solution inside the capitalist system! Here, in Tunes, we reaffirm our commitment to come together to forge a common strategy to guide our struggles against capitalism. This is why we, social movements, struggle:

*Against transnational corporations and the financial system (IMF, WB and WTO), who are the main agents of the capitalist system, privatizing life, public services and common goods such as water, air, land, seeds and mineral resources, promoting wars and violations of human rights. Transnational corporations reproduce extractionist practices endangering life and nature, grabbing our lands and developing genetically modified seeds and food, taking away the peoples' right to food and destroying biodiversity.

We fight for the cancellation of illegitimate and odious debt which today is a global instrument of domination, repression and economic and financial strangulation of people. We reject free trade agreements that are imposed by States and transnational corporations and we affirm that it is possible to build another kind of globalization, made from and by the people, based on solidarity and on freedom of movement for all the human beings.

[We struggle] for climate justice and food sovereignty, because we know that global climate change is a product of the capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption. Transnational corporations, international financial institutions and governments serving them do not want to reduce greenhouse gases. We denounce "green economy" and refuse false solutions to the climate crisis such as biofuels, genetically modified organisms and mechanisms of the carbon

market like REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), which ensnare impoverished peoples with false promises of progress while privatizing and commodifying the forests and territories where these peoples have been living for thousands of years.

We defend the food sovereignty and support sustainable peasant agriculture which is the true solution to the food and climate crises and includes access to land for all who work on it. Because of this, we call for a mass mobilisation to stop the landgrab and support local peasants struggles.

[We struggle] Against violence against women, often conducted in militarily occupied territories, but also violence affecting women who are criminalized for taking part in social struggles. We fight against domestic and sexual violence perpetrated on women because they are considered objects or goods, because the sovereignty of their bodies and minds is not acknowledged. We fight against the traffic of women, girls and boys.

We defend sexual diversity, the right to gender self-determination and we oppose all homophobia and sexist violence.

[We fight] For peace and against war, colonialism, occupations and the militarization of our lands.

We denounce the false discourse of human rights defense and fight against fundamentalism, that often justify these military occupations such as in Haiti, Libya, Mali and Syria. We defend the right to people's sovereignty and self-determination such as in Palestine, Western Sahara and Kurdistan.

We denounce the installation of foreign military bases to instigate conflicts, to control and ransack natural resources, and to foster dictatorships in several countries.

We struggle for the freedom of organization in trade unions, social movements, associations and other forms of peaceful resistance. Let's strengthen our tools of solidarity among peoples such as boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against Israel and the struggle against NATO and to ban all nuclear weapons.

*[We struggle] For democratization of mass media and building alternative media, that are fundamental to overthrow the capitalist logics.

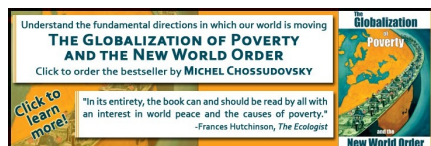
Inspired by the history of our struggles and by the strength of people on the streets, the Social Movements Assembly call upon all people to mobilize and develop actions – coordinated at world level – in a global Day of mobilization on the XXXX (day to decide)

Social movements of the world, let us advance towards a global unity to shatter the capitalist system!

No more exploitation, no more patriarchy, racism and colonialism! Viva la revolution! Long live the people's struggle.

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