

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND WORLD-SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

edited by

**Jackie Smith, Michael Goodhart,
Patrick Manning and John Markoff**



**POLITICAL ECONOMY
OF THE WORLD-SYSTEM ANNUALS**

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At a particularly urgent world-historical moment, this volume brings together some of the leading researchers of social movements and global social change, and other emerging scholars and practitioners, to advance new thinking about social movements and global transformation. Social movements around the world today are responding to crisis by defying both political and epistemological borders, offering alternatives to the global capitalist order that are imperceptible through the modernist lens. Informed by a world-historical perspective, contributors explain today's struggles as building upon the experiences of the past while also coming together globally in ways that are inspiring innovation and consolidating new thinking about what a fundamentally different, more equitable, just, and sustainable world order might look like.

This collection offers new insights into contemporary movements for global justice, challenging readers to appreciate how modernist thinking both colors our own observations and complicates the work of activists seeking to resolve inequities and contradictions that are deeply embedded in Western cultural traditions and institutions. Contributors consider today's movements in the *longue durée* – that is, they ask how Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and other contemporary struggles for liberation reflect, build upon, or diverge from anti-colonial and other emancipatory struggles of the past. Critical to this volume is its exploration of how divisions over gender equity and diversity of national cultures and class have impacted what are increasingly intersectional global movements.

The contributions of feminist and indigenous movements come to the fore in this collective exploration of what the movements of yesterday and today can contribute to our ongoing effort to understand the dynamics of global transformation in order to help advance a more equitable, just, and ecologically sustainable world.

Jackie Smith is Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh.

Michael Goodhart is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

Patrick Manning is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of World History at the University of Pittsburgh.

John Markoff is Distinguished University Professor of Sociology and History at the University of Pittsburgh.

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*Edited by Jackie Smith, Michael Goodhart,
Patrick Manning and John Markoff*

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INTRODUCTION

Unthinking the world-system

Michael Goodhart, Patrick Manning, John Markoff and Jackie Smith

Today's political realities present us with particularly urgent social and ecological crises, along with promising opportunities for people to converge around alternative projects that promise to resolve intractable global problems. The contributors to this volume represent some of the leading voices in social movement scholarship and global social change, as well as several emerging scholars and practitioners engaged in work to uncover the lessons of past movements that can inform and guide today's struggles for a more just and ecologically sustainable world. Contributors encourage each other and our readers to "unthink" some basic assumptions and conceptual frameworks that inhibit our full understanding of both the social movements challenging globalized capitalism and the promise of the alternatives these movements are offering to the current organization of the world-system.

A predominant theme in the conversations among our authors has been the need to question some of the key concepts, methods, and assumptions that inform the study of social movements and of the world-system. Participants adopted the language of *unthinking* the world-system to highlight the depth of the questioning we had in mind, to draw a contrast with familiar calls for *rethinking* that often leave fundamental epistemological issues untouched. Put differently, the challenge consists not merely in reassessing what we know but also in interrogating the *ways of knowing* upon which our "knowledge" rests. So, for instance, we need not only to make visible and to theorize the various manifestations of imperialism and oppression within the world-system, but to recover and think with and through indigenous and other subaltern knowledges as a way of unthinking what we "know" about social movements and about the world-system itself.

As scholars of and participants in social movement politics, we discussed extensively the importance of approaching our work with humility. By humility we have in mind an ethical sensibility to power relations, which operate in and

through our movements and our disciplines and which are often (unconsciously) replicated in the knowledge that we construct about the world. Yet we also have in mind a related epistemological humility that cultivates openness and attention to the wide variety of struggle and resistance in which people are engaged and to what it can teach us about possibilities for human emancipation. Humility of this kind represents a practice of unthinking; it is something to be enacted continuously in our research, our theorizing, our teaching, and our engagement. Once one begins trying to unthink in this way, huge, destabilizing questions immediately present themselves.

These questions structure the book before you. This volume seeks to challenge conventional ways of thinking about social movements and social change and to identify areas of practice and theory that can guide thinking and action at a time of urgent and pervasive questions about the stability and future of the present world-system and about viable alternatives to it and the pathways toward their realization. The chapters draw from world-systems analysis, social movement studies, and subaltern knowledges and theorizing to examine contemporary as well as historical social movements, as well as to address questions about what prospects and obstacles exist for those who wish to advance a more just, equitable, and ecologically healthy and sustainable world.

We begin with a realization that large-scale social change is likely to require a fundamental transformation of the modern world-system. In other words, in order to address the pressing and dire social and ecological crises confronting us, humans will need to reorient ourselves and the world-system away from the dominant capitalist mode of accumulation and exploitation and towards values that will ensure the long-term survival of people and the planet. We also recognize, however, the difficulty of conceiving of a new world-system when the existing system and its logic color our concepts, methods, and assumptions and condition our daily practices.

One such question has to do with the transformation in which we are interested – again, both as scholars and as participants in social movement politics. Is it the political revolution so ingrained in the imaginary of left/progressive movements since the French Revolution (or even before)? Or is that notion so shot through with modernist and Eurocentric assumptions about the state, the world-system, and the nature of domination as to be inadequate for theorizing and making a truly emancipatory politics today? Perhaps another kind of transformation is possible. In what might it consist, and how should we assess its emancipatory potential? Must emancipatory movements be antisystemic? What other modalities of resistance – in the everyday, in the spiritual – are possible? Can such modalities effectuate large-scale change? What is the appropriate geographic scale of action? Can we think of emancipation separately on local, national, regional, and global scales, or does emancipation necessarily take place at all levels simultaneously? Some project participants wanted to take seriously the operation of non-system logics on smaller scales as a pathway to emancipation, whereas others

felt that emancipation worthy of the name entails comprehensive transformation of the world-system.

Other key questions concern the role of traditional ideologies and social movement actors in making meaningful change. Do conventional left/progressive ideas and social formations remain the privileged vehicles of system transformation and the appropriate objects of emancipatory aspirations? Can they adequately acknowledge and incorporate the nomadic sensibilities of many contemporary actors in the global justice movement or the theories and practices of struggle and resistance of subaltern and indigenous communities and movements? What are the possibilities for collaboration and solidarity across traditional and alternative social movement formations, keeping in mind that both remain internally diverse and conflictual?

An important set of related concerns has to do with the difficulty that traditional social movements and social movement scholarship have had in integrating their others. Why do clear geographies of power remain such a prominent feature of the social movement landscape? Why has it proven so hard even for progressive movements explicitly committed to ideals of equality and inclusion to recognize and root out domination in their own ideas and structures? One possibility suggested by the contributors to this volume is that any adequate unthinking of the system must include unthinking core modernist and Eurocentric assumptions about the uniformity of antisystemic struggle and resistance, about the linearity of political time, and about the singularity of emancipatory visions and ambitions. Such an unthinking requires recognizing and grappling with the seeming incommensurability of different knowledges about and orientations toward the transformation of the world-system. As scholars of and participants in social movements, can we expand our epistemological horizons to embrace radically different notions about the nature, scale, and terms of emancipatory change? In so doing, can we unthink the world-system in ways that allow for its creative reconfiguration?

The attempt is clearly necessary. Capitalism in its neoliberal instantiation remains dynamic and firmly entrenched. Its own modernist logic drives us inexorably toward social inequality and ecological disaster, complacent in the surety that science and profit invisibly coordinate to promote human freedom and to provide technological solutions to what it can only conceive as technical problems.

The reflections in this volume take seriously the possibility that this same logic inhibits our ability to think outside the familiar narrative that left/progressive movements, spurred by their awareness of systemic crisis, will organize successfully to seize political power and transform the world-system. We recognize that developing new paradigms for theorizing social movements and system transformation requires that we look to the experiences of oppressed and subaltern groups to guide our critiques and our reimaginings of the global. We wrestle with the recognition of what Sylvia Walby, in her address to our convening of this volume's authors and other scholars, called "non-nested hegemonies" and the

challenges they pose to linear, uniform, and singular thinking about emancipation. We engage, in short, in a collective exercise of *unthinking* in hopes of opening up new and hybrid possibilities for the theory and practice of emancipatory social transformation. At the same time, we must be mindful that unthinking is not an end in itself; in a world rife with injustice, in which the obstacles to social transformation are formidable, it can be easy to content ourselves with such radical-sounding exercises. *If* the point of understanding the world is (still) to change it, unthinking should clear the way for emancipatory change.

Part I of the book begins by interrogating conventional categories that help shape mainstream academic and public discourses about the world and the politics of social change. The chapters here help us to historicize the modern state and to reflect on the ways the capitalist world-system has shaped fundamental assumptions and identities. In Part II, contributors examine emancipatory struggles of the past and in the current moment to identify possible lessons from history that can inform today's movements. The authors demonstrate how states and their policies affect movement strategies and practices but also reveal limits to states' abilities to fully contain the conflicts expressed by social movements. Part III demonstrates the inevitable challenges faced by movements seeking greater equity and voice in a system that is fundamentally oriented towards inequality and exclusion. The cases show how, over time, movements have learned from their internal conflicts, even as those conflicts persist. Finally, the chapters in Part IV explore the emergence of movements and strategic analyses that suggest other pathways toward system transformation. Engaging with these subaltern emancipatory projects and discourses provides insight into possible alternatives to the modern world-system, while raising profound questions about how we conceive of emancipatory social transformation, suggesting new avenues of research that might prove fruitful in this regard.

This volume began its formation at the 38th annual conference of the Political Economy of the World-System Section of the American Sociological Association, held April 10–12, 2014 at the University of Pittsburgh. The book derives its title from the conference theme, *Social Movements and World-System Transformation: Prospects and Challenges*. We want to thank Jules Lobel for working with us to organize the conference, and we are grateful to the following entities at the University of Pittsburgh that helped make this meeting possible: the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences; Department of History; Department of Political Science; Department of Sociology; School of Law; World History Center; Humanities Center; University Center for International Studies; Hewlett International Grants Program; Center for Latin American Studies; European Union Center of Excellence; the European Studies Center (EUCE/ESC); and the Global Studies Center. Thank you as well to the Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka (<http://vankamurals.org/society/>), which helped give conference participants a richer experience of the city of Pittsburgh and of its residents' long-enduring struggles for justice.

ANTISYSTEMIC MOVEMENTS, YESTERDAY AND TODAY¹

Immanuel Wallerstein

There have always been historical systems in which some relatively small group exploited the others. The exploited always fought back as best they could. The modern world-system, which came into existence in the long sixteenth century in the form of a capitalist world-economy, has been extremely effective in extracting surplus-value from the large majority of the populations within it. It did this by adding to the standard systemic features of hierarchy and exploitation the new characteristic of polarization. ...

The French Revolution further changed the structure of the modern world-system by unleashing two new concepts, whose impact was to transform the modern world-system. These concepts were the “normality of change” as opposed to its exceptional and limited reality, and the “sovereignty of the people” as opposed to that of the ruler or the aristocracy. ... It was in response to this danger to the dominant forces that the three modern ideologies – conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism – emerged.

Each of the ideologies represented a program of political action. Conservatism was the first and most immediate response, notably in the writings of Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre. The core of the conservative ideology was to deny the prudence, even the possibility, of substantial change. Conservatives reasserted the priority of the judgments of traditional elites, locally situated, and supported by religious institutions.

Liberalism arose as an alternative mode of containing the danger. Liberals argued that reactionary conservatism, which inevitably involved suppressive force, was self-defeating in the medium run, pushing the oppressed to rebel openly. Instead, liberals said, elites should embrace the inevitability of some change and defer nominally to the sovereignty of the people, but insist that social transformation was a complicated and dangerous process that could only be done well and

prudently by specialists whom all others should allow to make the crucial decisions. Liberals thus envisaged a slow, and limited, process of societal transformation.

Radicalism was the last ideology to emerge. It began as a small annex to liberalism. Radicals argued that relying on specialists would lead to no more than a slightly revised social structure. Instead, they said, the lower strata should pursue transformation of the system as rapidly as possible, guided by a democratic ethos and an egalitarian ideal.

The world-revolution of 1848 marked a turning-point in the relations of the three ideologies – right-wing conservatism, centrist liberalism, and left-wing radicalism. It began with a social uprising in Paris in February, in which the radical left seemed momentarily to seize state power. This uprising was unexpected by most persons – a happy surprise for the working classes, a serious danger from the point of view of the elites. It so frightened both conservatives and liberals that they buried their voluble differences that had loomed so large up to then and formed a political alliance to suppress the social revolution. ...

This pair of happenings in 1848 – social revolution in France and nationalist revolutions in many countries – forced a reconsideration of basic strategy by the tenants of each of the three ideologies. The conservatives noticed that the one major country in which nothing seemed to happen in 1848 was Great Britain. That seemed very curious since throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, radical forces had seemed to be the most extensive, active, and well-organized in Great Britain. ...

What the conservatives then realized, and historians later confirmed, was that the British Tories had discovered a mode of containing radicalism far more effective than forceful suppression. The British Tories had been making constant concessions to the demands for social and institutional change. These concessions actually were relatively minor, but their repeated occurrence seemed to suffice to persuade the more radical forces that change was in fact taking place. After 1848, the British example persuaded conservatives elsewhere, especially in continental Europe, that perhaps they should revise their tactics. This revised analysis brought conservatives nearer to the position of the centrist liberals, and took the label of “enlightened conservatism.”

Meanwhile, the radicals were equally unsettled by what happened. The principal tactics radicals had employed up to 1848 had been either spontaneous uprisings or utopian withdrawal. In 1848 radicals observed that their spontaneous uprisings were easily put down. And their utopian withdrawals turned out to be unsustainable. The lesson they drew was the necessity of replacing spontaneity with “organizing” the revolution – a program that involved more temporal patience as well as the creation of a bureaucratic structure. This shift of tactics brought radicals closer to the position of the centrist liberals, the radical bureaucrats now assuming the role of the specialists who would guide transformation.

Finally, the liberals too drew a major lesson from the world-revolution of 1848. They began to emphasize their centrist position, as opposed to their

previously primary role of confronting conservatives. They began to see the necessity of tactics that would pull both conservatives and radicals into their orbit, turning them into mere variants of centrist liberalism. In this effort, they turned out to be hugely successful for a very long time – indeed until the much later world-revolution of 1968.

It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that we see the organizational emergence of what we consider to be antisystemic movements. There were two main varieties – social movements and nationalist movements – as well as less strong varieties such as women’s movements and ethno/racial/religious movements. These movements were all antisystemic in one simple sense: They were struggling against the established power structures in an effort to bring into existence a more democratic, more egalitarian historical system than the existing one.

These movements were, however, deeply divided in terms of their analysis of how to define the groups that were most oppressed, and what were the priorities of achieving the objectives of one kind of movement relative to other kinds of movements. These debates between the various movements have persisted right up to today.

One fundamental debate was how to think about the role of the states in the achievement of a different kind of historical system. There were those who argued that states were structures established by the elites of the system, mechanisms by which the elites controlled the others. States were therefore an enemy, to be shunned, and against which the movements must ceaselessly struggle. ...

Against this view were arrayed those who agreed that the state was the instrument of the ruling elites, and for this very reason could not be ignored. Unless the movements seized power in the states, the ruling classes would use their strength – military and police strength, economic strength, and cultural strength – to crush the antisystemic movements. This group insisted that, precisely in order to transform the historical system, movements had first to achieve control of the state. ...

The second argument was between the social movements and the nationalist movements. The former insisted that the modern world-system was a capitalist system and that therefore the basic struggle was a class struggle within each country between the owners of capital (the “bourgeoisie”) and those who had only their own labor power to sell (the “proletariat”). ...

The nationalist movements assessed the world differently. They saw a world in which states were controlled either by an internal dominant ethnic group or by external forces. They argued that the most oppressed persons were the “peoples” who were denied their democratic rights and consequently were living in an ever-increasingly inegalitarian historical system. It followed that the natural “historical actors” were the oppressed nations. Only when these oppressed nations came to power in their own state could there be expectations of a more democratic, more egalitarian historical system. ...

Both the social movements and the nationalist movements [also] insisted on the importance of “vertical” structures. That is, they both insisted that the road to

success in obtaining state power was to have only one antisystemic structure in any state (actual state for the social movements, virtual state for the nationalist movements). They said that unless all other kind of antisystemic movements subordinated themselves to the single “principal” movement, the objective could not be achieved.

For example, take the women’s or feminist movements. ... They argued that the struggle against what was termed “patriarchy” was at least as important as any other struggle and was their primary concern as movements. ...

The “vertical” movements insisted that there could be women’s auxiliaries of the social or of the nationalist movements, but that the realization of the feminist demands could only occur as a consequence of the realization of the demands of the “principal” historical actor (the proletariat or the oppressed nation). In effect, the vertical movements counseled deferral of the struggles of the feminist movements.

The same logic would be used against other kinds of movements – such as trade-union movements or movements of so-called “minorities” as socially defined (whether by race, ethnicity, religion, or language). ... They could only be adjuncts of the principal movements, or else they were considered to be counter-revolutionary.

When these various movements first came to be large enough to be politically noticeable (circa the 1870s), the most important reality about all of them was that they were perhaps noticeable but in fact organizationally and politically quite weak. The idea that they could actually achieve state power seemed a matter of faith, unsustained by a sober assessment of the real *rapport de forces* in the modern world-system.

... It is therefore somewhat astonishing that in the period 1945–1970 the vertical antisystemic movements actually did achieve the first of the two steps. They did indeed come to state power, almost everywhere. This sudden shift in the political arena of the modern world-system warrants a careful explanation.

The end of the Second World War marked the onset of two important cyclical shifts in the history of the modern world-system. ... The success of the anti-systemic movements cannot be understood without placing it in this context. ...

... Hegemony is built on the existence of an enormous economic advantage, combined with political, cultural, and military strength. As of 1945, the United States was able to assemble all this to its advantage. In 1945, the United States was the only important industrial power in the entire world that had escaped major destruction of its plants. Indeed, on the contrary, wartime production had made its productive enterprises more extensive and efficient than ever. At this time U.S. production was so efficient that it could sell its leading products in other countries at prices lower than these countries could produce these products themselves, despite the costs involved in transportation. These U.S.-based quasi-monopolies were guaranteed by the active role of the state in protecting and enhancing their exclusive privileges.

The result was the largest (by far) expansion of the world production of surplus-value in the 500-year-long history of the modern world-system. ...

The problem for the United States was that a hegemonic power cannot abstain from military commitment. It comes with the position. And in 1945 there was one other power that had a very strong military, the U.S.S.R., and unlike the United States it showed no signs of rushing to dismantle it. It was clear that, if the United States was to exercise hegemony, it had to make some deal with the Soviet Union.

They did make such a deal, and we have dubbed it “Yalta.” ... There were in fact three such tacit arrangements. The first was that there would be a division of the world in terms of zones of influence and control. The line would be drawn more or less where the two armies ended up in 1945. ... The deal was that neither side would try to change these frontiers by the use of military force.

The second part of the deal had to do with economic reconstruction ...

Finally, the third part of the deal was the so-called Cold War. ... The deal was that this was not to be taken seriously, or rather that the function of the mutual denunciations was meant in no way to countermand the first part of the deal – the de facto freezing of frontiers indefinitely. The actual objective of Cold War rhetoric was not to transform the other side but to maintain the loyalty of the satellites on each side.

Although the first part of the deal lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the second part until at least the 1970s, the cozy arrangement began to be eroded by several factors. ...

It is in this context that the world-revolution of 1968 took place. It was a world-revolution in the simple sense that it occurred over most of the world, in each of what were at the time considered three separate “worlds.” And it was a world-revolution in the remarkable repetitions of two main themes almost everywhere, of course garbed in different local languages.

The first main theme was the rejection of U.S. hegemony (“imperialism”) by the revolutionaries, with, however, an important twist. These revolutionaries equally condemned the “collusion” of the Soviet Union with U.S. imperialism, which was how they interpreted the tacit Yalta accords. ...

The second main theme was the denunciation of the Old Left (that is, Communist and Social-Democratic parties and the national liberation movements) on the grounds that these movements were not in reality antisystemic but were also collusive with the system.

They pointed to the historic two-step strategy and said that the Old Left movements had in fact achieved the first step – state power – but had not in any serious way changed the world. Economic inequalities were still enormous and growing, internally and internationally. The states were not more democratic, possibly even less so. And class distinctions had not disappeared, merely renamed, the bourgeoisie becoming the *nomenklatura*, or some equivalent term. The revolutionaries rejected therefore the Old Left movements as part of the problem, not part of the solution.

While it is true that the revolutionaries were not able to remain in a position of real political strength very long and were suppressed as movements, just like those

in 1848, their efforts did have one absolutely major consequence. The world-revolution of 1968 transformed the geoculture. The dominance of centrist liberalism over the two other ideologies came to an end. Centrist liberalism did not disappear; it was simply reduced to being once again only one of three. The radical left and the conservative right re-emerged as fully autonomous actors on the world scene. ...

In the ongoing life of historical systems, each cyclical downturn returns not to the previous low point but always to a point somewhat higher. Think of it as two steps upward, one step backward on percentage curves that move towards the asymptote of 100 percent. Over the long term, the secular trends must then reach a point where it is difficult to advance further. At this point the system has moved far from equilibrium. We can call this point the beginning of the structural crisis of the historical system.

The short explanation of why historical capitalism has reached its structural crisis is the steady increase over time of the three fundamental costs of production: personnel, inputs, and taxation. ...

The three costs are each complex, since each is composed of several different subcosts. Personnel costs have always been the one that is most transparent. And among these costs, that of unskilled labor has been the one most discussed. ...

The bottom line is that today personnel costs are extremely high compared with past costs, and constantly increasing.

The story is similar in the cost of inputs. Producers have tried to keep these costs low by externalizing three major types of expenditures: getting rid of toxic waste, renewing raw materials, and building infrastructure. They were able for some 500 years to deal with toxic waste simply by dumping it into public space. But the world has nearly run out of public space, which has led to a worldwide environmentalist movement pressure to clean up the toxicity. This could only be done by the states, which involved the need for higher taxes. It also led the states to seek to force producers to internalize the costs, which has cut into profitability. ...

Similarly, the renewal of raw materials was not a problem until the combination of 500 years of usage that was not renewed and an expanded world population led rather suddenly to worldwide acute shortages of energy, water, forestation, and basic foods (fish and meat). The shortages have led in turn to acute political struggles over distribution both within and between countries.

... Infrastructure is a[nother] crucial element in commercial outlets for production. However, here again producers historically have paid only very partially for their use of the infrastructure, foisting the costs on others, especially the states. Given the ever-rising costs of repairing and extending the infrastructure, the states have found themselves unable to bear the costs, which has led to a serious deterioration worldwide of necessary aids to transport and communications.

Finally, taxes have been steadily rising as well, despite what seems to be constant and enormous tax evasion. ...

Once we are into a structural crisis, the system becomes chaotic. That is, the curves begin to fluctuate wildly. The system can no longer function in its traditional manner. ... In terms of the role of the antisystemic movements, the turning-point occurred on January 1, 1994, when the neo-Zapatistas (the EZLN in its Spanish initials) rose up in Chiapas and proclaimed the autonomy of the indigenous peoples. Why, however, on January 1, 1994? Because it was the day on which the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) came into operation. By choosing that day, the EZLN was sending the following message to Mexico and the world. The dramatic renewal of the 500-year-old demand of the peoples of Chiapas for self-government was being aimed both at opposing imperialism throughout the world and at Mexico's government for its participation in NAFTA as well as for its oppression of the peoples of Chiapas.

The EZLN emphasized that they had no interest in seizing power in the Mexican state. Quite the contrary! They wished to withdraw from the state and both construct and reconstruct the local ways of life. The EZLN was quite realistic. They realized they were not strong enough militarily to wage a war. Therefore, when sympathetic forces within Mexico pushed for a truce between the Mexican government and the EZLN, they fully agreed. To be sure, the Mexican government has never lived up to the truce agreement, but it has been constrained in how far it could go because of the support the EZLN was able to muster.

This support was the result of the second major theme the EZLN pursued. It asserted its own support for all movements of every kind everywhere that were in pursuit of greater democracy and equality. And the EZLN convened so-called intergalactic encounters in Chiapas to which they invited the entire global left. The EZLN also refused sectarian exclusions in these meetings – the pattern of the Old Left. They preached instead inclusiveness and mutual tolerance among the movements of the global left.

The revival of the global left received its second strong reinforcement in 1999. ... There were two remarkable aspects to Seattle. First of all, there was a major protest movement surrounding the meeting, which was composed of three forces that had hitherto never joined forces: the labor movement (and specifically the AFL-CIO), environmentalists, and anarchists. In addition, the members of these groups who were present were largely U.S. persons, giving the lie to the argument that only in the Global South could one mobilize opposition to neoliberalism.

The second remarkable aspect is that the protests succeeded. ...

This then brings us to the third major development in the second wind of antisystemic movements – after Chiapas and Seattle came Porto Alegre and the World Social Forum (WSF) of 2001. The initial call for the 2001 meeting was a joint effort of a network of seven Brazilian organizations (many of left-Catholic inspiration but also the principal trade union) and the ATTAC movement in France. They chose the name of World Social Forum in opposition to the World

Economic Forum (WEF) that had been meeting at Davos for some 30 years and was a major locus of mutual discussion and planning of the world's elites. They decided to meet at the same time as the Davos meetings to emphasize the contrast, and they chose Porto Alegre as the site of the 2001 meeting to underline the political importance of the Global South.

The organizers made the crucial decision that the meeting was open to all those who were against imperialism and neoliberalism. They also made the more controversial decision of excluding political parties and insurrectionary movements. Finally, they decided not to have officers, elections, or resolutions. This was in order to frame a "horizontalist" approach to organizing the world's anti-systemic forces, as opposed to the "verticalist" and therefore exclusionary approach of the Old Left movements. To summarize all this, they chose as the motto of the meeting the now famous slogan, "Another world is possible."

... In the years that followed, the WSF met in different parts of the Global South and with an enormous increase of the number of participants. In this sense, it has been a continuing success.

However, as the first decade of the twenty-first century went by, the dilemmas of the WSF came to the fore. They can best be understood in the context of the evolution of the world-system itself. There were two major elements in this evolution. The first was the bubble crisis in the U.S. housing market in 2007–2008, which led commentators around the world to recognize the existence of some kind of "crisis" in the world-system. The second was the economic and geopolitical rise of the "emerging" economies – in particular but not only the so-called BRICS (or Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).

...

The antisystemic movements now face a number of serious dilemmas. ... Inside the WSF and in the larger global justice movement, there are those who shun in every way state power and those who insist that obtaining state power is an essential prerequisite. There are those who insist on the priority of the class struggle (1 percent vs. 99 percent) and those who insist on the priority of the nationalist struggle (South vs. North). And there are those who are verticalist, insisting on joint political action whether within the WSF or the wider global justice movement, and those who are horizontalist, insisting on not neglecting the truly forgotten groups, the lowest global strata.

...

The net result is a divided Global Left in the political struggle over the new systemic order it is trying to build by tilting the bifurcation in the direction of a relatively democratic, relatively egalitarian world-system (or world-systems). ...

One way to analyze the options for the Global Left is to put them in a time frame that distinguishes short-term priorities and middle-term priorities. All of us live in the short-term. We need to feed ourselves, house ourselves, sustain our health, and just survive. No movement can hope to attract support if it doesn't recognize this urgent need for everyone. It follows, in my view, that all

movements must do everything they can to alleviate immediate distress. I call this action to “minimize the pain.” This requires all sorts of short-term compromises, but it is essential. At the same time, one must be very clear that minimizing the pain in no way transforms the system. This was the classic social-democratic illusion. It merely minimizes the pain.

In the middle-run (that is, the next 20–40 years), the debate is fundamental and total. There is no compromise. One side or the other will win. I call this the battle between the spirit of Davos and the spirit of Porto Alegre. ...

We do not know who will win in this struggle. What we do know is that, in a chaotic world, every nano-action at every nano-moment on every nano-issue affects the outcome. That is why I continue to end discussion of these issues with the metaphor of the butterfly. We learned in the last half-century that every fluttering of a butterfly’s wings changes the world climate. In this transition to a new world order, we are all little butterflies and therefore the chances of tilting the bifurcation in our direction depends on us. The odds are fifty-fifty. It follows that our efforts as activists are not merely useful; they are the essential element in our struggle for a better world.

Note

- 1 Excerpts from a keynote address delivered at the 38th Annual Political Economy of the World-System conference, April 10, 2014, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and published in the *Journal of World-Systems Research* 20(2): 170–183. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2014.593>.

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PART I

Disrupting hegemonic discourses and modes of thought

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