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"Tem Verde no Forum"

Greens report from the World Social Forum in Belem

Saturday, 31 January 2009

Rising the tide

Waiving the banners

The Brazilian greens have hired a boat to stay at the nearest possible place to the WSF place. About a hundred people are sleeping in hammocks - don't ask me for the mosquitos...

For this Saturday morning, they have invited us to a boat tour. We were supposed to cross the river Guamá, one of the feeder rivers of the Amazonas in the delta area, in order to get to an area of "quilombolas ", communities of black ex-slaves who managed to escape. They are cultivating "açai", a fruit every Northern Brazilian has in his or her daily diet, but also starting with other products, on the basis of ecological agriculture. We were on tour or an hour and a half, when the ship was suddenly stuck on a sand back. No way, we would have to wait until 4 p.m., when the tide would be rising again, thus rising the boat. Only then, the excursion could go on.

However, pour planes are leaving for Europe in the afternoon. What to do? The Greens called the fire brigade, which came with three speedboats to evacuate the poor Europeans. That was the end of our excursion. What a pity!

Not only did we need to leave Belem before the last day - the Day of the Social Movements and Actions Plannings to be back in time for the Strasbourg plenary, we also missed the "quilombolas". Bit the WSF will go on, probably in Africa, in 2011.

Bye,bye from Belem

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See also
http://www.fsm2009amazonia.org.br/

Friday, 30 January 2009

The Night of the Prom's

Even Maristas support the idea. "Another World is possible"

The WSF is a place for discussion, not for political campaigns. This is why the International Council of the World Social Forum, composed of about 140 rotating member organisations (NGOs, trade unions, grass root organisations etc.) has decided to pull big events with prominent speakers out of the programme, as they tend to concentrate media and also participants attentions on them. Any organisation, however, is free to invite whoever they want to parallel events.

For last afternoon, the MST, the Brazilian Movement of Landless People, has invited four presidents to a meeting. They all came: Evo Morales from Bolivia, Rafael Correa from Ecuador, Hugo Chávez from Venezuela and Rafael Lugo from Paraguay. The Brazilian president Lula was explicitly NOT invited, as the MST is in sharp disagreement with the little advance of the land reform, and particularly with Lula's speeding up of agro industry, his agro fuel policy and his pro GMO stance. The atmosphere was casual, the presidents sang Silvio Rodríguez' songs and two of the presidents declared themselves to be feminists: Hugo Chávez and Rafael Correa. Believe it or not.

Lula's party, of course, would not tolerate its president being bashed. Therefore, the Foro of Sao Paulo organised an evening of the five in the hangar. From the afternoon on, crowds flowed to the theatre, thus proving that in the end, everybody loves to see a hero. Culture obliges. Occasionally, Hugo Chávez hold the shortest speech of his life, talking not more than 20 minutes, as Lula observed.

Today, Lula has invited to an informal Summit of the five presidents. This is another signal that the WEF star is sinking: instead of going to Davos, Lula has opted for staying in his home country for the anti-Davos. It's pre-election time.

Abraços

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Thursday, 29 January 2009

One, two, many Social Fora

Children's march against child labour

Have you ever heard of FAL or FALA? Well, these are the Forum of the Local Authorities and the Forum of the Amazonian Local Authorities. They always take place alongside the WSF, as well as a World Forum on Health, a World Forum on Education, a World Forum of Judges, and not to forget the World Parliamentary Forum. The latter one met yesterday and will meet together again. It is time to re-launch the International Network of Parliamentarians, which has a bit fallen to sleep, after a couple of elections that pulled off active RPI members or had them elected in different positions, like RPI co-founder Tarcísio Zimmermann who is now mayor of the Southern Brazilian city Novo Hamburgo.

Not surprisingly, the main subject of the forum is a new international financial and economic architecture, the climate change and peace policy. The question of migration is also on the agenda. Almost all Latin American presidents have severely criticized the EP vote on the returns directive in June 2008 (the Greens voted against !) , and so do MPs. But they also look into the situation in their home countries and the need to shape adequate policies for migrants. The new Ecuadorian Constitution, for instance, aims at constructing a Latin American and no longer national identity, giving the right to vote to all people living in that country for five years, no matter, what country is indicated in their passport.

It is a pity that the WPF takes place in the Hangar, an old remodelled airplane garage and now a quite

luxurious conference centre, far of the WSF sites, where hundreds of events are taking place simultaneously. Next time, WPF participants say, the WPF must be explicitly opened to WSF people, in order to ensure exchange and the development of strategies for common aims.
See you tomorrow

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Thursday, 28 January 2009

Energy or people ?

Speaking out against the dam

2300 events are not enough, it seems! In addition to the endless catalogue of workshop offers comprised in the official WS programme, there are still spontaneous meetings going on. When we arrive at the UFPA, the lawn passage between two seminar buildings is blocked by around fifty people sitting on the ground and listening to indigenous speakers accusing the Xingú dam project to displace communities without offering adequate new space and destroy the environment. For two times, bishop Luiz Cappio has gone on hunger strike to protest against president Lula's energy policy in the context of the PAC (the Accelerating Growth Pact), his key project since he got in office for a second term. The first time, the bishop was successful. Fearful of loosing votes, Lula gave in in 2005 and stopped the dam construction. Last year, Luiz Cappio had to give up the hunger strike for severe health problems without reaching dialogue with the Lula government. Even worse, Lula decided to withdraw the dam project from public construction authorities and left it in the hands of the military. Why this? The army does not need any environmental licences, as it is supposed to construct for humanitarian urgency reasons! In April, Luiz Cappio will travel to Europe to continue his anti-dam campaign and get a human rights award. Let' see if we can invite him to Brussels for a solidarity event.

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Wednesday, 28 January 2009

Wednesday is Amazonia day !

The quickest way from the UFPA to the UFRA, from one WSF site to the other

It is almost a normal breakfast: everybody hides behind a newspaper. But this time, we are not thumbing through a normal daily: we are all reading the WSF programme, as big as a weekend edition of a larger European newspaper. The WSF meetings start today on two sites the UFRA (the Rural University of the Amazonian State of Pará) and the UFPA (the Federal University of Pará). Each of them is a nice green campus, a paradise for students. But they are huge. You have to take a bus or a boat to get from one to the

other.

This is why we have serious doubts about the place. People will stray over the campus and the meetings rooms will be empty. Wrong ! The local government has trained 2000 students to help participants find their way in the jungle of building. In the UFPA it is impossible to enter the seminar room of the Heinrich Boell event on REDD (Reducing Emissions from Degradation and Deforestation). So many mostly young people are sitting on the ground that the door does not open any more. Don't tell the building security!

The UFRA events are different. The organisers have set up tents or spaces, like the one on collective rights of peoples and nations without states, more easy to get in and out.

Ten tents or more are spread over the WSF, gathering thousands of people

The UFRA is also the space of the youth camp, which is growing and growing since the last weekend. Who said that the XXI century youth is apolitical? Far from this, those kids who were ten year old boys and girls when the WSF was created in January 2001, are now here to take a bath of political awareness rising. Most of them will not leave the UFRA until next week, alternating between political discussions and concert night life. Those who do leave the campus, will find stages distributed all over the town. This the city and state government offer the local population a cultural entry into the WSF world for free. See you tomorrow

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Tuesday, 27 January 2009

Dancing in the rain

Green Impressions from the inauguration rally of the World Social Forum in the Amazonian city of Belem

The heavily pouring rain is not a reason for leaving the demonstration....

What a spectacular start! At three in the afternoon, a most colourful crowd of people left the docks of Belem for the inauguration rally of the eighth World Social Forum (WSF). Far more than a hundred thousand are in the streets, some media immediately reported. Twenty minutes later the sky opened its locks. For half an hour, heavy tropical rain transformed the rally into an enormous shower room, before tropical sunshine came back to dry up the soaking clothes. And still everybody was dancing with the drums from the "blocos", the Brazilian carnival drummer groups, which encouraged the dripping wet rally participants with their irresistible rhythms all along the way to the final stage, where dozens of indigenous communities climbed up to show their dances and songs. In short, the eighth WSF will, once again, have its very particular shape.

Needless to say that the green delegation from Europe, led by French MEP Alain Lipietz, left the rally as wet as the others. The European greens had just joint the Brazilian greens in the inauguration rally, when the tropical diluvium drowned Belem.

... you just wring out your shirt and keep on dancing !

Until February 1, the cradle of Amazonia - this is what "Belem" means - will host around 100 000 WSF

participants from around the world, according to the latest registrations - perhaps there will be even more people coming here to discuss how to achieve "a better world", as the WSF motto suggests. The list of events, most of them self-organised, is almost endless: the programme looks like a weekend edition of a much read daily newspaper. However, the worldwide financial and economic crisis and proposals how to overcome its roots will be at the heart of discussions.

"Tem verde no Forum", read the t-shirts which greens wore at today's rally. "Verde", green, will be present in the WSF, both as an issue and a personal presence. Green workshops, organised together with the Brazilian greens and the Heinrich Boell Foundation, will encompass a large thematic spectrum, from climate change to global commons, from illegal deforestation to the new nuclear power plant threat, which is reinvigorating throughout Latin America.

The first day of the WSF will be dedicated to the Amazonian region, a "cradle" in many senses: it is an enormously rich region in terms of bio- and cultural diversity. No wonder that it has been the El Dorado for centuries for adventurers and exploiters. Unfortunately his cycle has not come to an end.On the contrary, agro export industry, illegal deforestation, irresponsible forms of power generation, which destroy traditional waterways and irrigation systems, new forms of slavery and the climate change threat need new answers to old questions.

During the next days, we'll keep you informed of the most interesting moments of the Belem WSF.

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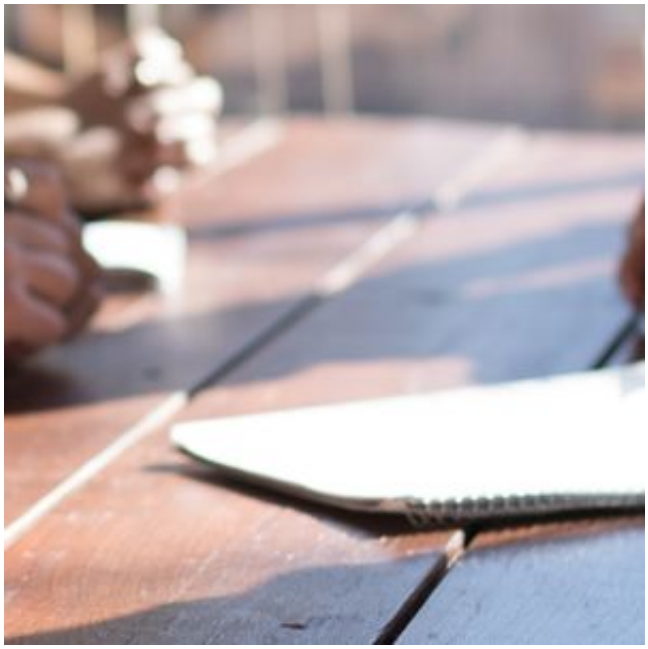

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