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# Why the World Social Forum?

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## Noam Chomsky

After World War II, integration of the international economy ("globalization") has been increasing. By late 20th century, it had reversed the decline of the interwar period, reaching the level prior to World War I by gross measures - for example, volume of trade relative to the size of the global economy. But the picture is considerably more complex.

Postwar integration passed through two phases:

- (1) the Bretton Woods period until the early 1970s;
- (2) the period since, after the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system of regulated exchange rates and controls on movement of capital.

It is phase (2) that is usually called "globalization." Phase (2) is associated with so-called "neoliberal policies": structural adjustment and "reform" along the lines of the "Washington consensus" for much of the Third World, and since 1990, others, such as India and the "transition economies" of Eastern Europe; and a version of the same policies in the more advanced industrial societies themselves, most notably the US and UK. The two phases have been strikingly different. For good reasons, many economists refer to phase (1) as the "golden age" of industrial state capitalism, and phase (2) - the "globalization period" - as the "leaden age," with significant deterioration of standard macroeconomic measures worldwide (rate of growth, productivity, capital investment, etc.), and increasing inequality. In the world's richest country, for most of the workforce wages have stagnated or declined, working hours have dramatically increased, and benefits and support systems have been reduced. Through the "golden age," social indicators closely tracked GDP; since the mid-1970s, they have steadily declined, to the level of 40 years ago according to the most recent detailed academic study.

Contemporary globalization is described as expansion of "free trade," but that is misleading. A large part of "trade" is in fact centrally-managed, through intrafirm transfers, outsourcing, and other means. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency towards oligopoly and strategic alliances among firms throughout the economy, along with extensive reliance on the state sector to socialize risk and cost, a key feature of the US economy throughout this period. The international "free trade" agreements involve an intricate combination of liberalization and protectionism, in many crucial cases (particularly pharmaceuticals) allowing megacorporations to gain huge profits by monopolistic pricing of drugs that were developed with substantial contribution of the public sector. The enormous explosion of short-term speculative capital transfers in phase (2) sharply restricts planning options for governments, hence restricts popular sovereignty insofar as the political system is democratic. The constitution of "trade" is far different from the pre-World War I period. A large part now consists of manufacturing flows to the rich countries, much of it intrafirm. These options, along with the mere threat to transfer production, are another powerful weapon against working people and functioning democracy. The emerging system is one of "corporate mercantilism," with decisions over social, economic, and political life increasingly in the hands of unaccountable private concentrations of power, which are "the tools and tyrants of government," in James Madison's memorable phrase, warning of the threats to democracy he perceived two centuries ago.

Not surprisingly, the phase (2) effects have led to substantial protest and public opposition, which has taken many forms throughout the world. The World Social Forum offers opportunities of unparalleled importance to bring together popular forces from many and varied constituencies from the richer and poor countries alike, to develop constructive alternatives that will defend the overwhelming majority of the world's population from the attack on fundamental human rights, and to move on to break down illegitimate power concentrations and extend the domains of justice and freedom.

[World Social Forum](#)

[The Forum's website hosts a Library of Alternatives](#)

# Manifestum of the World Social Forum

The World Social Forum will be a new international arena for the creation and exchange of social and economic projects that promote human rights, social justice and sustainable development. It will take place every year in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the same period as the World Economic Forum, which happens in Davos, Switzerland, at the end of January. Since 1971, The World Economic Forum has played a key role in formulating economic policies throughout the world. It's sponsored by a Swiss organization that serves as a consultant to the United Nations and it's financed by more than one thousand corporations.

The World Social Forum will provide a space for building economic alternatives, for exchanging experiences and for strengthening South-North alliances between NGOs, unions and social movements. It will also be an opportunity for developing concrete projects, to educate the public, and to mobilize civil society internationally. The World Social Forum developed as a consequence of a growing international movement that advocates for greater participation of civil societies in international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). For decades, these institutions have been making decisions that affect the lives of people all over the world, without a clear system for accountability and democratic participation.

Brazil is one of the countries that have been greatly affected by global economic policies. At the same time, different sectors of Brazilian society are crating economic alternatives in rural and urban areas, in shantytowns, factories, churches, schools, etc. The richness of Brazilian grassroots organizations represents a source of inspiration for the development of the World Social Forum. The Brazilian Organizing Committee is building alliances with organizations in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe to develop the World Social Forum.

This will be a broad coalition of organizations working on issues such as human rights, sustainable development, education, and environmental protection. The World Social Forum will discuss topics such as:

- building economic policies that promote human development;
- creating international strategies for grassroots organizing;
- building proposals to democratize international institutions, such as the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank;
- the influence of multinational corporations in local communities;
- creating sustainable development proposals to eradicate poverty and hunger, and to protect the environment;
- organizing against gender and racial discrimination;
- the protection and preservation of indigenous land and culture.

## World Parliamentary Forum

The will occur as part of the World Social Forum. It is intended to gather and mobilize parliamentarians from all the countries, so as to discuss crucial topics in the framework of neoliberal globalization.

The World Parliamentary Forum will occur on January 27th (from 2:00 pm to 10:00 pm) and on January 28th (from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm) thus, facilitating the participation of parliamentarians in debates, taking place in the mornings and in the other promoted activities by the social movements. The themes to be discussed should comprise issues like the deregulation of markets, the debt, speculative financial transactions, the risks of democracy in the face globalization and a number of other issues making up the political agenda for the next period.

Parliamentarians from all over the world will be given the task of tracing a common-based platform to face neoliberalism and to articulate well-organized struggles to break the chains reflecting the neoliberal hegemony from national bases. Citizens, builders of a generous future to mankind will inaugurate the new millennium, holding the first World Social Forum. It will bring about hope for all the people in the world and a new organization stage for those who rebel, resist and build alternatives against neoliberalism.

The World Social Forum will be held in the city of Porto Alegre, the State of Rio Grande do Sul- Brazil, from January 25th

to January 30th, 2001. In this period, nearly 2.600 delegates from all the continents, representing trade unionism, social movements from the city and the country-side, non governmental organizations, parliamentarians, mayors, in short, the grouped world civil society that fights for a new world. The World Social Forum will occur simultaneously to the the planet.

Meanwhile, the powerful and loyal governments to the barbarian neoliberalism will be in Davos, cultivating the dogma of the "only thinking" that rules the international policy, thousands of people from all the continents who represent the wealth and plurality of those who oppose to the formula of death, exclusion and misery will meet in Porto Alegre, exchanging experiences and building up alternatives against neoliberalism.

[World Parliamentary Forum](#)

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