

## THE GLOBAL SOCIAL FORUM MOVEMENT

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### PORTO ALEGRE'S "PARTICIPATORY BUDGET," AND THE MAXIMIZATION OF DEMOCRACY

#### INTRODUCTION

#### COUNTER-HEGEMONIC GLOBALIZATION AND THE DEMOCRATIC IMPULSE

The World Social Forum is a new social and political phenomenon. The fact that it does have antecedents does not diminish its newness. Rather, quite the opposite. It is not an event, nor a mere succession of events. It is not a scholarly conference, although the contributions of many scholars converge in it. It is not a party or an international of parties, although militants and activists of many parties all over the world take part in it. It is not an NGO [non-governmental organization] or confederation of NGOs, even though its conception and organization owes a great deal to them. It is not a social movement, even though it often designates itself as a movement of movements. Although it presents itself as an agent of social change, the WSF rejects the concept of a historical subject and confers no priority on any specific social actor in the process of social change. It holds no clearly defined ideology either in defining what it rejects or what it asserts. (Santos 2003, 235)

The possibility of democracy on a global scale is emerging today for the very first time. (Hardt and Negri 2004 xi)

**T**HROUGHOUT THE 1990S, the fragmentation of the US and global Left inspired as much ridicule as it did critical analysis. A seemingly infinite series of splits occurred along a variety of axes: ethnic and racial identity, geographical place, sexual orientation/practices, organization type, lifestyle choice, relationships with nonhumans, degree of ideological purity, and on and on. As many commentators have noted, given the ideological uniformity and structural authoritarianism among orthodox Leftists of earlier decades, diverse modes of social identification and political organization were necessary to both broaden the movement in terms of race and

gender, and deepen it in regard to the level of participation available to those who constituted the movement. But while a host of innovations in organizational type and practices emerged, from the Weathermen and the Black Panthers to ACT UP! and Reclaim the Streets!, there was no real movement or mode of organization that was able to effectively reach across the myriad ideological, issue- and identity-based gaps. But as a new wave of international institutions were created to extend and intensify neo-liberalism, the opposition, too, found itself gathering together at these same sites. And before you could say “The Battle of Seattle,” a plethora of isolated niches became so many expanding networks.

As Gautney (this issue) explicates in greater detail, what enabled the World Social Forum to fill the void was twofold. The World Trade Organization embodied global neo-liberalism in a way that no transnational institution had done before. The emergence of this enemy dedicated to manifesting a “utopia of endless exploitation” (Chávez 2004, 55) galvanized a broad opposition. As such, and as a first order of business, the WSF sought to define itself as an “open space” whose commitment to pluralism was only matched by its incredibly attractive power: from 20,000 participants in 2001 to more than 155,000 in 2005—with more than 250 regional social forums (SF) over the last four years. (The largest in the US was the Boston SF which occurred the weekend before the Democratic National Convention in July of 2004. Over 5,000 attended nearly 600 sessions.) (Moodliar and Pramas 2004) The undeniable attractiveness of the WSF is largely the result of its continued commitment to plurality and openness, especially for those aiming to connect across the gaps; and it is among these intervals that the SF movement continues to grow as a truly rhizomatic insurgency, but toward what end? Many now regard the WSF’s initial strength as a possibly fatal weakness, and it is this concern that occupies the core of this essay.

Each World Social Forum is a conflux of mind-boggling diversity and vibrant interconnectedness. But this festival of difference is Janus-faced: for some, it is a crucial element in the construction of a truly inclusive movement of movements. For others, it is an unwieldy cauldron of contradiction and confusion. (Gautney, this issue.) For all these reasons, any attempt to distill each forum’s significance or contemplate its potential must be theoretically located and agenda-driven. Thus, specifying one’s context of evaluation and modification is essential. My mission is as follows.

Hardt and Negri are right: global democracy is now possible in a way that it never was before. Whether we call it globalization or “Empire,” since WWII

the coalescence of political, juridical, technological, military, cultural and economic forces have enabled interregional and transnational communications and alliances that open the door to regularized global political cooperation. These forces have created the conditions for both Empire and/or rights-driven radical democracy. Many share Hardt and Negri's optimism about the democratic potential of this situation. Yet, if not for the existence and proliferation of the World Social Forum, this tantalizing proposition would seem utopian in the worst sense—especially when neo-Liberal mobilizations for the War on the Terror strive to strangle the global agenda. The SF movement's innovative contribution is not that it is capable of solving the problem of creating a democracy on a global scale, but that it connects the agents and practices necessary for this construction, and it enables them to modify or transform themselves in order to build the *demos* (or *demos*) necessary for global democracy.

There are many conflicting positions on the role of the WSF in regard to this task. Several of the debates often break down along the same axis: is the SF primarily an "open space" owned by neither a specific ideology nor a particular organization's agenda (Foltz, Moodliar, Pramas 2004)? Or, should it be a cultivated, continuous process aspiring towards definite political goals? See Gautney (this issue) for details on this, I will focus on just one aspect here. Some fault the WSF for its unwillingness to foster *deliberative* goal-oriented engagements among the movements, while others credit the WSF for producing an ideological open space which was able to create communications and coalitions amidst the intensely fragmented global Left.

Whatever one's position in this debate, there are at least two sets of difficulties that evaluations of the World Social Forum face. First off, it is a mere five years old. The WSF's newness combined with its size and scope—and the incredible linguistic diversity among its participants—makes it difficult to track all the various actors before, during and after the forum. Imagine evaluating the labor movement or the African National Congress's role in the anti-apartheid struggle after just five years. This is not to say that such an evaluation is too early; self-criticism in this early stage is essential to charting possible directions for the Forum, given its successes and failures thus far. But grandiose proclamations, especially negative ones, are of dubious worth.

Secondly, what criteria should be used to critically assess a movement that claims to be novel (see the Santos quote above) and to beckon us towards

a political horizon that is supposed to remain open? On this point, Santos' (2003) challenge should be taken quite seriously: if the WSF is an opening onto a new politics, and maybe even the actual politics itself, then the criteria to be applied must be different from those used to evaluate pre-WSF political movements. Contra Wainwright (2005), the question of political impact, then, cannot be answered so easily.

At this point it is helpful to return to the Hardt-Negri proclamation as a kind of guidepost: what is the conception of the democracy found at the WSF that offers more than just hope for these "other worlds that are possible" (the AWIP theme)? How is this conception to be distinguished from its competitors? This essay's chief task is to articulate in some detail a conception of democracy that is found in the WSF and among some of its key constituents in the global justice movement in order to better examine what this global democratization might look like. I call this conception of politics--that is both participatory and goal-driven with respect to human rights and social justice—"maximal Democracy" (maxD). There are many possible and actual modes of maximal democracy. Some are limited to non-representationalist, "direct" procedures for decision-making and administration, others are mixes of participatory and representative mechanisms. Some are explicitly anti-statist while others seek an interface with the state and bureaucratic institutionalization. But each of them can be contrasted with the more globally prevalent (neo)liberal conception of governance that distinguishes itself by its allegiance to the public/private distinction at the service of global capitalism. I call this type of politics "minimal Democracy" (minD).

The rest of the essay's structure and mission are as follows. First, the general concepts and practices of maxD are sketched out and contrasted with those of minimal democracy. In this process of demarcation, a range of views from democratic theory are briefly employed in order to better locate what I argue is the most radical and productive conception of democracy that the forum and the global justice movement offer. Views discussed are: aggregative, deliberative, participatory, and Empowered Participatory Governance (Fung and Wright 1999). My conception of maxD most closely resembles the last entry on this list.

The second section of the essay looks at one case in depth, the Participatory Budget (PB) of Porto Alegre, Brazil. Understanding the radicality of the

WSF's claim to offer glimpses of the other worlds referred to in the appropriately oft-cited slogan "Another World is Possible" requires the analysis of movements on the ground from the perspective of Maximally Democratic practices. For this, the most ambitious and successful of the maxD democratic movements, now fully institutionalized, is discussed in detail. Given that the Participatory Budget's home is also the birthplace of the World Social Forum, it is appropriate to consider the significance of this experiment in municipal governance for the global Social Forum movement.

This case and others are examined in order to argue the following. Evaluations of the global SF movement's contribution to the project of radical democracy (maxD) must examine the practices and perspectives of key *constituents* of the Forum. The WSF must not be abstractly reified as a type of discrete event or actor irrespective of its historical uniqueness and the distinctness of its charter. (See Gautney, this issue.) In other words, if one takes maximal democracy as a problematic to which the forum seeks to productively respond, then one must closely examine techniques and concepts of the maxD movements on the ground in order to ponder how the forum might intensify and extend this maximal democratic impulse. From this vantage, the SF movement is best understood not merely as a discrete set of discursive events but as a transformative site for the production of at least some of the conditions required for maxD, and local and global radical Left movements in general.

Two last introductory points: in this essay I argue for an understanding of the World Social Forum, and the local and regional Social Forum movement, that diverges from those accounts that consider the WSF to be a primarily public sphere or a space for deliberation. I attended the most recent WSF (V, 2005) and have organized and/or participated in three others in NYC. In my view, the WSF has been a site for the social and political production of the relationships and institutions required for maxD even if varying constituencies appropriate their experiences in other ways. (In a more limited sense, this essay may be thought to indirectly prove a contextualization of the notion of "horizontality" so often invoked in the global justice and SF movement and an analysis of its radical political potential.) But again, these analyses in no way preclude other theoretical takes and practical recommendations. Also, even though I do privilege a certain conception of association and governance, maximal democracy has many modes, both actual and potential.

## THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM AS PRINCIPLED OPEN SPACE

The WSF is both the product and facilitator of a visionary counter-hegemonic globalization movement. The great strength of this bottom-up mode of organizing is that, in combination with the charter, it permits incredible inclusiveness among groups on the so-called Left. (Indeed, Santos rejects the applicability of the Left/Right distinction to most of the world (i.e. those countries outside the geopolitical North). As was stated above, there is tremendous diversity in terms of ideology—from European Social Democrats and US unions that actively supported Kerry (John didn't make it to the meeting) to members of the Indian Communist party, peasant movements, and anti-state autonomists. There is also incredible diversity with respect to the size of organizations participating (in regard to both finances and membership), and the organizational structure of groups: from Churches and corporate-funded NGOs to local farming and healthcare collectives. And, perhaps most famously, there is the wondrous diversity of topics and themes. All this leads to a dizzying number of sessions: more than 2000 over six days at WSF V, the largest yet. [For more on these details, see Gautney (this issue).]

This is not to say that the World Social Forum—and the more than 250 regional and local forums that have occurred since the 2001--guarantees the advent of democracy on a global scale. (There are certainly no guarantees in this political moment. But just as the "possible" is up for grabs, so is the "impossible.") But the emergence of this phenomenon, as well as its spread and entrenchment, gives those on the Left both a referent and a glimpse of the manner in which the global justice movement of movements might sit down together and collectively ponder its tactics and visions as well as its capacities and strategies to bring about the future harked towards in the slogan "Another World is Possible." I shall treat this slogan as a problematic: how are we to create a politics that is capable of confronting neo-liberalism—and various other forms of domination—on many fronts, while creating institutions, organizations, relationships, cultural practices and so forth which are shaped by desires for democratic participation, human rights and social justice but do not exclude other possible practices that also aim to cultivate these norms and goals?

In its most minimal sense, democracy means self-rule as representation: the right of the citizenry to have its wishes and interests effectively registered by those wielding the executive, legislative, juridical, and administrative powers. This generally occurs through the voting mechanism and the

citizens' inherent right to run for office irrespective of class, gender, or religion. In addition, the efficacious exercise of this right is often thought to entail mechanisms which render the rulers' decisions transparent and their persons' accountable through the actions of the courts and constitutional guarantees such as first amendment protections that provide for the open airing of support and dissent. The key concepts of this minD conception are authority, representation, and accountability, and they are all linked to the idea of democracy as a popular process of legitimation. As Cohen states it, "The fundamental idea of democratic legitimacy is that the authorization to exercise state power must arise from the collective decisions of the members of a society who are governed by that power." (Cohen 1996, 95) The aforementioned processes seek to obtain this outcome. However, along with corporate concentration of wealth, the commodification of everyday life, militarism and religious authoritarianism, I will argue that this conception of democracy as legitimation is one of the chief *obstacles* to democracy as self-rule. (See also Aronowitz, this issue.)

Though expositors of minD obviously persist, they usually do so from an economic perspective, whether overtly neo-liberal or not. Yet, there is much agreement across the political spectrum that minimal democracy's two main mechanisms—elections and the legislative function—have been severely degraded, perhaps irreversibly. Indeed, both may actually stand as impediments to democracy even in its bare bones representationalist form. Deep dissatisfactions with the electoral process, concerns about the courts, and the integrity of legislative bodies have produced mixes of cynicism, resentment, and opposition in a public that is feeling evermore disempowered. (See Aronowitz, this issue.) In certain ways, September 11<sup>th</sup> has only reinforced this feeling, especially with the consolidation of the powers of the executive branch and the passing of the Patriot Act which has hindered that other avenue for the representation of the masses: public protest. (Police actions at the Republican National Convention of 2004 and the conviction of lawyer Lynne Stewart are two of the more recent troubling cases.)

In contrast to the above, maximal democracy considers the entire economic and sociocultural plane to be a proper field for democratic desires and practices. As such, the organization of everyday life in schools, recreation, the household, the workplace, religion, and the family unit are not distinct spheres to be protected by proper subjects for transformation. This democratization of *society* requires the (re)construction of a set of political and economic institutions that further the capacities and knowledges required for self-rule. Again, maxD is not a matter of spelling out individual

rights. It is, rather, about the production of a set of collective capacities. Self-governance, then, requires individual and collective self-development. This, in turn, entails a high degree of political equality: all are to be educated in those relevant capacities *and* have avenues for participation *and* mechanisms to protect the citizenry from forces that would corrupt those avenues or threaten the self-development of the populace. (We shall visit an example of self-rule in this maxD sense in the case studies below, especially in regard to Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting initiative.) In our society, such corruptions are perpetrated by the economic forces of commodification and wealth concentration; by epistemological hierarchies embodied in educational systems and the related privileges wielded by expert knowledges over supposed "laymen;" and by election law. But, this essay leaves it to others to catalogue all the perversions of the processes and the inequalities that reinforce them. (See, for example, Aronowitz in this issue.)

Put another way, in a maximal democracy, economic production is not separate from the political; it is a modality of the political; economics is a way of doing politics and one that must not encroach upon people's ability to participate in the system of governance. Even more, the so-called economy must help meet the needs of the general populace in order to insure and enable their projects for development and collective participation. Again, self-development and self-rule implicate one another.

## MAXIMAL DEMOCRACY IN HISTORY AND PRACTICE

Examples of (partial) instantiations of this maximal democratic model abound. Historically, the Greek polis is frequently touted a kind of democratic apogee—even if it's no longer accessible or viable (Dahl 1989, 13-23)—because of its construction of the notion of the transtribal polis as well as the privileging of face-to-face deliberation. (Bookchin 1995 70-86) But from the perspective of the vision sketched out in the previous section, it is less appropriate of an example than that of many Medieval European cities or the tribal system of governance employed by the League of Five Nations in what is now the northeastern US.

While the Greek polis generally enabled participation only to those who did not have to work to support themselves (Bookchin 1995, 75-80), the medieval city created venues of municipal and workplace democracy. One of the most significant were the "guilds" which enabled innovation in regard to production through the invention of new techniques while securing the



basic needs of its members—from food and housing to cost of equipment needed for production to burial costs. In a variety of Russian, German, and English towns, democracy meant self-jurisdiction and mutual support. (Kropotkin 1914, 162-5, 181-219) In cities ranging from Novgorod to Cologne, guilds (along with neighborhood-based “town halls”) collectively participated in deliberations concerning how best to meet the municipality’s needs, especially in regard to the construction of infrastructure, securing of fair prices for workers, trade contracts, and jurisprudence. And many of these same public functions were administered by neighborhood-based collectives. (Kropotkin 1914, 174-182) And across the Atlantic, similar maxD innovations and experiments were also taking place.

After more than a century of inter-tribal conflict, several North American peoples formed their own networks of self-rule and mutual support. One such case was the League of Five Nations. In this confederal model of self-governance, tribal matters were decided in regular meetings by delegates from all participating groups. Decision-making was by consensus, and political equality was insured even for those nations with smaller delegations at the table. Unlike the Medieval City, women played an essential guiding role in the Northeast of Turtle Island (later renamed North America), since the society as a whole was matrilineal—women kept and passed down the property—and women held a kind of veto power over the body’s decisions. (Wilson 1998, 98-105) Economics in this model was also a part and parcel of politics since the political itself was subordinate to a more fundamental cultural-ecological framework which was reproduced—and governed, in the more narrow sense—through a mix of ritual and deliberation in which place and history were paramount. (See also Wilson 58-60 for remarks on their conception of trade.) Now onto a contemporary case where many of these same principles of self-governance, self-administration, deliberation and mutual support are at play.

For the last 15 years, Porto Alegre, Brazil has been the site of one of the most radical, or “maximal,” and successful democratic experiments in municipal governance. This has occurred in a city of some size (1.3 million), and one with real political and economic inequality; and it has spread in various forms to a range of places in Brazil, Uruguay and even some cities in the geopolitical North (Chávez 2004, 19). The name of this revolutionary experiment, now a well-entrenched institution, is the “participatory budget” (PB). The PB is comprised of a number of governance mechanisms that enable neighborhood-based associations, non-territorial associations, and the citizenry at large to directly participate in the setting

of budget priorities and create new programs for investment. Below is a quick history of how this program came about, a somewhat condensed sketch of the mechanisms constructed, and an analysis of the consequences and implications for thinking about the structure and possibilities of World Social Forum and the global justice movement.

From 1964 to 1985, Brazil was ruled by a brutal military dictatorship. In the mid-1980s, the transition to an open, democratic society faced a double crisis: budget shortfalls and heavy foreign debt, combined with severe public doubt about the legitimacy of the new government. One particular municipality which forged an innovative response to both problems was Porto Alegre. Although Porto Alegre is the capital of the wealthiest state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, in the 1980s one third of its citizens dwelled in shantytowns or slums. In addition, the city as a whole faced a budget shortfall so severe that it was unclear how to best spend the funds available. (Chávez 2004, 161) As noted above, the post-dictatorship government was looking to legitimize itself in the eyes of the public and this was especially the case in Porto Alegre because the Worker's Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* or PT) had just won the mayoralty. This PT played a key role in the opposition to the dictatorship and it was driven by a provocative mixture of Marxist and/or socialist conceptions about how best to pursue social justice. And most crucially for this particular municipality, the PT sought to break from more traditional workerist party models that privileged factory—and usually male—labor as the subject for revolutionary change. Thus, from the outset, rather than distancing themselves from or subordinating cultural and peasant-communal movements, it forged close ties to social movements and community-based politics in pursuit of a “post-authoritarian” democratic politics. (Chávez 2004, 57-70)

As Daniel Chávez writes in his *Polis and Demos*, “The triumph of the Left in the elections of 1988 pushed a sudden and radical transformation of local politics.” (160) But though the Workers Party had come to power in Porto Alegre, many within its ranks questioned more traditional socialist solutions to the present political and economic crises—such as creating mechanisms for the state management of various economic sectors. In addition, the PT had not secured an electoral majority; rather, it garnered little more than 30% of the total vote. (Chávez 161). Outreach to the broader public was necessary for the visions and coalition building necessary for the government to have any chance at success. In 1985, as the dictatorship collapsed, but before the PT took power, a demand for participatory structure in regard to the municipal budget had been put forward by the Union of

Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre (UAMPA). (Baiocchi 2003, 47) The new mayor picked up on this proposal and met with associations in the city. Then, through mayoral decree—no law was ever passed—the Participatory Budget was created. However, though the participatory budget was formally initiated by the PT-run municipal government, it was constructed through negotiations with a broad array of groups across the city and experimentations with different deliberative forms over the first few years of the program. (Chávez 2004, 160-1)

The key features of the PB, in condensed form, are as follows. The process begins with neighborhood assemblies in each of the city's 16 districts and, since 1994, non-territorial thematic assemblies (more below). In these meetings—sometimes attended by more than a thousand participants—district level delegates are elected to review the last year's budget process and citizens are given a chance to express their concerns about its successes and failures. These assemblies are conducted in the presence of the mayor and his staff. After these meetings are held, delegates are elected to the PB Council which actually does the deliberation on spending priorities and amounts. Throughout this budget cycle, PB delegates are meeting with areas most in need and with the relevant technical experts. All information about the process is made public through the internet. (Chávez 2004, 183)

As described thus far, the PB seems to aptly instantiate the notion of deliberative democracy that has become dominant in Left Liberal democratic theory over the last twenty years or so. Deliberative democracy (DED) is often deemed the antidote to the more unthinking conception that equates self-rule with rule by the majority. This view, called “aggregative democracy,” argues that the function of the state is to create mechanisms so that the preferences of individuals may all be registered. Because individuals have different conceptions of the good and preferences vary widely, compromise—not to mention consensus—is a false hope. For this aggregative view, the best we can do is satisfy the majority's preferences and guarantee the rights of all to participate. (Young 2000, 18-21) In contrast, deliberative democracy demands more than preference-counting for those states or jurisdictions aspiring to be hailed as fully functioning democracies.

Deliberative democracy aims to put the *demos* back in democracy. It does this by requiring open discussion and exchange of ideas among all relevant actors before policy decisions are made. In contrast to the aggregative model, DED requires a community of inquirers and discussants so that each citizen reflects upon his or her view with respect to both the interests of the

wider society and each own model of the good life. For DED, each actor or view must be given a fair hearing. However, each is also required to present a compelling justification for his or her view, since argument is to be the sole means for achieving influence. DED obviously forbids coercion and instead favors “practical reason” as the chief means to foster agreement among diverse and sometimes conflicting segments of the participating populus. (Young 2000, 22-3) DED acknowledges that citizens’ conceptions of the good might diverge or conflict in significant ways, yet whatever the differences, there is something which is held *in common*; namely, the belief that being a citizen of a democracy is a necessary component of the good life.

Deliberative democracy assumes, or demands, equality among participants. But when such schemes are implemented in inequality-ridden societies, problems arise. How are we to address the cultural biases and forms of discrimination which privilege certain actors in the deliberative setting? One of the traditional critiques of DED is that while it opens up the deliberative arena to all, it does not possess the means to address inequalities within the deliberative arena that can result from sexism, classism and racism as well as the benefits received by those with better argumentative and rhetorical skills. (Baiocchi 2003, 52) In the worst case, DED reinforces discrimination and hierarchy. Indeed, manner of dress and speaking style—both of which are heavily conditioned by subculture and class position—often are unfair advantages in the deliberative setting. And in patriarchal and racist societies, visual indications of gender and race are sometimes enough to discredit the voices regardless of the quality of the arguments put forward. Porto Alegre’s Participatory Budget has been very aware of these sorts of problems and has established means by which many of the aforementioned power inequalities have been alleviated.

## FROM DELIBERATION TO EMPOWERED PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Over the several months of the budgetary process, the delegates discuss and debate the needs of their respective districts and become acquainted with the technical criteria involved in analyzing previous projects and proposing new ones. This marks one of the first real maxD innovations of Porto Alegre’s PB and distinguishes it in theory and practice from traditional deliberative models.

Reviewing, debating, and creating a budget requires a range of skills. First,

of course, one needs to understand how the budget works. This kind of knowledge—e.g. tax rates, funding formulae, and the schedule of the fiscal year—is not widely understood even in countries with extremely high literacy rates and postsecondary education, much less in Brazil. In order to make sure that the PB did not reinforce hierarchies already present in society, the city responded to poorer and less educated residents' demands for the provision of technical education and training in public speaking for participants (especially delegates). The purpose of these programs for participant capacity development was to make sure that class power did not translate into deliberative power in the assemblies. As such, Porto Alegre's PB does not just permit wide segments of the population to participate, it *empowers* them to do so. In this sense, PB goes beyond deliberative democracy and, following Fung and Wright (2003), instead might better be labeled as Empowered Participatory Governance.

The success of these developmental programs was startling. A study of the PB done in 1998 showed that most participants in the PB tended to have less education and were of lower income than the averages for the city as a whole. That is, those with lower income and with comparatively less education were *overrepresented* in the process; higher-income and highly educated groups were underrepresented. This was in part a result of the educational and training mechanisms funded by the municipality early on. These programs minimized the cultural capital of the well educated in the deliberative setting and enabled the poorer and less educated citizens to more effectively present the needs of their communities. But the many measures of the PB did not just insure deliberative success for these communities, they also materially benefited them; thereby earning for Porto Alegre the title of "redistributive democracy," as well as a participatory one.

The Participatory Budget has been incredibly successful from the human rights/social justice based criteria so often found at the World Social Forum and among global justice movement groups. At its inception, the PB was responsible for only 2% of the total budget. (The Municipal legislature handled the rest.) In this early phase, the process prioritized those most underserved and since the completion of its first year, basic services to the poorest and most marginalized have dramatically improved. This, in turn, justified the expansion of the PB's portion of the overall municipal budget to 20%. Now the PB handles social services, local school policy, and human rights enforcement as well as the budget of education, culture, health, social services and sports. (Baicocchi 1999, 11) Its successes are impressive. The year before the implementation of PB (1988), 75% of

households in Porto Alegre had running water. By 2000, 98% had it and in that same period access to sewage lines more than doubled (from 46% to 98%). During the pre-PT government from 1986-1988, a total of 1,714 families were provided with housing. Under PB, from 1992-1995, a total of 28,862 were assisted. And in education, there were 29 functioning public schools in 1988. In 2000, there were 86.

The PB has made great gains from the standpoints of quality and quantity of participation. Despite potential barriers posed by the technical and time-consuming discussions, large numbers of participants representing broad segments of the population have attended: 628 in 1990, 14,000 plus by 1999. And it is here that PB has been extremely innovative from the maxD perspective and successful in the face of some criticism of these sorts of democratic reforms.

As Baiocchi argues, the success of the Participatory Budget in both integrating the oppressed/exploited into the deliberative process *and* materially benefiting them belies many of the criticisms leveled at participatory and deliberative democracy. For example, esteemed and influential French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has argued, among many others, that both deliberative and participatory governance programs reproduce hierarchies found in society at large. This view can be seen in particular in the criticism of the Habermasian communicative mode of deliberative democracy. (For more details on Habermas, see Gautney this issue.) As Baiocchi notes, for Bourdieu

utterances between speakers are always expressions of relations of power between them. The competence to speak embodies difference and inequality. A privileged class habitus imparts the technical ability to speak and the standing to make certain statements. This competence is a statutory ability, meaning that "not all linguistic utterances are equally acceptable and not all locators equal." [...] Linguistic competence is not a simple technical ability, but certain interlocutors are not allowed certain speech acts. Bourdieu gives the example of the farmer who did not run for mayor of his township: "But I don't know how to speak!" (Baiocchi 2003, 52-3)

The innovations of the PB discussed above and further interpreted below seem to quite wonderfully counter this kind of abstract criticism of the possibilities of maximal democracy, especially in its Empowered Participatory Governance form.

Porto Alegre's Participatory Budget has been successful on a number of fronts and according to a broad range of criteria.

1) *Participatory Democracy.* The PB created innovative mechanisms to enable participation in the most central of all municipal functions: the constructing of the budget. This particular democratic project did not simply seek out state power, it successfully remade the budgetary function by transferring some deliberative and administrative powers to a non-state/civil society bodies.

2) *Development of citizen capacities for self-governance.* The PB educates citizens in how the budget process works and in public speaking so as to attempt to redress inequalities among participants that resulted not from the process itself but from the differential capacities of participants due to the hierarchies found in the wider society. As such, it fails to fall victim to many critiques of deliberative democracy discussed above.

3) *Alleviates inequality/redistributes wealth.* PB's focus on the most underserved communities acted to reduce economic and political inequality in Porto Alegre. This also prevents participation from being subordinated to the legitimization function of minimal democracy; that is, it does not turn into a participation scheme where the current relations of power are reinforced rather than altered. PB redistributes power so as to increase political equality.

4) *Inspired the unorganized to organize.* The early success of the program spurred greater political activity in civil society and in the neighborhoods and helped to foster a sense of solidarity in the city. Because persons saw that the program offered real power to participants—and was not merely an advisory body—this motivated organizing in sectors previously alienated from the political process. Thus, just as efforts were made to minimize differences in power among persons, the differences in power among neighborhoods were also reduced. However, the poor-underserved were in a strong sense deemed to be privileged actors in the operation of the PB assemblies and councils, and in terms of the priorities of the budget.

5) *Cultivated capacities for autonomy and self-development to be utilized in other political sectors as well as everyday life.*

Participatory budgeting has been the backbone of the experience of Porto Alegre from 1990 onwards, but the process of participatory governance goes well beyond PB. There are other instances

of citizen participation in municipal planning and management that complement the objectives and structure of the PB, such as the *Congresso da Cidade* (Congress of the City) and more than a dozen advisory councils enabling the direct participation of the population in the design and monitoring of practically every municipal policy. (Chávez 2004, 168)

As Chávez indicates, the PB as an official program broke the state's (e.g. municipality's) legislative monopoly, but consistent with the principles of maxD, it did not monopolize the idea of participatory governance. Instead, it spurred the formation of additional and distinct avenues for direct and indirect participation in areas of the budget that the PB does not cover as well as in other administrative functions. (Chávez 2004, 170-7, 184) This strikes me as a wonderful example of the pluralism that the WSF aims for. The aim is to develop maxD visions of another world, but to not rule out different maxD approaches which construct alternative routes to the goals of self-development, self-management, social justice and human rights. Although in the context of the WSF and global justice movement, this kind of pluralism is usually talked about in the cross-cultural context, the PB has managed to permit this kind of openness within the same city.

On this same note, the PB's success and growth inspired the formation of more associations and cooperatives throughout the city. That is, not only did it further democratize the city in regard to legislation and administration-delivery of services, it stimulated the further democratization of society through the creation of more associations in civil society—not all of which were expressly politics-oriented. One striking example of this is the number of housing cooperatives that have been created since 1989. There were none in 1990 and almost 100 in 2000. (Baiocchi 2003, 58) Again, for the maxD model favored at the WSF, it is crucial that the democratic impulse and its associated logic of practice traverse not only the political and economic and the deliberative and the administrative, but also the socio-cultural.

In yet another isomorphism found at the local and the global level of the WSF, the Forum in each of its annual meetings has also adopted this language of the transversal. The schedule itself was constructed thematically but each was linked and crossed by various subthemes that crossed all sectors. For example, "patriarchal capitalism" was one of the transversal subthemes that were discussed in all of the thematics, from "communications" to "peace and demilitarization." Just as the democratic impulse, once it gains some confidence and momentum, seeks to reorder previous distinct



political and economic sectors, it also rearranges the conversation and the topics and groups to be connected. This last comment on the WSF's structure and role is especially important because the success of PB in Porto Alegre occurred despite continued negative coverage in the mainstream press and a change in government in POA. Here, the WSF itself has become and continues to be a kind of axis of stabilization and consolidation which publicizes the successes found on the Left and supplies a regular relatively high profile gathering point to continue strategizing even as local conditions shift.

In sum, through a unique conjuncture of social movements and the electoral success of a genuinely Left political party, the city of Porto Alegre was able to advance a new kind of governance based on citizen participation, redistribution of wealth, and the construction of a "competent and capable civic administration." (Chávez 160) Was it seizing state power or building an autonomous politics within the shell of the old? It was an unpredictable mix. The PT did "seize state power" but it also gave some of it away by smashing the municipality's monopoly on the legislative process. But it did not do this in the traditional clientilistic or neo-liberal manner. Decentralization or deconcentration is not at all unusual in these days of neo-liberalism. It's just that the dominant model is one where states give up decision-making or administrative powers to corporate economic organizations and interests. This point requires additional elaboration.

Though some, if not many, on the Left regard the erosion of state legislative and administrative sovereignty due to privatization with understandable trepidation, the idea that state sovereignty could be restored to the good ole days of a single unitary administrative and legislative apparatus is both false and wrongheaded for at least two reasons. First, it is practically unrealizable, especially from the standpoint of maximal democracy and more comprehensive basic rights schemes (see for example Shue 1980) Second, it was never the case in the first place. Neo-liberal arguments for the first half of this critique are well known—the state is inefficient and the market is a better means for distributing resources in order to meet humanity's needs. (Friedman 1999) But there are also left versions from anarcho-communists, social ecologists, and associative democrats. For the purposes of this essay, I cite the associative democrat Paul Q. Hirst. Hirst writes,

Power is, of course, limited by the very complexity of the means of its exercise, and, therefore, no single will can prevail throughout the elaborate decision-making and administrative structures

that are nominally grouped within the constitutional limits of the modern state. Totalitarian projects have generally failed for this very reason, rather than from active resistance from below. However, this fact of the inevitable plurality of power undermines the claims of those republican democrats who believe that centralized power can be made democratically accountable. It means that however determined they are, the will of elected representatives can only run so far and so consistently within the ramified administrative machinery of the modern state [my emphasis]. (Hirst 1995, 192)

While some may question the causes Hirst cites for the demise of totalitarian states, the primary concern here is in regard to the “inevitable plurality of power.” This fact did not arise with neo-liberalism, nor does it mean that all hope for the Left is dashed because the sovereign state is gone forever or never even existed. The problem is that the Left all too often can’t, or refuses to, think democracy without the strong state. So, for many, the entire political project is said to lack both vision and horizon. I stress this myth because it carves out a different route for progressive politics and the role of the WSF.

The maximal democracy problematic can be extremely useful in this regard because it offers a way to address the question of how democratic social movements in civil society might relate to the state in order to both deliver material benefits to those worst off and to simultaneously strengthen organizations in so called civil society in ways that are recognized even by explicitly anti-statist groups. On this view, certain sectors of the *state are means* to the end of self-rule, rather than the ends to be seized as such. The participatory budget is a lesson in this regard and it has appropriately inspired similar projects across the globe. The global social forum movement now needs to build upon this and related successes and more productively focus on organizing around the maxD problematic.

One of the most divisive and seemingly unresolved splits in the WSF concerns its purpose and structure. Even if it remains bottom-up, some ask, why can’t it adopt mechanisms so that it can become a deliberative body capable of discussing, analyzing and debating proposals and then collectively deciding on a program for action? Even if it chose just one issue: something as simple as a proclamation, “Bush is a war criminal.” Or perhaps something a bit more bold such as a call for a global boycott of some multinational corporation for a definite period of time. In the latter example, the goal would

be to render some pre-chosen multinational corporation financially unviable for stockholders if not outright bankrupt. The *role* of the WSF would be to facilitate the organization needed to accomplish this task. Indeed, this was a large part of the focus of the first NYC Social Forum in November of 2001. In this three day meeting, a few groups tried to convince activists who had worked on anti-corporate campaigns to pull together their resources and instead aim to overturn the status that corporations enjoy as legal persons. This kind of shift in strategy seems extremely enticing since, then, one would not have to continually create campaigns against each and every MNC that was perpetrating egregious harm to workers, the environment, and so forth. Because so many are currently engaged in anti-corporate campaigns, the numbers involved in this more strategic campaign would be significant. In addition, this kind of strategy eliminates a key source of corporate power and also harks toward an alternate economic model which remakes the relationship between the private and public sectors as to democratize the economy.

It is my view that the WSF, or key constituents of this new constituency, should help facilitate the formation of such a deliberative body. My slight preference is that it would happen within the forum—local, hemispheric or otherwise—as one “track” among many. This track would occur over a course of several days and possess a definitive timetable. One possible formulation of this task would be as follows: day one: meet each other and exchange stories of previous successes and failures. (The purpose of such face-to-face exchanges would be to foster feelings of trust and solidarity.) Day two: proposals are forwarded and discussed. Day three: all motions and amendments are reviewed and a series of votes take place. Day four: a timetable is constructed for a sequence of actions by the respective groups: resources are raised and exchanged, plans drawn up, tasks divided. This type of goal-driven structure was precisely what we lacked at the first NYC SF and a chance to build a much more strategically sophisticated and bold coalition was lost.

As stated above, social forums should create spaces within them that would facilitate the generation of proposals and the deliberation for plans of action of the groups that comprise it. But the main purpose of this essay has been to recommend that the forum adopt the maxD model as a *problematic*. (Indeed, without an adequate problematic, deliberation itself could prove to be counter-productive.) There are many disparate groups that share aspects of this maxD model already. But what the WSF and especially local and regional forums can do is to facilitate collaborations which can strengthen

and/or forward maxD projects in particular areas. In this view, social forums are site-specific spaces for an assemblage of forces. I end with two suggestions.

The participatory budget as it has functioned in Porto Alegre configures a uniquely powerful set of actors. Key players included a political party (the PT), a strong set of neighborhood-based civil society organizations, and an institutional framework that was able to tap the municipality's financial and technical resources while preserving the autonomy of the non-state associations and the neighborhood and thematic assemblies. This required attentiveness to participant needs and ideas, long-term commitment by the municipality, patience and good faith among the associations, and the willingness of all to experiment.

But PB programs in other cities have differing institutional structures and key actors vary from place to place. Indeed, in his *Demos and Polis*, Chávez seeks to explain why the PB proposal succeeded in Porto Alegre but failed in Montevideo, Uruguay even though the latter city's initial proposal was more radical and Uruguay had a more stable Left presence at the federal and municipal levels. The reasons for its failure in Montevideo are complex, but two aspects are telling: the residents of Montevideo saw themselves as citizens of the city and not so much as residents of individual neighborhoods, thus the local assemblies faced difficulties taking root. Second, the political right engaged in an array of maneuvers to financially penalize the city for exploring these initiatives and otherwise obstruct their implementation. (Chávez 2004, 212) The point of this comparative analysis is the following: social forums are uniquely situated to discern the radical latencies in particular contexts and make judgments about the particular kind of coalitions required for specific projects to be both bold and successful.

Maximal democracy expresses itself in countless ways across the globe, from the Landless Peasants Movement in Brazil to Food not Bombs in San Francisco, along with participatory deliberations on how best to serve homeless persons with HIV in NYC. Indeed, in NYC, a group that has participated in previous NYC Social Forums is putting together a working group to explore how PB might work in this particular municipal context. Unlike Brazil, there is no radical left political party in the US. This means that a key actor in Brazil is not available in NYC. However, municipal labor unions are still quite strong—both in numbers and financial resources—even in the face of increasing political hostility from the state. Also, many civil society organizations that were not in productive contact before September 11<sup>th</sup> are now organizing together since the rise of the anti-war movement

and the continued opposition to the neo-liberal free trade agenda. It is my view that the conjuncture of these two organizational dimensions—unions and community and issue-based organizations—would be necessary for any participatory democracy project in NYC. Both have been present in small numbers at previous NYC SF's as well as at the regional Boston Social Forum, but the coordination and commitment necessary for such a project has been lacking. It is hoped that the NYC SF and related bodies might make advances on this front. The trick is to build the required solidarities and discern the appropriate structures within the forum to forward such a project.

Social forums must be more than open spaces for random encounters. And, to some extent, they are. But there has not been enough organizational innovation in the structure of the forums to further intensify and expand local and Global left movements, especially in those locales that face harsh neo-liberal attacks but lack meaningful Left parties. What is necessary for this shift to occur is twofold: first, mechanisms must be created that enable movements to consolidate their collective power through the deepening and regularizing of relationships. Second, problematics must be constructed so that past successes may be drawn upon to build a more radically maxD future. It is my view that a group formed after WSF III (2003) has taken up this mission. Though its name is rather bland—Facilitation for Local Social Forums network (FFSL)—its aim is bold. FFSL is in the early stages of constructing a global network connecting local SF's, so that local SFs can better create the structures required for coordinating campaigns and strategizing. FFSL will then help local forums interconnect with other local forums by creating appropriate mechanisms within each forum. Once this kind of local-local interaction starts to occur regularly, then the global justice movement just might have figured out a way in which to restructure the local and global itself. The NYC SF has joined this network and it remains to be seen how it can be of assistance in moving forward on maxD projects. But as Chávez provocatively notes,

Setting up the question as local versus global is to accede to spatial fetishism. What is really at issue is the geography of power. There are no formal spatial rules; it all depends on the power relations embedded in specific situations. (Chávez 2004, 47)

Maximal democracy demands that we create the mechanisms for popular participation inside and outside of the state and empower individuals, groups, and communities to take on the tasks of self-governance. Together with the productivity unleashed by this MaxD problematic, the social forum movement could be instrumental in remaking the global geography of power.

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