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development digest

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Me Marx, You Foucauld!

Inclusion is a difficult process. Almost impossible for the left, for the 'good', for those who feel strongly about something.

Efforts at inclusion and collaboration are often met with skepticism. A more extreme reaction is outright rejection of the other "line" as being a total sell-out to the enemy.

The most recent example has been the characterisation of the World Social Forum as "part of an imperialist plot to divert the struggle". Some others, though remaining involved, maintain their distance by saying that some of the constituents, like say NGOs, have doubtful antecedents. So everyone is busy trying to prove their revolutionary credentials.

These attempts at collaboration finally end up moving away from developing an inclusive politics, based on programmes and actual action, and emphasise differences, divisions and suspicions!

Never mind that most campaigns, networks, coalitions and struggles have failed to sustain their momentum. Never mind that the radical left, far left, socialists, social movements, NGOs, mass-based organisations have failed to show any significant growth in membership, institutional development or social action. Never mind that our helpless response to the most important calamity of today, the Gujarat riots, showed up our emasculation.

James Petras analyses precisely such fragmentation at work in the lost opportunity in Argentina, how fighting for narrow interests led to the alienation of the people, and finally led to the resurgence of a right wing party, much like our own situation at home.

Amiya Bagchi however does derive some hope in recent trends in struggles on the Narmada Dams and on issues like environment and sustainable development he sees a gradual rapprochment of the 'false' divide between Marx and Foucauld.

The Parameters of Resistance

by Amiya Kumar Bagchi

As the forms of protest and resistance have multiplied, the problem of choosing an appropriate political strategy has become that much more difficult.

Is the resistance to be mounted only globally?

Or are we to fight every little tyranny everywhere the corruption of municipal officials, the arrogance of party bosses seeking to control local democracy, and the callousness of public hospital authorities?

The Divide – political vs. moral

In much of the Third World, including the subcontinent of South Asia, a line seems to divide the anti-systemic or anti-imperialist struggles into two groups.

On the one hand, there are those who believe in the necessity of squaring up for battle against global transnational capital and fighting to reverse the policies that have allowed it to subvert and control all major governments. The adherents of this view think that long-term strategies for capturing state power have to be pursued toward that end.

On the other hand, there are others who are convinced that the fight against tyrannies that are crippling the lives of people has to be conducted here and now.

In fact, the **political activists**, if that is a name we can give to the first group, have to deal with local issues and they have to prove their sincerity and competence in dealing with them. Such constructive engagements are necessary, in addition to their ideology, for them to build their base of support and strengthen popular resistance against the oppression of capital and the state apparatus.

There are also some among the **moral resisters**, to give a name to the other group, who are not averse to seeking the help of the state apparatus to right the wrongs they are fighting against. But there are some moral resisters who

think that the state, as such, is an evil institution and its embrace is to be avoided at all cost.

This division, however blurred at the edges, between the political activists and the moral resisters has often made it difficult for resistance movements to unify in the past. The division has generally been described as one between those movements whose ideologies focus on the control of state power and those that often seek to remedy evils without bothering about who controls the state.

By and large, so-called neutral academics have approved of the moral resisters in preference to those they see as seeking power.

The division has also been described as a divide between the communist or socialist view of resistance movements and the Foucauldian view, with its

Political activists	Moral Resisters
Anti-systemic, anti-imperialist approach	Fight the here and now, in your backyard issues
Focus on control of state power	Not concerned with state, sometimes even works with government; or anti state
Communist/Socialist view	Foucauldian view

Intersection
Fight against imperialism is needed at all levels, including the local.
Every local struggle is connected to the global in this age of the "other" globalisation
Every struggle represents and is connected to the other
Left parties are now closely associated with environment, Common Property Resources, decentralisation, and gender struggles

Common Agenda
State is being made weak, but can be the only provider of roti, kapda, makaan
Recovery of Political Spaces

focus on the cellular nature of oppressive structures and their inevitable appearance under any state, however benignly it may try to operate.

A False Divide

I have never been able to accept this dichotomy as a valid representation of today's resistance to imperialist capitalism, that is, the actual capitalism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The fight against imperialism must encompass all aspects of life including the forms of ideology, the state apparatus, and the so-called civil society as well. That fight has to be fought by uniting all genuine anti-imperialist formations.

The immense diversity of human existence, and the many different ways oppression burdens that existence, must be part of our understanding of why different forms of resistance will arise in different contexts.

The overwhelming nature of the onslaught of imperialism in its latest incarnation has convinced many in the social movements that it is not enough to fight local tyrannies and local oppression. Instead, it is necessary to seek allies who are prepared to fight the system in all its ramifications attacking the taproot of imperialism.

In the age of imperialism, all local struggles have an international dimension. The recovery of the dignity of labor as part of human freedom by the workers of the first world is also an integral part of that struggle. Solidarity with genuine anti-imperialist movements across the globe is absolutely essential.

Foucauld and Marx can converge

The ecological movement in India, for example, which began as a protest against the indiscriminate felling of trees by timber merchants, endangering the livelihood and water resources of the people and women in particular, was then taken up by all left-oriented groups resisting the environmental devastation by profit-hunting capital. The ecological movements were present in strength in the recent Asian Social Forum held in Hyderabad, India.

One of the unfortunate legacies of the actually existing socialism, and the political parties associated with it, was a fascination with big factories, big dams, and big projects in general. They symbolized for them, and for many noncommunist nationalists, the drive of all oppressed people towards industrialization and their search for freedom from degrading poverty.

However, many of the factories and dams were located in sites that had provided shelter and livelihood to the peasants and forest-users of interior India; those people were displaced and derived few benefits from the projects that destroyed their homes. Various groups gave voice to the discontent and desperation of the displaced, but there was a tendency among organized communist movements to look upon these protests with suspicion.

However, when the Silent Valley in Kerala, one of the richest habitats of subtropical flora and fauna in the world, was threatened by a hydroelectric power project, the movement to protect it was spearheaded by the Kerala Sahitya Shastra Parishad. This body was organized chiefly by communist activists, which sought to spread literacy and raise the awareness of science and health care among ordinary people. Because of the protests, the project for generating hydel power was dropped by the government and the Silent Valley was saved.

The movement against big dams came to a head, attracting global attention, with the movement against the construction of a dam across the Narmada River in western India; the movement was known as Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada). The main leaders of the protest movement, Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, have built around it the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM). There was mutual suspicion between the NAPM and the organized left parties in the beginning, but fortunately, in the face of the common enemy of unbridled globalization by the rich, of the rich, and for the rich, they are now fighting shoulder to shoulder against the WTO and the structural adjustment and privatization programs of the central government in India.

The Foucauldian movements and the Marxist political parties can come together after all.

The Enfeeblement of the State

There is an illusion among some activists that the disempowering of the national state is always a good thing. However, in poor countries, it is ultimately only the state which can provide universal primary education, primary healthcare, basic sanitation, and food security for the poor, and protect common property resources. Getting the state to make these provisions is part of the democratic struggle throughout the world.

This public provisioning function requires the state to have adequate financial and administrative resources. Most nation-states have been deprived of all financial clout as a result of their indebtedness. Their powers of recovery have been destroyed because creating state enterprises, interfering in markets or taxing the rich are actions considered, by global capital and its henchmen, beyond the bounds of their legitimate authority.

Colonisation of Local Spaces

Just as most states of the Third World have been rendered powerless by ensnaring them in debt bondage, structural adjustment, and privatization programs, so also the forces of imperialism are penetrating these local bodies.

The architecture of financial domination by big capital erected by the transnational corporations, the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and G7 powers often remains invisible to grassroots workers, until they are hit by the kiloton bombs of the stealth bombers and their lives are totally destroyed.

Local bodies are increasingly deprived of the funds needed to look after the basic human needs of people under their jurisdiction. With increasing debt burdens and depleting disposable revenues, they must then turn to aid agencies such as the World Bank and its many satraps, the U.S. Agency for International Development or Britain's Department for International Development for funding projects.

As they take up these projects, they inevitably get entangled in their conditionalities and thus many a left-oriented political authority begins objectively to act as an agent of transnational corporations. The proliferation of foreign-funded NGOs also hastens this development.

Hence the resistance against the forces of global capital and imperialism needs to be both local and global. People must agitate against the activities of transnational and domestic big capital, against the strengthening of repression and the deliberate exacerbation of regional armed conflicts in the name of defense, and against the operation of undemocratic organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO.

All over the Third World, people are fighting for their rights over water, land, forests, and livelihood, and local organizations are often born out of their need to carry the fight further.

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, workers won a famous fight to prevent a transnational corporation from usurping all the rights of the local residents to water for irrigation, water for sanitation, and water for drinking.

In India, fishermen have won the right to fish in the Ganga against waterlords trying to monopolize the fishing facilities in that river. In struggles scattered across India, many local groups have demanded and obtained the right to govern themselves in most areas of life. In India, a structure of local governance had been in partial operation through a system of municipal corporations and village panchayats.

Casualisation of Labour /Fundamentalism

In Gujarat, perhaps the most developed capitalist state in India, beginning in February 2002, Hindutva-based fascism used the state apparatus to orchestrate a genocide of Muslims. These fascist forces perpetrated unheard of brutalities against men, women, and children (including those in the womb).

The enfeebling of the workers' struggle in the towns and workplaces provided an opportunity for the Hindutva formations in Gujarat to recruit the poorest and most disadvantaged of the workers into their campaign of extermination against Muslims.

Not only have wrongs committed more than a thousand years ago by one particular invader with a professed faith in Islam been invoked by the Hindutva forces, but the actual events in that ancient feud have been embellished, manipulated, and falsified to poison the minds of the Adivasis as well as those of caste Hindus and Dalits.

Resistance and Recovery of Spaces

Protests were mounted against that genocide all over India; women's organizations and organizations led by women spearheaded the protest activities at national, regional, and international levels. It is recognized that fascism in India as in Bosnia and Kosovo uses the bodies of women as the markers of ethnicized "honor" and as targets of attack on enemy territory.
In India, even though most of the left political formations are still dominated by men, they have had to recognize the struggle for equal rights for women as an integral part of the people's struggles for equality and justice.

South Asia, along with West Asia, and several countries of East and Southeast Asia, remain bastions of male chauvinism. A principal marker of religious and ethnic fundamentalism is their tendency to revere women as icons while oppressing them as human beings. One of the most hopeful signs of the unfolding of people's consciousness of their rights as human beings in South Asia during the closing decades of the twentieth century has been the growth of the women's movement against gender, class, and state oppression, and exploitation based on women's seclusion at home.

The movement has demanded the reservation of positions for women in local governments, in state assemblies, and the central parliament.

At the same time, the anti-imperialist workers must struggle to establish the rights of fishermen to fish in rivers and coastal waters, of Adivasis to the use of water, plant and animal resources in their locality, of town dwellers to clean water and air, and of children to grow up as fully competent world citizens.

Resistance lives! As we say in India, Inqilab Zindabad! ▶

Future Perspectives for Popular Social and Political Movements

by James Petras

Argentina is the third largest economy in Latin America (after Brazil and Mexico) and up till the end of the past century had the highest standard of living in the region. Since then it has one of the highest poverty and indigency rates in Latin America, barring Central America and the Caribbean. To understand the complex and changing reality of Argentina today – a five-year economic depression, financial collapse, popular uprising and mass movements of 2001-02, as well as the recent return of traditional political parties to power – it is important to identify the principal political economic events which shape the present and the future perspectives for the popular social and political movements.

The Situation Today

(1) In the course of the past decade and a half, Argentina has passed from a speculative boom in the mid-1990s to an economic depression (1998-2003), to a popular uprising in 2001 and the flourishing of mass movements to the current period of the ascendance of right-wing political parties and personalities.

(2) The working class and poor have shifted from mass direct action to high levels of electoral participation between 2001 and 2003. The abstentionist campaign of sectors of the left in the presidential elections of 2003 was a total failure as 79 per cent of the electorate voted.

(3) The unemployed workers' movement to occupy factories and self-manage them has been in part reversed. The state is forcibly and successfully evicting workers in some factories and the remaining factories are largely on the defensive.

(4) The unity of the popular assemblies and unemployed workers' movement has given way to fragmentation and in some barrios to the return of local Peronist bosses with their clientelistic practices.

(5) The profound social-economic crises continue and despite the fragile 'stabilisation' during 2003, poverty and indigency rates continued to rise even as unemployment rates declined slightly.

(6) The 'fundamentals' of the economy continue to be incompatible with any sustained economic recovery, as the neo-liberal economy continues in place, new investments are absent, privatised foreign-owned firms and their local associates continue to decapitalise the economy ($19 billion outflow in 2002), the power of big capital remains in place, sustaining widening social inequalities.

(7) While the mass movements have ebbed and conventional politicians dominate the electoral field, the popular organisations continue to struggle; they have suffered no decisive defeats and are capable of regaining the high ground if the economy goes into another tailspin and the movements are able to build a unified socio-political formation oriented toward state power.

The Early Uprisings

The popular uprising of December 2001, despite claims by some leftists of a pre-revolutionary situation, was a spontaneous mass rebellion with a limited agenda and widespread popular support that ranged from the destitute to the former affluent small and middle level business class. The uprising in Buenos Aires was followed by similar explosions in the interior among the bankrupt and depressed provinces.

More significantly, neighbourhood popular assemblies spread throughout the city of Buenos Aires, hundreds of thousands met spontaneously to discuss their losses, their predicament; those who previously suffered quietly spoke up at meetings voicing their anger and the debate continued for hours at a time. Hundreds of proposals and radical demands were voted on and approved, though few, if any, were implemented.

Throughout January and February, the unemployed movements (MTD) and the neighbourhood assemblies converged in mass street demonstrations. The middle class assemblies' demands for the unfreezing of their savings were supported by the MTDs and they in turn participated in the blocking of downtown streets in support of the demands of the piqueteros (picketers, unemployed workers) for jobs and food aid. Conferences were convened to unify both movements along with human rights groups, university movements, progressive intellectuals and trade unionists.

At the high point of popular mobilisations in early 2002, analysts estimated that between two and three million Argentines participated in some kind of public protest. The unemployed organisations included upward of 1,00,000 active supporters who participated in scores of road blockages and peaceful occupation of government offices. By late 2001 and continuing into early 2002, scores of factories were occupied by workers threatened by mass firing and factory closures.
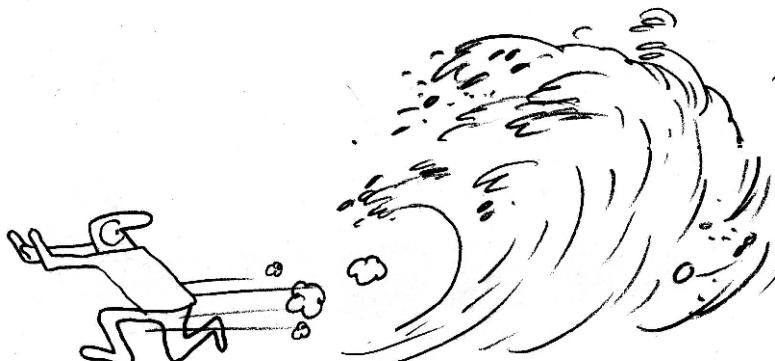
Clearly the capitalist system was in deep crisis, the traditional political leaders and parties were discredited or in retreat, and the new social movements were gaining political prominence. The major challenge to the activists was how to sustain and extend the movements, how to secure influence or control over public resources to fund jobs, housing and health systems and finally how to develop organisational coherence, political leaders and a common programme to bid for state power.

The Marxists and the Anarchists

Among the mobilised unemployed and barrio assemblies there was a general rejection of the traditional political leaders expressed in the slogan, *que se vayan todos* which for the anarchists, spontaneist and many social movement leaders meant a rejection of any form of political organisation and electoral activity. What was an initial healthy spontaneous rejection of the dominant political class turned into a dogma, precluding the development of a new political leadership and flexible tactics capable of gaining institutional political power.

The established small Marxist parties and anarchists intervened each with its own agenda and conception of the role the assemblies should play. Arguments between them extended into almost nightly meetings in parks, plazas and street corners.

The anarchists were arguing as horizontalists for open-ended meetings without agendas, leaders, spokespersons or closure. The Marxist grouplets were for a fixed agenda (their priorities), for an established leadership (their cadres) and majority votes. Each saw the assemblies as prototypes of communes or soviets.

While all the Marxist grouplets were active in some form in all the assemblies, MTDs and factory occupations, their initial organisational contributions were more than negated by their sectarian tactics, largely dominating discussions, gaining leadership positions through prolonged meetings (the sectarians' specialty) in which most new militants departed before midnight.

The result was a variety of MTD organisations and coordinators with competing sets of leaders, divided by minor differences and frequently unable to act in common on May Day, let alone in daily struggles.

Left sectarians divided the movements but they were not alone.

Another serious blow to the development of a unified socio-political movement was dealt by a group of militant MTD leaders who raised the ambiguous term autonomy to a universal principle. Initially autonomy was understood to mean independence from domination by the electoral parties (left and right) and the corrupt bureaucratic trade unions.

Particularly harmful in this regard were a small group of university students who propagated theories of spontaneous transformations based on not seeking political or state power but retaining local allegiances around small-scale projects. Their guru, a British professor devoid of any experience with Argentine popular movements, provided an intellectual gloss to the practices of his local student followers.

Over time however autonomy came to mean negative attitudes toward any political coalition, alliances with any trade union, and all forms of unity with other social movements except on a tactical basis. Extreme autonomy precluded any strategic alliances.

The downslide

While the unemployed workers movement initially proved promising in pressuring for jobs and funding for local projects, it soon confronted a series of serious problems. First, the movement appealed to only a fraction of the unemployed workers – less than 10 per cent of the four million. Secondly while the MTDs were quite militant, their demands continued to focus on the 150 peso a month public works contracts. There was little political depth or political-class consciousness beyond the leaders and their immediate followers. The assumption of many of the leftist-anarchists and Marxists was that the crisis itself would radicalise the workers, or that the radical tactics of street blockages would automatically create a radical outlook.

The MTD remain today a vital force in the poor barrios but their power to mobilise has diminished, their movement is divided and some activists are increasingly being co-opted.
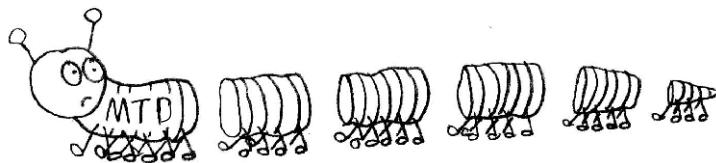
The return of the traditional political parties

In practice, the deep structural problems persisted and the new Duhalde government soon initiated a major effort to pacify the rebellious townships of unemployed workers, providing over two and a half million job contracts for six months, distributed by his loyal point men and women in the barrios. This move undercut the drawing power of the radical leaders of the MTD to extend their organisations and provided the Peronist Party the organisational links to the poor and unemployed for future elections, particularly since the movement leaders rejected electoral politics and neglected any sort of political education.

Over time most of the initial followers of the anarchist, spontaneist and no-power grouplets abandoned them for the Peronist-controlled unemployment committees.

By early 2003, the traditional right populist Peronists were re-entering the unemployed barrios and establishing clientelist relationships even with activists who continued to support the left wing MTDs and engaged in street blockages. ▶

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Participatory Economics: Parecon
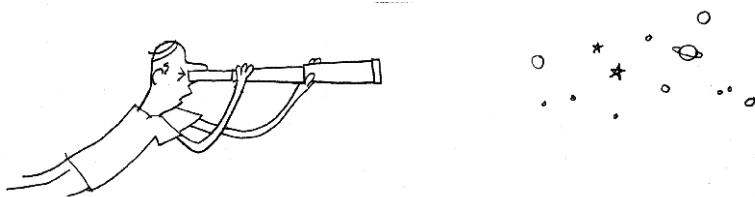
'Another World is possible'.

But what might such a world look like? How would we design institutions? How would we structure society?

Michael Albert's conception of a participatory economy (Parecon) offers a vision of how we might organize production, consumption, remuneration and distribution in ways that foster the values of justice and solidarity (Cynthia Peters – writer, activist).

The model goes beyond failed systems of market capitalism, command economy and social democracy (Carl Boggs – author, social movements and political power). It builds alternatives to capitalist irrationality – such as the barter markets, piquetero productive projects, workers' self-managed factories and independent distribution centers (Ezequiel Adamovsky, activist in Argentina).

In the interview with ZNet, Michael Albert talks about his book.

In the other interview, Ezequiel Adamovsky, an activist, writer, and member of the movement of Neighbour's Assemblies in Buenos Aires, talks with Michael Albert, on the situation in Argentina. There was a great opportunity, much ground level action and successful experimentation on a large scale to make 'Parecon' a reality.

That it was not sustained is another story told to us by James Petras. In this minefield of struggle and success stands a self-managed factory, Zanon Ceramics.

There are lessons in there for us in India. We do not have to wait for a crash on the Argentinean scale to heed those lessons.

An interview with Michael Albert
ZNet

	Parecon: Life after Capitalism by Michael Albert. Verso Books, London, April 2003. 311 p

Can you tell ZNet, please, what your new book, Parecon: Life After Capitalism, is about? What is it trying to communicate?

Parecon: Life After Capitalism is about an economic system called Participatory Economics that seeks to accomplish production, consumption, and allocation to efficiently meet needs consistent with the guiding values: equity, diversity, solidarity, and self-management. When people ask what do you want for the economy, I answer: parecon.

Parecon features workplace and consumer councils, self-managing decision-making norms and methods, remuneration for effort and sacrifice, balanced job complexes, and participatory planning a set of institutions very different from those of capitalism as well as from what has been called market socialism, for example.

The book, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism,* first examines existing systems, revealing their incompatibility with guiding values we hold dear. Then the book presents defining institutions for the new economy, describing workplaces, consumption, and allocation. Next the book details the daily life implications of the proposed institutions. Finally, the book deals with a host of broad concerns that people have registered on first hearing about this new vision: Would it really further our aspirations and values? Would it be productive? Would it violate privacy or subvert individuality? Is it efficient, flexible, creative, meritorious? And so on.

Can you tell ZNet something about writing the book? Where does the content come from? What went into making the book what it is?

Participatory economics has been around as a model for a little over ten years. Robin Hahnel and I developed it and have written about it in various

venues. This new book is my best effort to motivate, describe, elaborate, and defend the vision.

In that sense, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* emerges from many engagements over the years and reflects lessons from actual experience with work life, teaching, organizing, public speaking, dealing with questions in online forums on ZNet, and of course from trying to work through the model in new ways as new insights, questions, and explorations arise.

Regarding the writing, I and many folks who helped me have prioritized making this book as accessible and compelling as we could. I am not the world's best writer, nor even in the top 600 million or so, but I plug away, and I did a lot of plugging on this book.

What are your hopes for the book? What do you hope it will contribute or achieve, politically? Given the effort and aspirations you have for the book, what will you deem to be a success? What would leave you happy about the whole undertaking? What would leave you wondering if it was worth all the time and effort?

If everyone who is reading this and all their friends and relatives and workmates don't go out and buy it, soon I will be wondering what I did wrong.

This book tries to answer the question "What do we want?", seriously, compellingly, and accessibly. So naturally I would hope people would give it a read.

As mentioned, I have been hard at work on developing and trying to make known participatory economics for over a decade, and the work is finally beginning to have impact. *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* in some ways climaxes that effort, and will hopefully bring it further along. The book will be published in many languages and has attracted considerable attention even before publication. There is diverse interest from many quarters. There is some momentum for this economic vision, it seems.

In addition, times have changed quite a bit in the past decade. We have progressed from the heyday of market mania and Margaret Thatcher's famous claim that "There Is No Alternative," to a new time of deep travail and wondering about all things economic. Among progressives the World Social Forum inspired watchword has become "Another World Is Possible." Anti-

globalization movements have taken the wind out of market complacency and are scrutinizing everything economic. People want to know from all kinds of activists, what is your alternative and participatory economics is, I hope, a very good answer, regarding at least the economy.

So, I hope *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* is going to propel this economic vision into much greater visibility than it has previously enjoyed. Of course, I hope the model will prove compelling and worthy, and thus be adopted widely. I have very high hopes indeed and I admit that I will be quite let down, in the sense of the question, if the book doesn't garner attention and provoke discussion, leading to either support for parecon, or, if not, then in lieu of that to development of some other better vision. I would also hope it inspires people to address matters of kinship and gender, culture and community, political organization, ecology, international relations, trying to generate vision in these realms as well. Life is not just economics, by any means. But mostly, the fact that we need serious, worthy, defensible, and comprehensible economic (and other) goals seems indisputable. That now is a good time to offer visionary aims for assessment, also seems indisputable.

So of course I'd like to see *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* travel the world's roads and subways in the hands of the world's working populations. More realistically, I'd happily celebrate the book worming its way into wide enough visibility so that someone far more eloquent than myself writes a much better book that reaches still more widely, into those roads and subways, putting the new vision into widespread left consciousness.

So go visit Amazon, please, or your local independent book store, and get the momentum going...books aren't cheap, nor is the time needed to seriously read them in oversupply, I well know. But, well, I guess I think/hope this one will repay the attention very positively. That's my hope, anyhow. And I wish that people will give that hope a chance. ▶

Building Institutional Forms for Parecon:
A look at Argentina

Ezequiel Adamovsky in an interview with Michael Albert

Albert: It seems to me that if movements want to attain certain institutions as a part of their goals, they will need to use organizational forms that foster those institutions and can melt into them, rather than organizational forms that would be neutral regarding the sought aims, or that would obstruct their attainment. I favor such goals as remuneration for effort and sacrifice, self-management, and classlessness to be attained via worker and consumer councils, balanced job complexes, remuneration for effort and sacrifice, and participatory planning. I wonder, whether these aims would resonate in Argentina, your home country. Can you give us a picture of the movements there that have formed local assemblies in neighborhoods and in workplaces? Are the assemblies early forms of workers and consumers councils?

Adamovsky: Four movements emerged in Argentina in the last few years, which I think are related to the spirit of parecon:

- the barter markets,
- the "Piquetero" movement,
- the Neighbors' Assemblies, and
- the occupied factories.

The **barter markets** emerged as a crazy idea of two guys, who set up the first experiment in their own garage not too long ago. Basically, it was a simple idea: people who had lost their jobs and therefore were unable to get any money at all, could still exchange their talents and capacities with other people in a similar situation. So, for example, a tailor could repair someone else's clothes in exchange of, say, home made bread, or Computer training, etc. By using their own "currency" – at the beginning, badly printed notes called "credits" -- they were able to exchange goods and services with other people on a non-reciprocal basis, that is, getting by on "credits" from one person, but buying from another. In the worst moment of the economic crisis, it was said that over 7 million people were relying on the barter markets to get by.

Unfortunately, barter markets started to decay later on, due mainly to the fact that some people started to use them as a means to enrich themselves, for

example, by faking the "credits" (which was very easy) or by getting hold of real credits in areas where they were relatively cheap, and using them in richer areas, where their value was higher. These sorts of activities made the barter markets more and more unreliable. Although they are still there, their importance is not what it used to be.

The **Piquetero movement** is a movement of unemployed workers, which started to organize after 1996. It is not one group, but many different organizations (at least 15), with different strategies. But they are all known as "piqueteros" because of the road blockades ("piquetes") that they usually use as a way to put their demands forward. The first "piqueteros" organized spontaneously to resist neo-liberal policies, and they did so by gathering in democratic and "horizontal" (meaning without hierarchies) assemblies. Later on, some Trotskyst, Communist, Maoist and populist parties "copied" the piquetero strategy, but without the radically horizontal approach. Some of the piquetero groups, however, still organize through real assemblies, and make decisions in a horizontal way. In these cases (notably in the Movement of Unemployed Workers "Anibal Veron") the assemblies contain elements of what you have called workers and consumers councils. For example, the MTD Anibal Veron and other groups have set up their own productive projects, small cooperatives that produce bread, bricks, clothes, and other products. But production does not follow market rules, nor is it organized by any "coordinator class". All the movement supports the productive projects, and makes decisions on new investments, etc., and the "profits", if any, do not go to those who work in them alone, but to the whole movement. The criterion is that every kind of work is valuable, so all must be remunerated, i.e., not only those who work baking bread, but also those who take care of popular education, campaigning, etc.

The **Neighbors' Assemblies** are a relatively new phenomenon. They mushroomed immediately after the rebellion of December 2001. In the main cities, neighbours started to gather in the corners spontaneously, to discuss and make sense of their own problems. After an initial period of catharsis – people simply telling each other their problems, anxieties, and frustration – they started to figure out what the causes of the crisis were, and to discuss possible ways out. In the case of the Assemblies, there's no clear element of workers councils – although some of the Assemblies, like the piqueteros, also set up productive projects. Elements of consumers councils are more visible. For example, many Assemblies organized community buys, that is, buying large quantities of goods from retail suppliers, and then distributing them between the neighbours according to different criteria. Other

examples are the pressure they put on electricity, gas, telephone companies and the like, to get them not to raise the prices, and not to cut off users who weren't able to pay the bills.

Finally, **the occupied factories is the newest movement**. It consists in workers of (sometimes fakely) bankrupt factories, who refuse to become unemployed. When the factory owners announce the closure of the plant, they refuse to leave, occupy the factory, and start to run it themselves.   The funny thing is that contrary to all predictions, and despite innumerable obstacles, they do it very well. The workers can run relatively large companies – like Zanon ceramics, for example – and not only get them to produce, but also make them profitable. The occupied factories organize according to different criteria. But generally, the main decisions are made through horizontal assemblies of workers, and salaries tend to be more egalitarian than under the old bosses. Together with these four movements, there are also innumerable smaller things going on, from peasants occupying lands and producing collectively, to artists and independent journalists finding non-corporate ways to produce and distribute their works. In the last few years, Argentina has been an extraordinary laboratory of new economic and political ways to orgainze and live together.

Democratic Organising. There is a long distance from general principles to concrete organizing. Take for example decision-making through assemblies or councils. There is much magical thinking about this: some people tend to think that all you need is to get as many people as possible to discuss and vote and, bingo!, you   will always have the right outcome.   But that is not true, as we are learning painfully. Many times in my Assembly, for example, we faced the situation in which everybody has the same right to decide on a certain issue (and everybody defends that right passionately), but then those decisions do not affect all of us equally.

That is why I was immediately attracted to one of the ideas that parecon puts forward: that people should influence decisions in proportion as they   are affected by them. It is a very simple principle, easy to understand and relate to, but one that changes the whole logic and practice of decision-making completely. Likewise, I imagine that the political engineering that Parecon proposes – councils at different levels and with different functions – would have been quite helpful for the workers of occupied factories and generally for all the horizontal movements. It would have helped us to figure out concrete and efficient ways to translate general principles (like direct democracy and self management) into concrete realities.

This is not to say, however, that "conceptual workers" do not tend to dominate the agenda. As far as I know, the main political figures within the factories, and those with more knowledge about the productive process tend to have more power, in reality, than the rest. But the dynamics of self-management and direct democracy can sometimes reverse this.

Building confidence and capacities: One of the most pervasive effects of capitalism and coordinatorism is that workers are disempowered to such an extent that they do not believe they can be their own "managers". One of the workers of Grissinopolis once explained to me, with a sad look in his eyes, how difficult it was to convince his workmates that they could actually run the company themselves. At the beginning, they thought he was mad. It took a long time for some of the workers to discover that they were not worse than any of the managers they had had before, and that, in fact, they knew their job much better. Actually, half of the workers decided to leave the ship and try to find a "normal" job under "normal" managers.

All relatively complex social enterprises – be it running a company, organizing a political event, etc. – require a certain knowledge, confidence, and experience without which the whole thing is likely to fail.

So, if people do not feel they have the capacity to do something, they will "voluntarily" call a coordinator in. This happened to me in my Assembly many times. As I am a good speaker, my mates used to want me to represent them whenever it was necessary. But of course, that gave me the chance to improve myself as a speaker, whilst my mates remained silent, which reproduces and reinforces inequality in this specific field. So, at some point I decided I would refuse to represent the Assembly in some occasions, which would indirectly "force" other people to come out and try to do it themselves. But the funny thing is that I had to resist pressures from them to keep performing this coordinator-like role, and sometimes they would even get angry at me. "You do it better, why don't you go" they would say. For some of them, daring to take control and responsibility was painful, and it was much easier to rely on someone else.

But, of course, after they broke the inertia and discovered they are capable of doing new things, they loved it and never again give it up. ▶
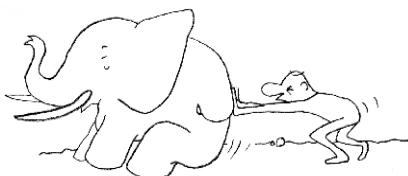
Zanon Ceramics: Self-Management

James Petras

In 2003 the courts, with Duhalde's (President of Argentina) concurrence ordered the occupied worker-run factories to be returned to their owners, including two of the major symbols of the leftist ascendancy: the Bruckmann textile factory in Buenos Aires and the Zanon ceramic factory in Neuquen province.

The regime was able to dislodge the workers in Bruckmann but failed in Zanon. It is important to analyse the reasons for the partial victory at Zanon. Several factors account for the success of the Zanon workers in maintaining control and continuing production.

First of all, they built a broad alliance including several trade unions (teachers, public employees, university professors), students, church groups including the Bishop and the unemployed workers' organisations. These forces have mobilised to block police raids and to pressure the city mayor and state governor to negotiate and not repress.

Secondly, the workers inside the factory in their assemblies had developed a high level of class solidarity and class consciousness before the factory takeover. This facilitated lively and open discussions and the election of a coordinating committee which reflected the diverse interests of the workers. A few of the leaders are members of small Marxist parties but they are a minority and more important, their first loyalty is to the factory, listening to the assembly and building a coalition.

Thirdly, the Zanon workers have "learned what they didn't know" in running the factory. They have compensated by drawing technical and administrative support and taking short courses from the engineering and business schools, as well as from a few administrators who stayed on and work with the new worker-run factory.

Several major problems face the Zanon workers

First, the threat of a judicial order to dislodge the workers by force. The Zanon workers have secured 40,000 signatures for a petition calling on the state legislature to expropriate the factory under workers control.

Secondly, the plant is functioning at 20 per cent capacity because of lack of credits, capital and loans. The state and provincial governments refuse to provide any funds though the state has spent billions bailing out banks and private monopolies.

Thirdly, the workers need to improve their marketing. The state and big capitalists in Neuquen have pressured enterprises not to purchase Zanon products. The governor who mouths Buy Neuquen slogans, imports ceramics from Brazil rather than Zanon, as part of a concerted campaign to undermine the self-managed factory.

While the workers have been steadfast in their struggles, their heroism succeeded in sustaining the factory because they also reached out and secured the support of engineers and technicians to train and advise them as well as building a broad coalition which included the left but also the church, trade unions, students, and the unemployed.

Without the broad coalition and active support of professionals the workers would not have succeeded.

The virtual absence of sectarian politics and the broad community support probably have a lot to do with the geographical location of Zanon.

In the provinces, the sectarian infighting is less intense, as everyone knows one another and works together on a face-to-face basis and camaraderie at the workplace is stronger than ideological nitpicking particularly when it comes to closing ranks before a major threat.

Likewise, in the provincial cities, the concept of community is stronger, the social networks link with family, neighbourhood and social organisations creating closer bonds of social solidarity in which reciprocity in supporting each other's struggle is a common feature.
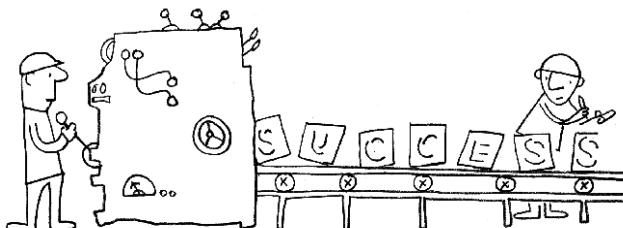
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The Tyranny of Time

by Jay Walljasper

It wasn't supposed to turn out this way. As a kid in the 1960s I remember hearing that one of the biggest challenges of the future would be what to do with all our time. Amazing inventions were going to free up great stretches of our days for what really matters – friends, family, fun.

But just the opposite has happened

People may complain about how busy they are and how overloaded life has become, but speed is still viewed as generally positive – something that will help us all enrich our lives.

It has always seemed obvious to me that the faster I move, the more things I can do, and the more fun and meaning my life will have. As I race through meals, work, family time, social encounters, and the physical landscape on my way to my next appointment, I'm beginning to wonder what I've been missing, what pleasures I've been in too much of a hurry to appreciate or even notice.

But Historian Stephen Kern, a professor at Northern Illinois University whose book The Culture of Time and Space chronicled the soaring velocity of life between 1880 and World War I, pointed out that "new speeds have always brought out alarmists." In the 1830s, he noted, it was feared that train passengers would suffer crushed bones from travelling at speeds as high as 35 miles an hour. Kern considers the current concern about the effects of our speeded-up lives a similar form of hysteria. "Technologies that promote speed are essentially good," he said, adding that, "the historical record is that humans have never opted for slowness."

Slowing down can be fulfilling

A surprising number of people I know have cut back to part-time work in their jobs or quit altogether in order to work for themselves, raise kids, go back to school, or find some other way to lead a more meaningful, less hurried life -- even though it means getting by on significantly less income.

There is a small but growing chorus of social critics, Schor among them, who believe that faster is not always better and that we must pay attention to the psychological, environmental, and political consequences of our constantly accelerating world.

Environmental activist Jeremy Rifkin was one of the first to raise questions about the desirability of speed in his 1987 book, Time Wars. "We have quickened the pace of life only to become less patient," he wrote. "We have become more organised but less spontaneous, less joyful. We are better prepared to act on the future but less able to enjoy the present and reflect on the past."

Danny Hillis, who pioneered the conceptual design behind high-speed supercomputers, disagreed with Kern, warning that our obsession with speed forces us to lose sight of the future and remain trapped in the present. He recommended cultivating what he calls 'a new aesthetic of slowness'.

The prominent German environmental thinker Wolfgang Sachs shares Hillis' interest in devising an aesthetic of slowness and offered his own ideas about what form it would take. "Medium speeds will be considered an accomplishment, something well done," he said. And when you see someone going fast, you shrug your shoulders, saying, `What's the point?'
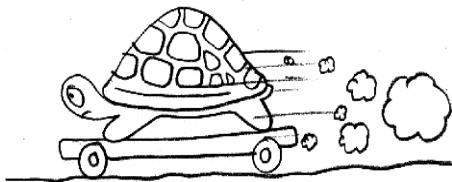
Speeding to disaster

Sachs argues that speed is an under-recognised factor fuelling environmental problems – "It's possible to talk about the ecological crisis as a collision between time scales – the fast time scale of modernity crashing up against the slow time scale of nature and the earth." In his view, genetic engineering, with all its potential for ecological havoc, is an example of how we interfere with natural processes in the name of speeding up evolution.

Sachs' recent report, Sustainable Germany, which maps a route to a green society, embraces slowing down as a key environmental objective. It proposes putting a 100-kilometre-an-hour (60 miles per hour) speed limit on

Germany's autobahns and scrapping plans for a high-speed rail network. Sachs also recommends strengthening local economies and cultures so that people won't have to rely as heavily on long-distance travel.

"A society that lives in the fast lane can never be a sustainable society," he told the conference, adding that a slower society would make life more pleasant and elegant. "In a fast-paced world we put a lot of energy into arrivals and departures and less into the experience itself. Raising kids, making friends, creating art - all run counter to the demand for speed."

There is growing recognition that faster speeds are not just a natural fact of the universe. It's an issue for public attention. What has not been discussed before now is – what kind of speed do we want?

Jogi Panghaal, a designer who works with community groups in India, defines the issue as not simply whether speed is good or bad, but whether the world of the future will allow a variety of speeds. He is concerned that a monoculture of speed will develop in which the whole world is expected to move at the same pace.

The culture shock of Speed

India and other traditional societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa are already undergoing culture shock as the rule of Western efficiency bears down upon them. People who once lived according to the rhythms of the sun, the seasons, and nature are now buying alarm clocks, carrying pocket calendars, and feeling the pressure to move faster and faster.

Panghaal warned that inhabitants of the industrialised nations may feel this loss as much as the traditional peoples do because less modernised cultures provide inspiration of finding a slower, simpler way of living – including the two-week vacation in the Third World that has become a necessary ritual of replenishment for many of us.

Humans may not have opted for slowness in the past, but they have also never had to contend with constantly soaring speeds not only diminishing the quality of life, but also endangering the future of the planet.

As Wolfgang Sachs declared to the audience in Amsterdam, "Slow is not only beautiful, but also necessary and reasonable." ▶

About the Author : **Jay Walljasper** *is editor-at-large of the Utne Reader, in which a longer version of the above article first appeared.*

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Let us move forward

Development should be rejected,but not because it is western or foreign. It is time to look for a new ethic to tackle the crisis of modern life. And the answer may not always lie in traditional cultures.

Kathyayini Chamaraj,freelance journalist

Kathyayini brings out the futility of looking for Structural Transformation merely in an over-romanticized past, much in the same way as religious fundamentalists imagine past glories and the purity of life in times gone by.

It is not only the bigots and fundamentalists who hark back to the past.

Just as modern scientists and technologists have thrown out the baby – the wisdom of the ancients (and not so ancients) - with the bath water,so too do the counter-modernists. We then throw ourselves open to charges of being anti-devlopment,anti-progress,anti-modern. In short,of being Luddite.

Structural Transformation calls for a critical understanding of both modernity and tradition. It calls for a synthesis of the real gains of the dominant modernization paradigm with the counter paradigm of egalitarian,dignified, sustainable well-being of every human being.

What we need is a new ethic and a new culture,she says, not of the GATT,IMF, World Bank variety,but the one of solidarity and mutual help.
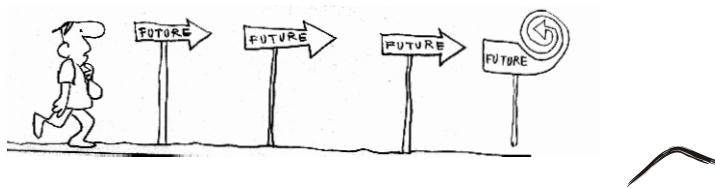
Back to the Future
by Kathyayini Chamaraj

A section of the women's movement in the developing world rejects what it terms the "universal vision" based on the ideas of scientific rationality, secularism and the nation state emanating from nineteenth century Europe as the "ultimate desirable vision for every other culture and society outside the western world" (Asian Women's Human Rights Council).

It claims that these notions and the institutions derived from them, such as those of the free market, have resulted in other " universalisms" outside the west being delegitimised and termed underdeveloped and even uncivilised.

This section also criticised the universal convenants of human rights such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as also being Eurocentric and relating exclusively to the relationship between the individual citizen and the nation state, ignoring notions of collective rights of communities, for instance to commons.

Its search is hence for an " authentic universalism born from an experience of cultures rooted in diversity." It holds that in the secular world of the west, all that is sacred is illegitimate in the light of the cultures, knowledges (sic) and wisdoms (sic) of the people on the peripheries, that one must seek other visions of governance, notions of justice and modes of being itself."

Romanticisation of indigenous/traditional cultures

While one has every reason to question the Western models of development being adopted even by developing countries, one also recognises in this cultural approach a certain romanticisation of indigenous/traditional cultures and the blind equation of whatever is indigenous and traditional with the intrinsically good and desirable.

Within this cultural approach, at one end is the view that preserving diversities of cultural identities per se is an inherent good; and hence globalisation and homogenisation trends which tend to destroy cultural identites need to be opposed.

At the other end is the view that traditional cultures need to be preserved because they have sustainable lifestyles built into their systems.

The tyranny and drudgery of traditional societies

But contrary to these views, studies reflect that traditional / indigenous cultures have not always been sustainable (Saral Sarkar, EPW,22.7.95) and that many ancient civilisations met their end due to their environmentally destructive practices.

The impression that traditional cultures are sustainable may have gained ground because these cultures were not yet aware of the use of many technologies or fossil fuels and the pressure of their populations on the environment had not reached destructive proportions.

One more difficulty that arises in accepting these new "cultural " visions is that equity, a necessary element of any development, has never been a component of traditional cultures. Oppression, discrimination, exploitation and superstition have characterised most of them.

This is especially true for the treatment of women within traditional cultures. Says Sarkar, "... in almost all cultures of the world, hierarchy, class or caste system, and patriarchy have condemned large parts of the population to a permanently humiliated existence for no other reason than that they were born in the wrong family or as women." Thus in India, much of the violence against women and their status relative to men, has cultural sanction.

The history of the last century is replete with reformatory movements that were directed against oppressive cultural mores and customs, which were coming in the way of women's emancipation. The abolition of sati and widow remarriage, for instance, have been hard-won victories on behalf of women. Can one envisage a return of the older practices in the name of preserving cultural identity?

Cultural Identities are Divisive and Oppressive

Emphasis on cultural identities tends to highlight differences between people rather than their commonalties and creates walls instead of uniting people often leading to communal and ethnic riots. Those who speak on behalf of letting cultural identities assert themselves are often not very articulate about the shape and content of the "unity in diversity" that they expect will emerge out of such cultural freedom.

Especially where Indian women are concerned, our cultures provide little space for their self-fulfillment and for the expression of their individuality. Patriarchal structures are framed to keep women within the four walls of the house as far as possible. It is a moot point whether the satisfaction of the basic needs of the vast majority of the poor, most of them women, is possible without a certain amount of development of the Western kind. Heretical as it may sound, it is doubtful if the housewife, the domestic helper or the traditional washer-woman can be liberated without the aid of mixer-grinders and washing machines.

Sarkar also makes the pertinent point that the Western model of development has not been so much imposed on the people of developing countries as much as that people have themselves opted for this model - they preferred to wear trousers and move around in cars rather than wear dhotis and ride in bullock carts.

Whether this is good or bad is a different question altogether. Hence, while a thatched hut may satisfy the yearning for the romantic and the picturesque of a jaded urban spirit seeking solace by going "back to nature", a permanent dweller of a thatched hut would in all probability prefer the security of a pucca roof over his head. It is also debatable whether our dismal infant and maternal mortality rates can be lowered without replacing these romanticised structures with better housing which will enable the maintenance of better standards of hygiene.

The question then reduces itself to one of determining how much industrialisation one can adopt, keeping in view the limitations imposed by the demands of equity and environmental sustainability. Traditional cultures per se do not guarantee either of these.

A new ethic and culture

As Sarkar puts it, "Development should be rejected, but not because it is western or foreign. It should be rejected, because it is ecologically, economically, politically and socially impossible and/or harmful, … "

What is needed then is not a "return to tradition" but a new ethic and culture both in the North and the South, capable of tackling the crisis of modern civilisation.

The new ethic and culture should accept the imperatives of equality and the limits to growth – both economic and that of population, says Sarkar. All cultures undergo evolution and there is hence no need to weep over the evaporation of traditional cultural value. If it helps in meeting the new goals, it should be preserved and further developed. There is also no need to be frightened of the slogan "one world", says Sarkar, because it need not necessarily mean the "one world" of the GATT , IMF, World Bank, but the one of solidarity and mutual help because humankind is one. ▶

About the author: **Kathyayini Chamaraj** is a Bangalore-based freelance journalist.

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