Thinking Diagonally
Forum contribution: Planetize the Movement!

Christopher Chase-Dunn

Valentine Moghadam’s essay offers important insights on the current state, and possible future, of the Global Left. The Social Forum process was a good run-up for the global justice movement, but it seems to have run its course. It is time for progressives to move toward a more systematic and organized approach. Last year, in a forum on Samir Amin’s proposal for a Fifth International co-published by the *Journal of World-Systems Research, Globalizations*, and the *Pambazuka News*, Rebecca Alvarez and I proposed a single “diagonal” organization that would combine decentralized horizontalism with a degree of democratic coordination that should make for a greater degree of global political capability than that exhibited by the World Social Forum. Such a structure could both support and defend egalitarian projects and communities while also waging effective struggle against the power of reactionary states, firms, and populist movements.

A resistance to formal organization is common among the Left, as we have seen not only in the World Social Forum but also in phenomena like Occupy and the Arab Spring. Activists sought to intentionally avoid the inherent conservatism of institutions, which can often fight to maintain their own self-interest and internal power structure.

But the avoidance of organizationhamstrings any movement’s ability to achieve its own goals. Organization need not entail a Leninist demand to “march in line.” Virtual communications and democratic decision-making technologies can be harnessed to produce better integrated organizations. Rotating leadership can expand opportunities for participatory democracy, the degree of bureaucracy can and should vary according to the risks involved, and local groups should be able to adjust their organizational structure according to the context and nature of a
task. A movement of movements must be willing to organize and engage at every level, from the global to the local. And this must include engaging in electoral politics, for by taking power at the local level, a globally connected Left can begin to prefigure a better world.

Our idea of a diagonal organization is just one of many percolating. Sahan Savas Karatasli has argued for a moiety of two party-network organizations similar to that proposed by Moghadam.³ And Heikki Patomäki has advocated for a global political party, with DiEM25 an emergent example.⁴ The global justice focus of the Social Forum process that stressed the need for addressing global inequalities must continue to be a priority.

These are exciting times. Another World Revolution is happening. The Global Right and the Global Left are once again contending with each other and with centrist liberalism. It is different this time around, but imagination and perseverance will be rewarded, as they were in the World Revolution of 1917. As my old friend Andre Gunder Frank often said, a luta continua.

Endnotes


About the Author

Christopher Chase-Dunn is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Director of the Institute for Research on World-Systems at the University of California, Riverside. He is the author of *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (with Thomas D. Hall), *The Wintu and Their Neighbors* (with Kelly Mann), *The Spiral of Capitalism and Socialism* (with Terry Boswell), and *Social Change: Globalization from the Stone Age to the Present* (with Bruce Lerro). He is the founder and former editor of the *Journal of World-Systems Research*. Chase-Dunn is currently doing research on transnational social movements.

About the Publication

Published by the Great Transition Initiative.

Under our Creative Commons BY-NC-ND copyright, you may freely republish our content, without alteration, for non-commercial purposes as long as you include an explicit attribution to the Great Transition Initiative and a link to the GTI homepage.


About the Great Transition Initiative

The Great Transition Initiative is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being.

As an initiative for collectively understanding and shaping the global future, GTI welcomes diverse ideas. Thus, the opinions expressed in our publications do not necessarily reflect the views of GTI or the Tellus Institute.