

## **World Social Forum 2002**

### **Workshop Presentation, 3<sup>d</sup> February**

First of all – welcome! and thank you for choosing to attend this workshop on the Simultaneous Policy.

The World Social Forum rightly says “Another World is Possible”. Well, the Simultaneous Policy is a technology which is offered to all parts of our diverse movement for making another world not just “possible” but probable, or even inevitable. But before telling you more about the Simultaneous Policy, let me first make some observations about our great yet fragmented movement. Now, many people say our fragmentation is our greatest strength. They talk about, and take pride in, our “strength in diversity”. But I contend that fragmentation is not our strength but our weakness. For whilst a fragmented movement may make it difficult for governments and their corporate masters to control or undermine, that fragmentation is a fatal weakness when it comes to the all-important issue of finding solutions. And those solutions must be found if “another world” is not to remain just a remote possibility, but is actually to become a reality.

Now I am not suggesting that all the millions of NGOs and activists groups should seek unity by banding together into one huge organisation – far from it. For what is needed is not organisational unity but rather for our movement to find a common ‘tool’ or ‘technology’ which all its many factions and groups can use to harmonise their political action on a global scale while, at the same time, continuing with their very valid individual campaigns; what we need, therefore, is a technology which provides for a synthesis of unity and diversity. Furthermore, that technology must also be capable of disarming the present regime, as it were, “from the inside”. For in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> atrocities, the world-wide crackdown on civil liberties increasingly means that opposing the system only “from the outside”, through street protest, is no longer a very viable option.

To understand why SP holds such potential for our movement, we must first look at globalisation in a way which clearly exposes its underlying driving forces. I will therefore start this workshop by stating what, to some, might sound highly provocative: that to focus our attention on the WTO or on the other multi-lateral institutions is to miss the underlying causes of today’s world problems. Because, as many of you know, the WTO, IMF and World Bank are not the real cause of our problems, but merely rather nasty and pervasive symptoms. They are symptoms because they do not control the global market but merely react to it. They do not control it because, as we know, the key factors of global capital and transnational corporations operate beyond the control of any nation, group of nations, or of the multi-lateral institutions. And if you cannot control something, you can only react to it. And so it is that global market forces now dictate and shape the actions of both national governments and the multi-lateral institutions as well as of the rest of humanity.

But before we talk about solutions, we should ask ourselves what is the underlying dynamic at work in the global market? Is there some dictator or elite who controls this market dictatorship?

Or is it a self-sustaining force with no human hand behind it? What makes it so “irresistible” or “inevitable” as politicians keep telling us. And why is there – apparently - “no alternative”?

The answer, as many of you know, can be expressed in a single word: COMPETITION. Or, to be more precise, in the words: Destructive Competition.

I will not attempt to justify that statement in any depth, save to say that the reason world problems only seem to worsen is not because we lack the resources, knowledge or will. It is because competition induces fear. Governments fear implementing any policy that might incur the displeasure of internationally mobile capital for fear of devaluation, inflation or capital flight. Even the G-7, the richest nations in the world, are powerless to impose significant controls on global capital flows for fear of the markets, jobs and investment moving to Zurich, Singapore or the Cayman Islands. Governments likewise fear imposing tighter employment regulations on industry for fear of capital and jobs moving to other competing countries. Businesses resist the implementation of environmentally responsible technology not because it cannot be done but because they fear increased costs and reduced competitiveness resulting in lower profits and job losses. Mergers and acquisitions and their attendant job losses occur, not so much out of greed but out of fear for the company to retain competitive advantage and relative safety for fear of itself becoming the target of a takeover. Developing countries too, must compete with one another to attract investment from foreign multinationals by submitting to ‘structural adjustment’ and allowing their raw materials to be plundered and indigenous peoples displaced for fear of investment going to other competing developing countries.

The nations of the world have therefore embarked on a merry-go-round of global competition; a merry-go-round now spinning so fast that no nation can get off unless it is forcibly ejected by the market itself – a socially damaging ejection which our poor friends in Argentina are currently experiencing. In this atmosphere of fear and competition, the markets now dictate that politicians in all countries have only the narrowest of margins within which to enact policies that protect society and the environment, making voters increasingly aware that democracy is being subverted into what could be better described as “pseudo-democracy”; an electoral charade in which whatever party we elect, the policies delivered inevitably conform to market and corporate demands and to the dictatorship of international competition. To sum it up therefore, today, the main barrier to solving world problems is destructive competition; an out-of-control competition over which no nation, government, corporation or institution has any substantial control.

Furthermore, destructive competition is not just an unacceptable symptom of so-called “free trade”. It is also the equally unacceptable feature of protectionism: the competitive vicious circle of a competitive raising of national trade barriers so often cited by free-marketeers as the cause of previous world wars. Indeed, neither free-trade *nor* protectionism on their own can offer an answer to our problems. Nor can economic justice or environmental and employment security be fostered within a framework of unfettered competition of either variety. After all, competition is not about justice or security – it’s about *winning*. And for increasing millions around the world, it’s about losing.

In this way of looking at the world predicament, therefore, all of us – governments, politicians, corporations, workers and people – all find ourselves caught in this vicious circle of destructive competition from which there is ordinarily no way out. Of course it is true that the rich elite are

the ones who benefit most from this situation and even encourage it, but that doesn't mean they actually control it. The key point to note is that, at every level, humanity is trapped in a series of interlocking vicious circles of destructive competition now running out of any democratic political control. Indeed, you could say that "globalisation", in all its positive and negative manifestations, represents but the latest great evolutionary challenge humanity now faces: that of achieving a cooperative and democratic global society; one which comes together to respect the finite nature and diversity of our planet and the rights of all its many peoples to live in peace, freedom and security; one in which the good of each nation is contained in the good of all; one which expresses a synthesis of global unity and national diversity. In short, our challenge is well expressed in the 15 Principles of the World Social Forum. The problem of destructive competition and the fear it creates is, therefore, a truly global - and a truly human - problem.

In a globalised and competitive world, we need to seek out an appropriate basis for co-operation between nations which avoids the risk of capital flight, job losses and the kind of destructive competition I have described. Such a basis, I suggest, is the simultaneous implementation by all, or virtually all, nations of a range of appropriate and democratically designed policy measures. *That* is what I have called the Simultaneous Policy: or "SP" for short.

The measures of SP would, however, be quite familiar to you. For they are the measures which so many groups represented here at the World Social Forum are already calling for. So SP's measures, amongst other things, would include taxing all major corporations and global currency speculation as ATTAC proposes; it would cancel Third World debt as Jubilee Plus proposes; it would abolish weapons of mass destruction as many peace and disarmament groups around the world are calling for, and it would include many environmental measures which many other groups represented here in Porto Alegre are calling for. The central policy of re-regulating financial markets and corporations would restore genuine democracy to nation states and the proceeds of the taxation would fund development of the poorest countries on a debt-free basis allowing them to meet higher environmental and labour standards.

Remember, however, that these measures would be implemented by virtually *all countries simultaneously*. SP therefore represents a low-risk way forward because it removes the key fear of business, governments and people alike: the possibility that *some* major corporations or *some* countries could gain unfair competitive advantage by escaping implementation thus causing a loss of competitiveness, profitability, jobs and votes for all others. In short, by eliminating competition at this level, we also eliminate its adverse consequences. It is just this basis of simultaneity which allows governments and people to say 'Yes' to Tobin, 'Yes' to a Kyoto with teeth, and 'Yes' to significant restrictions and taxes on TNCs, etc instead of saying 'No'. By removing the key objection to being the first to 'go it alone', SP represents a vital and new consensus-building strategy without which the vicious circle of destructive global competition can only continue. So it's important to see the concept of "all nations acting simultaneously" not so much as a rigid condition but rather as a way of removing key objections and thereby building the necessary consensus for eventual implementation to occur. As Jackie Navarro of ATTAC Canada put it, "*With a system like SP, there's no way for governments to wriggle out. All excuses evaporate. It's a system which unmask all those seeking to hide behind theoretical impossibilities. I can't wait to see what follows.*" But I

stress that SP is not the Movement – it is a technology for use BY the movement. On the one hand SP provides a rallying point for our movement to come together to develop its global policy programme, and on the other, it provides a viable new technology for getting those policies implemented.

And this new technology is urgently needed. For the existing technology – party politics – has, in the competitive global market, become substantially obsolete as a means for seeking change. It would therefore be a big mistake for our movement to put itself into the political arena in the form of a political party. Instead, resulting voter apathy and the narrowing of policy differences between existing parties allows us to use a far more elegant means of achieving our aims. Because instead of splitting the vote as a political party does, the simple adoption of SP by individual citizens signifies their willingness to vote for ANY political party – within reason – that adopts SP. Adoption therefore represents each individual's commitment on how they will vote in future elections. And as Ralph Nader is once reported to have said, "nothing concentrates a politician's mind like a citizen's threat to vote for another candidate". So the way the SP technology works is by bringing existing political parties into competition with one another to adopt our movement's policy measures.

So how will the SP technology actually work and what are its advantages? I will answer these questions by explaining the Principles upon which SP is based:

Firstly, since *implementation* is to be simultaneous amongst all nations, it can only occur once *adoption* by all nations has been achieved. It is therefore clear that a gradual process of adoption or 'adoption campaign' must take place first: person by person, political party by political party and nation by nation. Adoption could therefore be described as an open 'declaration of intent' to implement its measures when all other nations do likewise. Who ever adopts SP risks little or nothing because implementation can only occur when *all* nations do likewise.

***– SP is low-risk or no-risk; it eliminates fear and distrust .***

Secondly, any individual, any business, any NGO, any political party or any government may adopt SP provided it is adopted in full. It can also be adopted by a church, school or any other group or organisation.

***– SP is universally inclusive: anyone can adopt it.***

Thirdly, since global simultaneous implementation refers to a point in time in the future at which all nations implement the same measures, this creates what could be described as a 'future context' of *co-operation* amongst nations – the new era of international global community. This 'future context' is clearly entirely different to the 'current context', as we have it today, which is one of *competition* amongst nations. Arising from this, policies that are unworkable and consequently undesirable in the current competitive context – like re-regulating capital markets, for example - can, in a future context in which all cooperate, become entirely workable and desirable.

***- SP transforms sterile into fertile; it provides the cooperative basis that allows necessary policies to be adopted.***

Fourthly, nations can still actively compete with one another whilst, at the same time, advocating cooperation in the form of their adoption of SP; these two policies can continue in parallel for as long as is necessary until all nations agree. However, the open adoption of SP by individuals, organisations, businesses, political parties and governments also crucially serves as a challenge to others who have not yet adopted. As the numbers adopting increase, so will the moral force of the challenge.

- *SP challenges everyone to adopt it. Anyone not adopting can have no good reason for refusing.*

And finally, whatever the current politics of a person, organisation or political party, if they consider the measures of SP as desirable in a future context in which all cooperate, that is sufficient for their adoption. Because it relates only to the future context of cooperation, SP becomes a non-party political issue in the current context of competition. This allows it to be adopted by any person, organisation or party of any political leaning. Instead of dividing people along party-political or other lines, SP therefore unites them behind a policy for which there is already widespread support; support which, until the advent of SP, had no means of effective, political expression.

- *SP focuses on what we can agree on; not on what we can't. It transcends party politics and unites us instead of dividing us.*

So many other initiatives, appeals and charters calling for global change such as the Hague Appeal for Peace or Charter 99 represent merely petitions or 'shopping lists' of what they want to achieve – they express the 'what' but ignore the all-important 'how'. That is where SP is different: it also provides the 'how'. This crucially renders it capable of official adoption by political parties and governments.

All these are good reasons why SP provides our movement with the technology for success. But, perhaps the most compelling reason of all is "pseudo-democracy". Today, international competition dictates that whichever party we elect, and whatever they may say in their manifestos, the policies delivered inevitably substantially conform to market and corporate demands thus supplanting democracy with pseudo-democracy: an *illusion* of democracy in which it no longer really matters for which party we vote. As more and more people realise their votes can make little or no difference, they will increasingly be prepared to vote for ANY party that adopts SP seeing it as the only way to restore genuine democracy, economic and environmental security and peace around the world.

Now we should remember that in most countries it takes only a relatively small number of people to influence the 'swing' or 'floating vote'. The target, therefore, is to get that 'critical mass' of people in each electoral constituency in each country to adopt SP. (And as we have seen in the last U.S. Presidential Election that 'critical number' can be extremely small indeed!) Because SP is to be implemented only when all, or virtually all, nations do likewise, no one – including politicians - has anything to lose by adopting it. And if enough of us do, politicians will be powerless to ignore us. Because when political parties and prospective Members of Parliament around the world realise that a critical proportion of the electorate is prepared to vote for *any* party or candidate, within reason, that adopts SP, they are going to

find adoption rather difficult to resist. They, too, will have no option but to succumb by adopting SP for fear of losing the election. And this makes it not unlikely that *more* than one party, or even *all* mainstream parties, might adopt it because if they fail to do so, they consign themselves to almost certain defeat

This is why I refer to SP as a 'new political technology'. Because SP has all the effectiveness of a political party without actually needing to be one. In fact, you could say that SP is potentially *more effective* than a political party because it does not require a majority for its policy to be adopted; it only requires the 'critical number' needed to swing an election one way or the other. Furthermore, the SP technology can be adapted for use in both 'first past the post' electoral systems and in proportional representation systems as well as by Green Parties who share our aims. So SP has the potential to permit our movement to turn the global competition of 'corporate globalisation' on its head. Instead of the global economy forcing the people of the world to compete with one another economically, the world's peoples – lead by all those represented at the WSF today - can instead force politicians to compete with one another to adopt SP.

That is all I can say about SP in such a short time. I hope this talk and the positive reaction my book has received might encourage you to find out more about it. For SP could be described as 'world democracy in the making'; a means for our movement and all humanity to make this vital and historic transition from international, corporate-led competition to global, people-led cooperation: Another World is indeed Possible.

Thank you for your patience and attention and I will be pleased to try and answer any questions you may have.

John Bunzl – Director.                      December 2001

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For a fuller explanation of the SP 'technology', please ask us for John Bunzl's new book:

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