

Strengthening the Zimbabwean ‘specter’; the Zimbabwe Social Forum 2004 and the future

Reflections By Tinashe Chimedza¹

Navigating around a previous ban by the Zimbabwe police the Zimbabwe Social Forum (ZSF) converged in the Sheraton Gardens from the 28th to the 30th of October. This reflects a spirited commitment by the Zimbabwean social movements, activists and progressive NGOs to establish and expand the forum as an ‘annual’ space and platform to deepen solidarity and move the Zimbabwean social movements towards a more definitive anti-capitalist struggle. Indeed the organizers and comrades who worked to hold the forum deserve to be congratulated in sustaining the commitment to establish the forum in a country wrecked by a dictatorship and where meetings and gatherings of this nature are always targets by the ruling regime. Definitely not holding the social forum would have set back the momentum and expansion of the social forum space as an open platform for building ‘Africa’s next liberation’ and enhancing solidarity that began building up in 2003 in the first edition of the forum.

The forum was held at an interesting time. At an international level it was days before the US Election (Bush has won; damn Ohio!) and it was just two weeks after a massive 75 000 ‘rabble’ gathered at the European Social Forum which ended in a massive rally denouncing war in Iraq and interesting debates around the reason why despite the millions that marched Iraq was attacked and occupied. At a local level the social forum was held against an increased attack on progressive NGOs by the ruling regime evidenced in the NGO Bill and increased attacks on civil and political rights witnessed by the illegal and inhuman deportation of the COSATU delegation and the imprisonment of the MDC MP Roy Bennet. On the economic front more banks are being closed and workers salaries and meager savings –did I say savings -held up in banks whose owners are rent payers to the ruling elites. The ‘slow’ down in the rate of inflation is yet to translate into concrete gains by the working class, in a word, the social conditions of the Zimbabwean working class are brutal. Add the HIV & AIDS scourge that has ravaged families and one has a desperate situation for the working class in Zimbabwe. It was therefore an historic moment when the ‘space’ was claimed by the people living with HIV & AIDS, the increased participation of AIDS service organizations is a welcome development that will push forward the struggle for cheaper drugs and stopping the big pharmaceutical companies from saying ‘your money or your life’.

‘Newly resettled’ farmers are now being evicted because they have outlived their usefulness of window dressing an ‘agrarian revolution’ that was meant to entrench a ruling elite accumulation and parcel out land to the rent payers. One remembers fully well the chilling story of the homeless people who were massacred by the ruling party police. Thus the challenges that the social forum had to deal with are gross and present such a ‘grotesque’ picture that one feels compelled to –humbly- congratulate the Zimbabwe Social Forum in keeping ‘reality of the impossible possible’ Having said this, it is only progressive that I

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contribute to the debates around the history, future and possibilities made inevitable by this space. Is it not only fair that, one driven by the reality of the impossible, throws from time to time 'anathema' so that empires and tyranny may be broken?

This article intends therefore to modestly contribute –in some certain sections excite – debate on the future of the social forum space as it becomes more and more 'nationalized' (localized). How encouraged I was when I heard and read that the comrades in Tanzania are working on the Tanzania Social Forum, a process that needs to be strengthened to meet the agenda that the social movements set when they met in Addis and in Bamako. Back to the reflections on the ZSF, first is the debate around the form, structure and direction of the social forum as a 'space', the important questions being that as the social forum is nationalized (localized) what are the important issues to be considered and sharpened at the organizational level? To what extent possible can the nationalized social forum remain only a space meeting once a year and only 'recalling' its structures when the next date approaches? Secondly what are the lessons that can be drawn around the need of expanding participation? And what are some of the important 'classes' of activists and organizations that need to claim this space? In this regard emphasis-not to the exclusion of others-is discussed around the participation and engagement of the intellectual class, the youth movement and the 'informal' sector.

A mere space?

That the social forum is a space is uncontested but what that space must become as participation increases and social conditions worsen is heavily contested by various schools of thought. This debate has been going on at the international level around the World Social Forum and it also –briefly- came up in the meetings of the Zimbabwe Social Forum Council. What are these contesting positions and of what significance are they to the Zimbabwe Social Forum? In summary the contesting positions are that the Zimbabwe Social Forum must remain a 'space' only and avoid being 'organizational' arguing that this will drive it into the *cul de sac* of sectarianism and seduce undemocratic control of its agenda by certain sections of the forum. Contesting this view is the school of thought that argues that the social forum must become a living theater of struggle –it must be organic and facilitate mass mobilization reaching out to previously marginalised social forces. The first debate seems to be supported by the World Social Forum Charter that declares that the social forum must be open and non-confessional and therefore it must not become a super-NGO. For this argument the adoption of the WSF Charter of Principles binds the ZSF to the acceptance of these principles, deviation therefore comrades is defeatist.

On the other hand the later debate seems to drive the view that the social forum must become a more pronounced space for joint resolutions and joint actions meaning that it moves towards some stronger organizational form to match the demands of a more definitive struggle against neo-liberal experiments. Of what use then is the 'space' if dies and only resurrects as an annual reincarnation?

This ongoing debate becomes very pertinent especially for the Zimbabwe Social Forum since it has to deal with 'growth' challenges and building an 'organizational' form that fulfills these challenges. The ZSF has a remarkable challenge of contributing to a struggle whose

agenda includes undoing the damage done by marginalization spanning back centuries; from primitive accumulation, a nationalist struggle, a failed neo-liberal project and the current status quo of a reactionary state. Some important factors that need to be considered in confronting this debate are related to the following issues. 1) What are issues around the organizational structure of the Zimbabwe Social Forum and its implication on 'continuity' and the tasks of organizing demanded thereof 2) the mobilization challenge for mass participation vs the local conditions especially with regards to the closure of democratic space by the ruling regime 3) the nature of the working class conditions and their implication on organizational challenges and the fact that the nationalized social forum is being held at the 'point of production' where ownership and claiming the space can not be jumped over.

...A backgrounder

Before pushing forward any debate informed by the above factors one must consider the background to this debate and the brief history of the development of the Zimbabwe Social Forum itself in Zimbabwe starting in 2003. These are important factors in answering a dangerous assumption that the social forum is an 'alien' idea that is not applicable in dealing with the challenges faced by the progressive sections of society and the working class in the struggle for a better country. Firstly the discussion to hold the Zimbabwe Social Forum edition was initiated by activists and progressive organizations that had experienced and participated in the World Social Forum editions where they found an increasing need to 'nationalize' this process. This immensely got support from activists who had participated in the Social Movements Indaba sessions and the 30,000 'red' march to Sandton during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002. These activists that participated at the WSF felt the disarticulation of gathering every year at the World Social Forum and coming back home to their own little spaces and forgetting about it until the following year. Thus there was a local dialogue –urbanized as it seemed- to establish task committees that would drive a process of 'exciting' activists and progressive NGOs around the idea of nationalizing the social forum. These activists are themselves involved in campaigns around debt, aid, privatization, workers rights, women's rights, peace and justice, popular democracy and economic policy alternatives; issues that have rallied their participation in the World Social Forum in the first place. Secondly in the first edition of the Zimbabwe Social Forum the closing plenary agreed that the Social Forum is not an 'innocent space' and that it is taking sides with the poor. This is a commitment that the Zimbabwean activists and progressive organizations agreed when adopting the Zimbabwe Social Forum Charter in 2003, an affirmation to expand struggles against corporate globalization. These two factors help to interpret the fact that the Zimbabwean social forum is informed by two important factors 1) the need to establish a democratic space committed to mass participation linked to a global movement for social justice and popular democracy and 2) committed to the struggle against corporate globalization and its manifestations at a local level.

1) Organizational challenges

Experiences and lessons from the first edition of the Zimbabwe Social Forum informed the debate that resulted in the establishment of the National Organizing Committee (NOC), the Tasks Committees and the Youth Committee that have been responsible for mobilization,

media work, fundraising, venue organizing and other tasks. These structures were added onto the Zimbabwe Social Forum Council that is essentially the driving force of the social forum and is open to participation by representatives of organizations, movements and activists that agree to the principles expressed in the ZSF Charter of principles. It is a democratic and open structure that makes decisions and where possible allocates responsibilities to the task committees and brings the whole structures to some accountability. Although not a point labored on, the creation of the NOC seemed to some to be the acceptance of some 'board' that will act on the Council's behalf a situation that might seduce them to become the social forum themselves. This debate while important in pointing out the need to subject the NOC to account to the Council must itself be restrained by the practical needs that are created by the organizational tasks of the forum, especially the administrative tasks.

For continuity and for the smooth 'organizational' purpose it has become important to maintain and hopefully expand these committees as participation increases and new different conditions emerge. Thus the ZSF has to maintain a democratic and open organizational structure that is able to pursue with some orderliness the administrative functions that are needed for holding the social forum.

'Self-activity' as expressed in organizing to claim the social forum space does not preclude efficient organization, any serious movement purporting to present itself as an alternative for marginalized voices can not afford the luxury of romanticizing about tasks that can make it flounder and dither at the first interaction with the local conditions especially in a country like Zimbabwe. The organizations, activists and movements claiming the social forum space cannot afford to burst like a soap bubble in its first contact with the harsh realities of the ground (the reactionary state). Where the 'uncivil republic' has usurped people power and closed all spaces of free expression and association the social forum must develop its own publications, newsletters, website and running outreach dialogues that mobilize and expand expansion. Factors that make -the more- a case for the construction and entrenchment of an organizational form that meets these challenges.

2) Mobilization for Democratic mass participation vs The reactionary state

One of the factors that are important in a country like Zimbabwe is the role of the reactionary state. It stares the 'space' in the face; a factor that was very evident when the police denied the ZSF organizers to hold the 2004 edition in the Harare Gardens. The reactionary state while being soft because they think the 'space' is abstract they will become more interested as debates become sharper and begin to push solidarity towards challenging the reactionary nature of the state. While the ZSF might not develop a political program to challenge this undemocratic and reactionary nature of the state one considers that in the ZSF there are progressive organizations like the NCA, the ZCTU, ZINASU and the women's and residents organizations that are challenging the state on issues of governance. So the need for expansion of the space is pitted against a reactionary state whose discretion must be seduced every year to get 'authorization' to hold the Social Forum.

One remembers the argument put forward by Dave Malungisa around the need for mass participation in the African Social Forum, arguing that 'the counting that we need to do is; how many thousands will attend the Forum; mass mobilization, creativity and ideological

clarity must define the nature of our forum...’ The same argument is applicable to the Zimbabwean process, that it must be democratic, open, mass based but importantly it must not miss the ‘ideological’ clarity that must drive the national social movements. This need in itself prescribes organizational tasks that are unavoidable. First if you want effective mass participation then it becomes unrealistic to think that the ZSF Committees and its organizational center can be constructed and dissolved and then recalled. The demand for effective participation necessitates that the progressive organizations and activists meeting in the ‘space’ transform the social forum into a living process.

Through the year the task of the NOC and the task committees become that of being focal points of mobilization of groups that are not effectively participating in the social forum process. The ‘political economics’ of the Zimbabwean struggle must be understood carefully, one of this factor being that the ‘rabble’ is no longer only to be found within the factories, they are now concentrated in the ‘informal sector’. Which has no unions and the only organized formations in this sector are often some community-based organizations that have limited reach and capacity to mobilize for example the millions of women who work in this sector. Secondly the high rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe means that beyond challenging the system on the ‘conveyor belt’ millions of often-unorganized youths will remain outside the social forum. The transformation of the space into a living space –at least at the national level-comes with it the possibility of building a mass movement for the struggles for democratization in Zimbabwe but more importantly it readies the working class –youth, workers, women, peasants – for the struggle against neo-liberal experiments and the limitation of democracy only to equality and not equity. This transformation amalgamates –not through building a super NGO but rather amalgamating solidarity and action- the energies and creative possibility created by the various progressive sites of the struggle for democratization and social transformation. Making possible the liberation of the working class from the prevailing social conditions that are being maintained by a reactionary and corrupt state neo-liberal corporate globalization.

One duty that the social forum provides is its capacity –at least growing now- to unmask the African development crisis especially with regards to the ‘new forms of colonialism’ where the marauding colonial brigands and exclusionary settler minorities are replaced with a local elite and a reactionary state. Zimbabwe has experienced this especially after the implementation of ESAP –a project that even Iden Wetherel said was a faith unmoved by facts- the international institutions were unconcerned with democracy in Zimbabwe as Samir Amir warns that the sustenance of capitalism need not rely on a democratic state. Unlike in colonial Africa where ‘imperialism’ and ‘settler colonialism’ stood in your face screaming evidenced by its pass laws, its dispossession, the discrimination, racism and savage exploitation of the working class one can no longer put up a slogan and the masses are immediately able to say Pamberi NeChimurenga. Yet their social conditions are explained in terms of social stratification and that they are here because of a governance crisis –a bait that is entrenched by the bourgeoisie intellectual class that says it is only our institutions of governance that are bad- in such a dangerous scenario were our horizon are limited by middle class intellectual analyses to understand why we are here the social forum provides an open space not tied down to ‘democratic centralism’.

3) The nature of the working class conditions and the point of 'production' factor

Most importantly the social forum must become a living space because the national unlike-well to some extent-the world social forum it meets at the point of 'production'. Reflecting after Mumbai in 2004, Charles Mutasa, pointed out that one can not pontificate about poverty, about homelessness, about discrimination, about social violence; you see it, it stares in your face right on the streets. The nationalized social forum is being held where the circles of poverty, disease and underdevelopment are entrenched. One does not have to show videos, pictures and say long speeches about how the 'rabble' is being marginalized and squeezed by corporate globalization, you look into the faces of the people and you see the effect of the collapsed public services, you look over the fence and the evidence of poor unemployed youth roaming the streets confront you, you look again and you see women struggling to sell vegetables with a child on the back to make a living.

Simply put the shocking reality of poor social conditions natured by a ruling elite and accelerated by structural adjustment are evident around you. In such a scenario do you just maintain the 'space' only as a weekend excursion to debate, see old friends and ponder about how there is nothing left of the left? Remembering fully well that you have taken sides with the poor, do you just say that well see you next year folks? These are fundamental questions that become necessary as the social forum meets at the national level with people who are disparaged and excluded that telling them to meet next year confuses them and sends them wondering why they gathered, debated, networked and built relations. In understanding the 'political economics' of the Zimbabwean crisis one is drawn to two important realities 1) the limited capacity of working class organizations to mobilize its members 2) the sometimes unwillingness –sometimes driven by a fear of upsetting funding partners –of NGO aristocrats to deploy their capacities to mobilize the working class for social action.

These factors are important when considering the mobilization challenge that the social forum faces if its going to fulfill the objectives set by the declarations of the African social movements and progressive activists in Bamako and in Addis. How then do you reach out to the 'unorganized sections' of the working class? The millions that are working in the informal sector, the hundreds of thousands of youth in the townships and the women who are not interacting with the liberal bourgeoisie women's institutions? If the 'impossible that we dream' is to become inevitable then an attempt to develop a program that reaches out to the effective mobilization of these social bases is important. And to live, as argued earlier, this important task to ad hoc task committees that meet and disband at unplanned behest is to drive the social forum to an inevitable demise; that of unsustainability. To date progressive organizations –have to their ability, capacity and priority –been able to deploy resources to the social forum. What then becomes of it when this capacity to 'volunteer' for the 'space' diminishes and due to changing conditions these organizations are unable to fulfill the important and necessary obligations demanded by the social forum organizational tasks? Does it disband? Becoming another failed 'project' proposal? This scare serves to put into perspective an assertion that the social forum, for the sake of its agenda and in developing its capacity, must move speedily towards a definitive organizational form that serves to meet the demands of mobilization, reaching out to the working class and making sure it survives beyond the NGO aristocrats.

On other matters.

(a) What about the MDC?, (b) On engaging the intellectual class (c) Building a new heritage (d) The Mumbai Factor (e) The Fire this time; the challenge for the youth movement (f) Dreaming the impossible; Towards a definitive democratic mass struggle in Zimbabwe

(a) What about the MDC?

Well this is a difficult matter. Why must one be tempted to discuss about political parties? Are political parties not the easiest way of de-politicizing the working class? Are political parties not the easiest way of surrendering the working class agenda to a liberal intellectual class only interested in creating a bourgeoisie democracy? In debating this matter lets venture a little into the theories of development. That statism has come under attack in the developing countries, especially with the introduction of structural adjustment, is foregone but we must not forget what this so called 'efficient and lean state' provides for international capitalism. First the state maintains arms of coercion that are always called to enforce implementation of 'deregulation', removal of subsidies and sustained attacks on the working class.

Lets not be abstract, in Zimbabwe the reactionary state amended labor relations statutes to make the labor market 'more flexible' and attract foreign investment, when the townships went up in barricades the reactionary state pushed in the coercive arms of the state to butcher working people. If the state is 'irrelevant' as an instrument of development how then do you explain the fact that it is the duty of the state to protect private property and any complicity by the state to affect this right by pursuing a redistributive is attacked. The same critiques of the state call upon the state to act –meaning the coercive parts of the state. At an international level the same state still plays an important role, that of signing off the working class' gains and welfare at the World Trade Organization, WIPO, Free trade agreements and memorandums with the IMF and the World Bank. The state is therefore an important instrument for the local rent paying elite endeavoring to strike deals with international capital but also as displayed above the state remains a strong mode of reproducing and protecting the interests of international capitalism. Thus the state –for a progressive or revolutionary or reformist- must remain an area of great contestation furthermore when the working class sees the potential of a progressive agenda once there has been a change.

If the liberal intellectual class and the 'lobby' groups that support neo-liberalism were not so interested in the state themselves then why then do they fund political parties and sponsor certain candidates? We then know for sure that the state is an important instrument of some kind of development, whether that based on the mantra of growth or that based on people before profits. Am I then saying the social forum space must assume an organizational form that drives it towards a political organization –as in a party- that challenges the ruling elite? An answer to this question lies in the Charter where its principles declare an exclusion of political parties. But as I argued before that this social forum is a 'nationalized' social forum

then certain conditions prescribe to it certain organizational forms or persuasions that might be anathema at the level of the World Social Forum, after all is the social forum not created to serve the growing and overwhelming need to build solidarity and expand the frontiers for the liberation of the ‘rabble’, what Ashwin Desai calls the ‘poors’? So it is this relation with the MDC and the social forces claiming the space that I attempt –modestly- to deal with in the following paragraphs.

I will proceed with a debate that appreciates a point made by Munyaradzi Gwisai – a comrade that I have debated, agreed and sometimes sharply differed with- that the MDC represented a post independent crystallization of the working class struggle in Zimbabwe and to wish it away will be infantilism. Lets put aside for the moment the fact that –tragic as it may seem- the political economics of the 1990s did not crystallize in a more definitive anti-capitalist workers party. At least the formation of the MDC and its capacity and potential to improve issues of governance remain possible avenues to provide space –that will still be contested by NGO aristocrats -to the progressive sections of the working class and the progressive social movements to push forward a progressive agenda. The social forum while not creating itself as a ‘new site’ of struggle must be able to relate to sections of the MDC that are progressive and militant and are at least pushing forward an agenda for democratization. While the ‘conquest and retention of political power’ is not the primary focus of the social forum one must draw examples that the Workers Party led by Lula Da Silva was able to put forward some kind a progressive agenda. The Workers Party turned its municipalities into examples of participatory democracy, a process that encouraged the holding of the first edition of the World Social Forum in 2001.

Importantly the struggle for democratization being led by the MDC –the political struggle- represents an important stage in creating a bourgeoisie democratic state that will help create a constitutional democracy –as idealized in the NCA Draft Constitution –that will protect people’s political and civil rights; a state of affairs that will open up the possibility of further organizing and agitation for social transformation –the economic struggle. Immediately one asks, is this not reform rather than revolution? Attempting to respond to this question will lead me in an unnecessary –at least for now- debate. But let me briefly comment that the democratization that the social forces meeting in the space are agitating for is not a limited type of democracy of a limited Bill of Rights and independent and accountable institutions of governance. This type of democracy in the words of Mamdani is ‘...not just political; it is also cultural and economic...’ I will assert therefore that which ever way one looks at it the MDC still holds the potential –especially after the boycott decision -of shifting the balance of forces in favor of a political transition that will move towards a bourgeoisie democratic state under which the progressive sections of the MDC and of the working class will find it more easier to radicalize other sections of the working class taking advantage of the ‘independent institutions like the judiciary, the Parliament and the media’ created by the rights –limited as they maybe -entrenched by a bourgeoisie democracy.

Above all if you look at the sections of the working class and even NGO aristocrats –even those attracted by tokens when the MDC takes power- they have some relation with the MDC and the unorganized youth, the unemployed, workers and women still look forward to the leadership of the MDC. It will be infantilism –again- to think that the social forum must attempt to exclude these sections. One of the debates that emerged in the Youth Camp in 2003 was the challenge of mobilizing the hundreds of thousands of youth that are ‘new’

those that have not been radicalized by any action as was in the 1990s –the decade of IMF riots- when whole townships rebelled against poor social conditions. The ruling regime has already moved with speed to capture this important social force into the ‘sycophant nationalism and patriotism’ pushed down their throats in the camps, in their education curriculum and in the state media. A look at our ranks will reveal that we are still relying –at least in my view- on the young activists who where radicalized by the 1990s and the struggle against privatization in the universities; thus the conveyor belt of activists and leadership has been stalled risking the present capacity of the movement and its future especially from burn out and as others disappear –at the frustration of failing to make it into the upper middle class– into the diaspora.

Because these sections of the movement invested their energies and often lives for the MDC it becomes difficult not to relate to them and utilize their experience in ‘teaching’ and learning –an important part of a revolutionary- progressive analyses that prepare them for the ongoing struggle for democratization. The political struggle must not however run into the parochialism of not building a political program that is informed by the ‘political economics’ of the Zimbabwean struggle –colonialism, failed post colonial transformation and a failed neo-liberal experiment. If at all, the social forum must become an instrument of progressive exchange and informed political economy analyses. It is a confluence, a convergence of the old –radicalized by the 1990s- meeting the new that have been denied a life under the current crisis in Zimbabwe. In this ways the space relates to its old self –the MDC (for the MDC was an amalgamation of progressive forces) -and builds stronger links with the new progressive melange that will take forward the struggle for democratization and social transformation in Zimbabwe.

(b) Engaging progressive intellectual class

The York University in Canada hosted a debate entitled ‘Africa-The next Liberation’ (http://www.arts.yorku.ca/african_liberation/theme/theme_index.html) and the debates that came out of the background papers pointed out the need of sharpening debates and inform the ‘theoretical’ thrust of the struggle that is crystallizing in Africa. A challenge that must also be taken up at the level of a people’s forum that has taken sides with the ‘poors’. Thus it is always necessary to engage the intellectual class taking caution that such engagement is only necessary to the point of their debates and ‘alternative’ thinking help to move the theoretical base for the social movement. The social movement is pitted against a hegemonic system that is attacking the need of understanding the ‘political economics’ of the social conditions of the working class, economists are being trained to interpret statistics and graphs according to the dictates of an ‘free market’ removing the human function in their equations and pushing for ‘jobless and ruthless growth’. Thus as the social movement deepens and expands at the national level local, new conditions demand new forms of organizing, this process can be moved forward by intensifying the mobilization of the progressive intellectual class to participate in the social forum space with a view of them taking forward the debate around constructing the theory/ideology that will drive Africa’s next liberation.

The social movements all over the globe are developing their ‘ideologues’ that are not necessarily professors and experts but the contribution of the progressive intellectual class is a pillar in enhancing the capacity of the social movements to say this is what we are fighting

for. This process can not be delayed any longer because by doing so the social forum postpones the development of an 'revolutionary' theory that will drive a revolutionary movement for the liberation of Africa from the systemic hegemony of corporate globalization and from the undemocratic shackles of a ruling regimes and the rent paying corrupt local elite. The intellectual class will play an important role in writing critiques of the Zimbabwean political economy, building on land mark theoretical debates pushed forward in the Beyond ESAP document and the Declaration of the Working People's Convention. Theoretical debates and engagement will deal with important issues like how does the movement relate to the 'the new farmers' especially those that are being evicted and such issues as the basis of building a mass movement to deepen the struggle against tyranny and enhance social justice.

Am I then calling for a 'revolutionary vanguard of intellectuals' –envisioned by Cabral- to in absolute be responsible for developing the theory of our liberation? Am I not confining thinking to a certain class that must monopolize the thinking on behalf of the masses? Am I not dumping Gramsci's valid assertion that says everyone is a philosopher? Am I not arguing for the creation of some kind of 'advanced and resolute section of the working class...that have over the greater mass the advantage of understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletariat movement' To these questions I say no. To put forward a debate for the creation of a 'revolutionary intellectual vanguard' is to mobilize the intellectual class as a privileged; an all-knowing class who must lead an unknowing rabble. Such a position will be to attempt to delete and ignore the experience and knowledge that the working class has gained in the practical struggle against poor social conditions. Rather it is precisely because progressive intellectuals occupy an important space that I argue for them to be mobilized as but one part of the social space. The progressive intellectual is able to push forward ideas through interaction with students, interaction with the working class and in some cases they have the unique opportunity of being afforded space in publications and in some forms of mass media. Thus through these spaces of communication the progressive intellectual is able to put forward a critical and progressive analysis that initiates debate and sparks progressive consensus on social struggles in Zimbabwe.

To this I must quickly add that I am not talking about just any other intellectual I am talking about the progressive intellectual who has deliberately chosen not to be co-opted and act on behalf of the institutions either of the local tyranny or of the international capitalist system. The progressive intellectual class must –or risk irrelevance -serve as an organic part of the struggling working class, this type of intellectual is divorced from idealism because they combine theory with practice. They are able to make philosophy serve the interests of the popular masses who are 'making history' in such a case the theory/philosophy becomes liberating.

A strong interpretation in this matter is that pushed by Wamba Dia Wamba warning that, 'Either philosophy unites with the popular masses of the people who make authentic national history and is thus liberating; or it is separated from the masses –idealizes itself –and loses its creative foundation and thus becomes oppressive. In today's Africa to think is increasingly to think against imperialism...' Thus by engaging the progressive intellectual class we are able to in the words of Amilcar Cabral 'analyze the history of development of that political force to examine its weakness and strength and seek ways of strengthening it

further, not from outside but from within'. In this way the open and democratic space created and entrenched by the social forum provides an important convergence point, building further important links between the progressive intellectual and the working class. The battles that emerge from the social forum provide forward and backward linkages, the intellectual is ripped out of idealism and on the other hand the working class' positions are strengthened by an intellectual who has become organic and whose thinking serves the masses in their quest for democratization and social transformation.

This process can be ignited by holding seminars, public engagements and running an email debate list now and between the forums, here the progressive intellectuals must take the space and face the challenge of constructing and debating a post-nationalist, post neo-liberal political economy theory that will drive Africa's next liberation.

(c) Building a new heritage

It might be necessary here to draw example –not perfect- of the liberation movement in South Africa, a process that was able to build the capacity of communities to build, respond and mobilize against apartheid. In Zimbabwe there is an over reliance –that suits labor/NGO aristocrats- of the off/on type of action; the leadership must always give the instructions and you wait for their instructions on any matter. This is unlike in the 1990s where communities acted in defense of common good, yes there were organized mass actions, but what about the spontaneous actions that spread like veld fire? People could act on their own reacting to immediate social conditions that make them act. The on/off control kills the creativity of the communities, they must be able to have their own processes that can and act in defense of common good. From protest action against uncollected refuse, poor conditions at a school or hospital or a poor transport situation. But we do not want this, do we? We call it uncoordinated little actions that slap the shoulders of a lion. Yet these actions, failed or successful they train the organic cadre rather than a leader who has to travel across town to come and organize the rabble.

The space created by the forum hopefully will be able to give back this power to the people and let them know that they have the capacity to act on their own in the defense of the common good. But we do not want this, do we? To whose name will be the action accorded? It serves the NGO and labor aristocrats no political profile to their CVs. Yet if the pro-democracy movement is to move towards a more definitive democratic mass struggle in Zimbabwe then the social forum because of its 'neutrality' must restore this autonomy. This is a horrifying idea to political parties because they are only concerned in marshaling the energies of the working class only when they want to advance their limited interests. Am I then urging anarchy? That no one must be in control of the masses? To this question I plead partly guilty because I myself am horrified 'with turning on and off' the actions of the working class only to fit the interests of the 'party' that seeks power. Beyond that function being fulfilled the masses must be de-politicized so that they don't 'gang' up and –through anarchy- challenge the status quo that was created on their backs.

(d) The Mumbai Factor

In 2004 when the WSF gathered in Mumbai there was an interesting development. Thomas Deve reflected a bit on the Mumbai Resistance when he shared his reflections on the future of the ASF after Mumbai. Across the road from where the WSF gathered there was the Mumbai Resistance. The differences between the MR and the WSF were certainly more than the road that divided the venues of the two ‘forums’. The MR represented a critique of the WSF for being ‘reformist’ and failing to build a concrete mobilization and action program to fight neo-liberal corporate globalization and imperialism. The emergence of the Mumbai Resistance represented an earlier debate that has been haunting the word social forum debates; that of mass participation, the direction of the agenda and moving towards a more definitive and concrete struggle. I will not attempt at least for now to exchange on this debate at the international level but it is a debate that the ‘nationalized’ social forum must confront and debate on. Below is a thought provoking speech given at a mass meeting when the delegate returned to Argentina.

Lets turn briefly to an interesting speech by Hebe Bonafani from the Madres in Argentina;

“Comrades we were in Porto Alegre on the occasion of the Second World Social Forum. More than 50, 000 participated in this weeklong event. There were large numbers of people from all over the world, including thousands of youth.

1) There were different levels to the WSF. First, there were the small gatherings of those who were in charge, controlling things. They were led by the French, mainly from an association called ATTAC, and by others from a few other countries.

2) Then there was the commissions and seminars, where all the intellectuals, philosophers and thinkers participated.

3) *And then there were the rank and file folks. We participated at this level, and we discussed with all sorts of people. But the fact is that we were brought to the WSF so that we could listen –not so the rank and file to participate. (my own emphasis)*

Reading through this speech one is taken to the depth of a debate that is important for the social forum in Zimbabwe, at what level do we place emphasis of participation. At the level of the ‘small gathering’, ‘the commissions’ or at the ‘rank and file’ level. This is important in that unlike at the WSF where the big NGOs can bring their delegates at the national forum the ‘rabble’ is all there around you and in some cases the cost of sending one person to the WSF is able to bring in hundreds of working people.

(e) The fire this time; youth & the space

The 2003 Youth Camp represented the first time that the Youth Camp was held and experiences from it –its weaknesses and few strengths- informed the way that this year’s camp was organized; bringing in more numbers from different sections of the youth movement and not clogging it with the usual suspects. Why the youth? Looking at the anti-capitalist movement worldwide it is evident that the millions of people who have marched in disdain against war, ‘free trade’ deals and against neo-liberal experiments have been youth. In the Northern countries there is another factor; young people are now impatient with the traditional institutions of ‘politics; the big NGOs, the political parties and the trade unions

most of whom have been corporatised. In the developing countries women and youth are the most hit by the social conditions created by neo-liberal experiments.

The labor movement has taken a progressive bold step in mobilizing its young workers through a structure; this will serve two purposes 1) as a training ground for young workers and 2) provide an interface with other youth organizations. The youth movement in Zimbabwe faces two immediate challenges; that of 1) mass mobilization and 2) building and recruiting more cadres that are prepared to train and teach other.

The autonomy that the youth are currently enjoying at the forum must be utilized and exploited to the full. The links that are built at the forum, during mobilization and in meetings must be taken beyond the social forum they must become the basis of building a progressive mass youth movement that is not limited by 'jackets', being NCA, being ZINASU, being MDC or being ZCTU. This is a big challenge considering that some of the activists already have limited their participation on this basis, a tragedy that will only serve to entrench artificial divisions and takes the struggle a step back. Speedily therefore as the social forum becomes a living theatre of struggle the youth must not stand aside; they must take the task of organizing and active solidarity seriously and move to push forward an agenda that unites the youth movement around issues that are important to them and that push forward the frontiers of liberation.

The ability of the youth comrades to produce a daily 'vibe', their capacity to bring together previously unmobilized sections and their capacity to establish themselves as an important feature of the social forum are important landmark developments that are going to make sure that they will come to a 'revolution on their way'. To this work I say congratulations and indeed we have nothing to lose but our chains. As one comrade said, it is only when we the young people start to think and act for ourselves that we will build a liberation that is permanent and lasting. Without this ability we will be told to rebel against our friends and embrace our oppressors; the issues are there and are not hard to find. Massive unemployment, poor social services, poor conditions for the working youths and the collapsed education sector.

But I will hasten to say that this space that we are creating will remain half worked if we do not develop stronger links with the young women who often are being placed at the bottom because of the social violence in this society. Through meetings with them they will come to understand that this is not just another 'space for patriarchy to contest power' and that it is a space that they must claim and push a progressive agenda for the liberation of women. They will come to understand that a 'woman's place is in the struggle'. But to learn more and build its capacity the youth movement must build a progressive links with groups in the North so that 'resistance can be globalised'.

On these matters I say this process is becoming deeper and irreversible.

(f) Dreaming the impossible? Towards a democratic and definitive mass struggle in Zimbabwe

Finally - for now - a word of exhortation to comrades. The 'political economics' of the Zimbabwean struggle necessitate a transformation of the 'space' into a living space with

millions of activists that understand the nature of the crisis -the correct analysis- and hence are prepared to work in building a new heritage of democratic mass struggle that will make the hijacking of liberation impossible or at least difficult. One must understand that political parties -no matter how progressive -are not prepared to build such a legacy of democratic mass struggles lest tomorrow the rabble challenge them when they are in power. More often than not ‘...armed liberation struggles did not provide the experience or habits which would help foster democratic systems of governance after independence or respect for human rights’. Faced with the current struggle for democratization and social transformation in Zimbabwe the social forum presents the need emerging need to build and entrench a democratic mass movement that does not subordinate democratic processes to the overall agenda of liberation.

In South Africa the Landless People’s Movement has embarked on a campaign on jobs, land and too. We must write to them our experiences especially with ‘market based’ land reform so that they strengthen their struggle so that ‘those who work the land must share it’. Jubilee South Africa is pushing forward the struggle against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. New frontiers of struggle are being opened and sustained everyday. In a few weeks time the African Social Forum will converge and the Social Movements Indaba will be participating; indeed how one wishes that these processes will amalgamate and the working people will be liberated.

In this way the social forum will play an important part to mobilize Africa’s next liberation, precisely because we are ‘realists and we dream the impossible’ the issues debated here – albeit cautiously-will play their part in contributing an exchange that will drive Africa’s liberation.