

The Living Democracy Movement

Alternatives To The Bankruptcy Of Globalization

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The Bankruptcy of Globalization

Globalization was projected as the next great leap of human evolution in a linear forward march from tribes to nations to global markets. Our identities and context were to move from the national to the global, just as in the earlier phase of state driven globalization, it was supposed to have moved from the local to the global.

Deregulated commerce and corporate rule was offered as the alternative to the centralized bureaucratic control under communist regimes and state dominated economies. Markets were offered as an alternative to states for regulating our lives, not just our economies.

As the globalization project has unfolded, it has exposed its bankruptcy at the philosophical, political, ecological and economic levels. The bankruptcy of the dominant world order is leading to social, ecological, political and economic non-sustainability, with societies, ecosystems, and economies disintegrating and breaking down.

The philosophical and ethical bankruptcy of globalization was based on reducing every aspect of our lives to commodities and reducing our identities to merely that of consumers on the global market place. Our capacities as producers, our identity as members of communities, our role as custodians of our natural and cultural heritage were all to disappear or be destroyed. Markets and consumerism expanded. Our capacity to give and share were to shrink. But the human spirit refuses to be subjugated by a world view based on the dispensability of our humanity.

The dominant political and economic order has a number of features that are new, which increase injustice and non-sustainability on scales and at rates that the earth and human community have not experienced.

1. It is based on enclosures of the remaining ecological commons -- biodiversity, water and air, and the destruction of local economies on which people's livelihoods and economic security depends.
2. The commodification of water and biodiversity is ensured through new property rights built into trade agreements like the WTO which are transforming people's resources into corporate

monopolies viz. TRIPs and trade in environmental goods and services.

3. The transformation of commons to commodities is ensured through shifts in governance with decisions moving from communities and countries to global institutions, and rights moving from people to corporations through increasingly centralized and unaccountable states acting on the principle of eminent domain -- the absolute sovereignty of the ruler.

This in turn led to political bankruptcy and anti-democratic formations and constellations. Instead of acting on the public trust doctrine and principles of democratic accountability and subsidiarity, globalization led to governments usurping power from parliaments, regional and local governments, and local communities.

For example the TRIPs agreement was based on central governments hijacking the rights to biodiversity and knowledge from communities and assigning them as exclusive, monopolistic rights to corporations.

The Agreement on Agriculture was based on taking decisions away from farming communities and regional governments.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) takes decisions and ownership over water from the local and public domain to the privatized, global domain.

This undemocratic process of privatization and deregulation led to increased political bankruptcy and corruption and economic bankruptcy.

A decade of corporate globalization has led to major disillusionment and discontentment. Democracy has been eroded, livelihoods have been destroyed. Small farmers and businesses are going bankrupt everywhere. Even the promise of economic growth has not been delivered. Economic slow down has been the outcome of liberalizing trade. Ironically some corporations that led the process of trade liberalization and globalization have themselves collapsed.

Enron which came to India as the "Flagship" project of globalization with the full force of backing and blackmail by the US Trade Representative has gone bankrupt and is steeped in scandals of corruption. Chiquita, which forced the banana wars on Europe through a US/Europe WTO dispute has also declared bankruptcy.

First South East Asia, now Argentina have exposed how vulnerable and volatile current economic arrangements are.

The non-sustainability and bankruptcy of the ruling world order is fully evident. The need for alternatives has never been stronger.

Creating alternatives to Corporate Globalization

During the last decade of the 20th century, corporate driven globalization shook up the world and the economic and political structures that we have shaped to govern us.

In December 1999, citizens of the world rebelled against the economic totalitarianism of corporate globalization. Social and economic justice and ecological sustainability became the rallying call for new movements for citizen freedoms and liberation from corporate control.

September 11th 2001 shut down the spaces that people's movements had opened up. It also brought back the focus on the intimate connection between violence, inequality and non-sustainability and the indivisibility of peace, justice and sustainability. Doha was rushed through in the shadow of global militarization in response to the terror attacks.

As we face the double closure of spaces by corporate globalization and militarized police states, by economic fascism aided by political fascism, our challenge is to reclaim our freedoms and the freedoms of our fellow beings. Reclaiming and recreating the indivisible freedom of all species is the aim of the Living Democracy Movement. The living democracy movement embodies two indivisibilities and continuums. The first is the continuum of freedom for all life on earth, and all humans without discrimination on the basis on gender, race, religion, class and species. The second is the continuum between and indivisibility of justice, peace and sustainability -- without sustainability and just share of the earth's bounties there is no justice, and without justice three can be no peace.

Corporate globalization ruptures these continuities. It establishes corporate rule through a divide and rule policy, and creates competition and conflict between different species and peoples and between different aims. It transforms diversity and multiplicity into oppositional differences both by breeding fundamentalisms through spreading insecurity and then using these fundamentalisms to shift humanities focus and preoccupation from

sustainability and justice and peace to ethnic and religious conflict and violence.

We need a new paradigm to respond to the fragmentation caused by various forms of fundamentalism. We need a new movement which allows us to move from the dominant and pervasive culture of violence, destruction and death to a culture of non-violence, creative peace and life. That is why in India we started the living democracy movement.

Creative Resistance

Seattle was a watershed for citizens movements. People brought an international trade agreement and WTO the institution that enforces it to a halt by mobilizing globally against corporate globalization. Seattle was the success of a strategy focusing on the global level and on protest. It articulated at the international level what citizens do not want. Corporations and governments responded quickly to Seattle's success. They killed protest possibilities by moving to venues like Doha where thousands could not gather. And they started to label protest and dissent of any kind as "terrorism".

The Biotech industry (Economist, Jan 12th, 18th, p62)) has called on governments to use anti-terror laws against groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the earth and groups critical of the industry.

Mr. Zoellick, the US Trade Representative has called the anti-globalization movement terrorist.

A different strategy is needed post September 11/post Doha. Massive protests at global meetings can no longer be the focus on citizen mobilization. We need international solidarity and autonomous organizing. Our politics needs to reflect the principle of subsidiarity. Our global presence cannot be a shadow of the power of corporations and Bretton-Woods institutions. We need stronger movements at local and national levels, movements that combine resistance and constructive action, protests and building of alternatives non-cooperation with unjust rule and cooperation within society. The global, for us, must strengthen the local and national, not undermine it. The two tendencies that we demand of the economic system needs to be central to people's politics -- localization and alternatives. Both are not just economic alternatives they are democratic alternatives. Without them forces for change cannot be mobilized in the new context.

At the heart of building alternatives and localizing economic and political systems is the recovery of the commons and the reclaiming of community. The living democracy movement is reclaiming people's sovereignty and community rights to natural resources.

Rights to natural resources are natural rights. They are not given by States, nor can they be extinguished by States, the

W.T.O, or by corporations, even though under globalization, attempts are being made to alienate people's rights to vital resources of land water and biodiversity.

Globalization has relocated sovereignty from people to corporations, through centralizing, militarizing States. Rights of people are being appropriated by States to carve out monopoly rights of corporations over our land, our water, our biodiversity, our air. States acting on the principle of eminent domain or absolute sovereignty of the State are undermining people's sovereign rights and their role as trustees of people's resources on the public trust doctrine. State sovereignty, by itself, is therefore not enough to generate countervailing forces and processes to corporate globalization.

The reinvention of sovereignty has to be based on the reinvention of the state so that the state is made accountable to the people. Sovereignty cannot reside only in centralized state structures, nor does it disappear when the protective functions of the state with respect to its people start to wither away. The new partnership of national sovereignty needs empowered communities which assign functions to the state for their protection. Communities defending themselves always demand such duties and obligations from state structures. On the other hand, TNCs and international agencies promote the separation of the community interests from state interests and the fragmentation and divisiveness of communities.

The living democracy movement

We started the living democracy movement to respond to the enclosures of the commons that is at the core of economic globalization. The living democracy movement is simultaneously an ecology movement, an anti-poverty movement, a recovery of the commons movement, a deepening of democracy movement, a peace movement. It builds on decades of movements defending people's rights to resources, the movements for local, direct democracy, our freedom movements gifts of Swadeshi (economic sovereignty), Swaraj (Self-rule) and Satyagraha (Non-cooperation with unjust rule). It seeks to strengthen rights enshrined in our Constitution.

The living democracy movement in India is a movement to rejuvenate resources, reclaim the commons and deepen democracy. It relates to the democracy of life in three dimensions.

Living democracy refers to the democracy of all life, not just human life. It is about earth democracy not just human democracy.

Living democracy is about life, at the vital everyday level, and decisions and freedoms related to everyday living -- the food we eat the clothes we wear, the water we drink. It is not just about elections and casting votes once in 3 or 4

or 5 years. It is a permanently vibrant democracy. It combines economic democracy with political democracy.

Living democracy is not dead, it is alive. Under globalization, democracy even of the shallow representative kind is dying. Governments everywhere are betraying the mandates that brought them to power. They are centralizing authority and power, both by subverting democratic structures of constitutions and by promulgating ordinances that stifle civil liberties. The Sept 11 tragedy has become a convenient excuse for anti-people legislation worldwide. Politicians everywhere are turning to xenophobic and fundamentalist agendas to get votes in a period when economic agenda have been taken away from national levels and are being set by World Bank, IMF, WTO and global corporations.

The living democracy movement is about living rather than dead democracy. Democracy is dead when governments no longer reflect the will of the people but are reduced to anti-democratic unaccountable instruments of corporate rule under the constellation of corporate globalization as the Enron and Chiquita case make so evident. Corporate globalization is centered on corporate profits.

Living democracy is based on maintaining life on earth and freedom for all species and people.

Corporate globalization operates to create rules for the global, national and local markets which privilege global corporations and threaten diverse species, the livelihoods of the poor and small, local producers and businesses.

Living democracy operates according to the ecological laws of nature, and limits commercial activity to prevent harm to other species and to people.

Corporate globalization is exercised through centralizing, destructive power.

Living democracy is exercised through decentralized power and peaceful coexistence.

Corporate globalization globalizes greed and consumerism. Living democracy globalizes compassion, caring and sharing.

Democracy emptied of economic freedom and ecological freedom becomes a potent breeding ground for fundamentalism and terrorism.

Over the past two decades, I have witnessed conflicts over development and conflicts over natural resources mutate into communal conflicts, culminating in extremism and terrorism. *My book Violence of the Green Revolution* was an attempt to understand the ecology of terrorism. The lessons I have drawn from the growing but diverse

expressions of fundamentalism and terrorism are the following:

Nondemocratic economic systems that centralize control over decision-making and resources and displace people from productive employment and livelihoods create a culture of insecurity. Every policy decision is translated into the politics of "we" and "they." "We" have been unjustly treated, while "they" have gained privileges.

Destruction of resource rights and erosion of democratic control of natural resources, the economy, and means of production undermine cultural identity. With identity no longer coming from the positive experience of being a farmer, a craftsman, a teacher, or a nurse, culture is reduced to a negative shell where one identity is in competition with the "other" over scarce resources that define economic and political power.

Centralized economic systems also erode the democratic base of politics. In a democracy, the economic agenda is the political agenda. When the former is hijacked by the World Bank, the IMF, or the WTO, democracy is decimated. The only cards left in the hands of politicians eager to garner votes are those of race, religion, and ethnicity, which subsequently give rise to fundamentalism. And fundamentalism effectively fills the vacuum left by a decaying democracy. Economic globalization is fueling economic insecurity, eroding cultural diversity and identity, and assaulting the political freedoms of citizens. It is providing fertile ground for the cultivation of fundamentalism and terrorism. Instead of integrating people, corporate globalization is tearing apart communities.

The survival of people and democracy are contingent on a response to the double fascism of globalization -- the economic fascism that destroys people's rights to resources and the fundamentalist fascism that feeds on people's displacement, dispossession, economic insecurities, and fears. On September 11, 2001, the tragic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon unleashed a "war against terrorism" promulgated by the US government under George W. Bush. Despite the rhetoric, this war will not contain terrorism because it fails to address the roots of terrorism-- economic insecurity, cultural subordination, and ecological dispossession. The new war is in fact creating a chain reaction of violence and

spreading the virus of hate. And the magnitude of the damage to the earth caused by "smart" bombs and carpet-bombing remains to be seen.

Living Democracy is true freedom of all life forms to exist on this earth.

Living Democracy is true respect for life, through equitable sharing of the earth's resources with all those who live on the planet.

Living Democracy is the strong and continual articulation of such democratic principles in everyday life and activity.

The constellation of living democracy is people's control over natural resources, and a just and sustainable utilization of land, water, biodiversity, communities having the highest sovereignty and delegating power to the state in its role as trustee. The shift from the principle of eminent domain to the public trust doctrine for functions of the State is key to localization, to recovery of the commons and the fight against privatization and corporate take over of land, water and biodiversity.

This shift is also an ecological imperative. As members of the earth family, Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam, we have a share in the earth's resources. Rights to natural resources for needs of sustenance are natural rights. They are not given or assigned. They are recognized or ignored. The eminent domain principle inevitably leads to the situation of "all for some" -- corporate monopolies over biodiversity through patents, corporate monopolies on water through privatization and corporate monopolies over food through free trade.

The most basic right we have as a species is survival, the right to life. Survival requires guaranteed access to resources. Commons provide that guarantee. Privatization and enclosures destroy it. Localization is necessary for recovery of the commons. And living democracy is the movement to relocate our minds, our production systems and consumption patterns from the poverty creating global markets to the sustainability and sharing of the earth community. This shift from global markets to earth citizenship is a shift of focus from globalization to localization of power from corporations to citizens. The living democracy movement is a movement to establish that a better world is not just possible, it is necessary.

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