'Another world is possible'

A study of participants at Australian *alter-globalization* social forums

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Abstract

The past decade has seen the emergence of a mass 'alter-globalization' move-
ment in many regions of the world. One element in this movement has been
the World Social Forum and its continental, regional, national and local spin-
offs. In the first half of this article I provide a critical analysis of the social forum
experience, particularly the World Social Forum, and outline both those
aspects of the experience that are commonly agreed to be successes as well
as those that are frequently held to be their failings or limitations. In the sec-
ond half of the article, I report on a survey of the participants at two Australian
social forums in 2004, which details their backgrounds, motivations, attitudes,
experience and ambitions. Comparison is made with their closest parallels –
the activists from the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s previ-
ously examined by Offe, Touraine, Melucci and others.

Keywords: anti-globalization, new social movements, World Social Forum

The accelerating processes of economic and financial globalization have
transformed the world economy in the past two decades. These processes
have challenged the capacities and practices of key institutions, both
national (such as governments, central banks and trade unions) and
transnational (such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund
[IMF] and transnational companies [TNCs]). By the same token, globaliza-
tion has confronted communities in both the West and the developing
world with a range of systemic problems arising out of the unchecked
power of international capitalism.

While globalization has its enthusiastic exponents in the field of business
and government, it also has its detractors, from within the financial estab-
lishment (Soros, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002), but most from outside (Danaher and

Burbach, 2000; McNally, 2002). These authors focus on the growing North–South divide, the role of the World Bank and IMF, and the power of the TNCs. The concerns of the critics are now part of the mainstream agenda, finding their way into World Bank publications, international business academic discourse (Wild et al., 2003) and popular consciousness (Pusey, 2003).

The academic critique of globalization has arisen in tandem with the growth of a massive global movement against corporate globalization, what I will call the *alter-globalization* movement.[1] According to Wallerstein (2004), there have been three major milestones in this movement – the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas in 1994, the protests against the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in November 1999, and the first meeting of the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre in Brazil in January 2001. The last of these has spawned a multitude of social forums at all levels and in all continents, which form the focus of interest of this article.

The emergence of social forums
The birth of social forums

The wave of international mass protests in 1999–2002 against meetings of key agencies of international neoliberalism, such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization, the G8 leaders and the World Economic Forum (Burgmann, 2003; Buttel and Gould, 2004) was motivated by the notion that 'Another World is Possible'. But it also gave rise to debates about the form that this 'other world' would take. These debates were the catalyst for the call by eight Brazilian NGOs and the French organization ATTAC to convene the first World Social Forum (WSF). This alternative 'people's assembly', which met for the first time in January 2001 in Porto Alegre, was counterposed to the neoliberal World Economic Forum held each year in Davos in Switzerland. The aim of the Forum was to bring together alternatives to corporate globalization and to give a 'voice to global civil society' (Cassen, 2003). Typically, the Forum comprises a series of parallel events, including large plenaries organized by the Organizing Committee and addressed by well-known figures from the alter-globalization movement, a larger number of thematic workshops, and an enormous number of smaller workshops and seminars organized by participating individuals and groups.

The success of the 2001 Forum, with 25,000 participants, encouraged the organizers to schedule further Forums at Porto Alegre in 2002 and 2003, and then further afield in Mumbai in 2004, Porto Alegre again in 2005 and a 'polycentric' Forum in Mali, Pakistan and Venezuela in 2006. The sheer scale of the WSF is astounding, and it is by far the largest event of its type in the world. At the 2005 Forum, 6873 organizations took part,

with 2500 separate events proposed by 5700 organizations and attended by 155,000 participants. The cost of arranging the event is likewise extremely high, despite large numbers of volunteers. In 2005, the event cost US $6.9 million, with support and administration costs adding a further US $1.4 million. Funding for the 2005 WSF in Brazil was provided by various international cooperation agencies (US $2.4 million in 2005), sympathetic state and municipal governments (US $1.1 million), the federal government (US $1.1 million) and mixed stock corporations (US $1.6 million).[2]

The idea of the World Social Forum spread rapidly. In 2002 the first European Social Forum met in Florence, followed by Forums in Paris and London in 2003–4. Regional (e.g. the Mediterranean Social Forum, the Horn of Africa Social Forum) and city social forums followed, as did themed forums (e.g. the Migration Social Forum in January 2005, the World Water Forum in Geneva in March 2005 and the International Free Software Forum in Porto Alegre in June 2005). Each of these has as its inspiration the World Social Forum. Nonetheless, they are autonomous of each other and the WSF, and there is no organizational or structural relationship between them.

Debating the World Social Forum

Several claims have been made as to the innovative or notable features of the World Social Forum. The first factor is its immense success in drawing together tens of thousands of activists from around the world on a regular basis. In doing so, the Forum has become 'the central locus of anti-systemic activity in the world-system' (Wallerstein, 2004: 634). Smith (2004: 420) describes the WSF as 'the most globally inclusive initiative for fostering transnational civil society'. At the 2005 WSF, there were participants from 149 countries (Ibase, 2005: 1). By far the majority (80–85%) resided in the host country, another 9 percent elsewhere in Latin America, 4.5 percent in Europe (particularly France and Italy), 2.6 percent in North America, 2.5 percent in Asia and a further 1.6 percent in Africa. Only 72 participants, less than 0.1 percent, normally resided in Oceania (Ibase, 2005: 12). Participants from the global South therefore play a much larger role than in other international movements of past years.

The second impressive feature of the WSF is that, after years of defeats, the international left has finally constructed something that inspires its supporters and contributes to shaping world opinion (Waterman, 2004a). The WSF provides 'the basis for a new dialectics of hope' in a grim world (Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004: 152). Third, Teivainen (2002) argues that the WSF and the alter-globalization movement places civil society institutions at the heart of global solidarity, instead of the state-focused structures of previous international solidarity movements.

A further distinctive feature of the Forums is held to be its 'open space' organizing model, enunciated in the Forum's Charter of Principles which

was drawn up in January 2001 by the Brazilian Organizing Committee of the first World Social Forum and which has served as the template of all subsequent forums. The Charter holds that the Forum is an 'open space' for discussion and debate, and is occupied by people brought together in agreement on only one idea, opposition to neoliberalism.[3]

The Forum, according to many of its leading figures, is definitively not a social movement. Chico Whittaker (2004), for example, describes the Forum as not a social movement, nor a 'movement of movements', but 'an incubator' of movements. That is, the WSF provides the space whereby activists interested in forming movements can network. Wallerstein (2004: 634) concurs with the distinction between the Forum as open space and the Forum as movement, describing the Forum instead as 'a family of movements', for example, the landless people's movement, the anti-sweatshop movement, the debt relief movement and so forth. Similarly, Seoane and Taddei (2002: 117), argue that the Forum is 'a forum for international encounter in which the entire universe of anti-neoliberal social and political movements can come together'. As an open space, the Forum passes no resolutions, makes no decisions, organizes no political activities other than the Forum itself, and no-one is mandated to speak on its behalf.

Several benefits are held to accrue from the open space model, most notably inclusiveness of diverse currents and opinions. Thus Biagiotti claims that the open space process 'contributes to the creation of a common political culture, understood as the mutual adjustment of different political cultures by exchange, accommodation and debate' (2004: 535). Every group is accorded equal status, and the non-voting, non-delegate structure of the Forum allows it to produce consensus. According to Biagotti (2004), Forums are therefore 'places of empowerment'. The WSF process prioritizes 'unity in diversity', and thereby avoids one dominant stream of thought, philosophy or ideology that would disenfranchise those not conforming (Pleyers, 2004).

The open space concept is a controversial topic within the Forum. Other figures in the Forum suggest that, in order to go forward, the Forum needs to move beyond simply being an open space and take up some of the characteristics of a social movement in its own right (Albert, 2004). The distinction between the two is held to be that, in becoming a social movement, the Forum should make decisions collectively and its constituent forces should seek to put these decisions into practice, utilizing the enormous collective power of the forces attending the Forum. Implicit in the advocacy of the 'Forum as movement' is the acceptance of greater political centralization, involving perhaps the direct election of the Organizing Committee. Proponents of the 'Forum as movement' suggest that adherence to the Forum's Charter of Principles holds back any further development of the Forum as a tool for social change (Smith, 2004). Thus, the 2003 Forum, which brought together 100,000 participants in January 2003, could not

pass any resolution condemning the impending US attack on Iraq (Teivainen, 2003: 126). Instead, this call had to come from a meeting organized after the closure of the Forum, and this call could not be identified as having originated from the WSF. The result is that a sub-set of WSF participating organizations have constructed an Assembly of the Social Movements as a decision-making forum which meets on the day following the closure of the Forum (Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004).

Supporters of the 'open space' model, who wish to prevent the WSF becoming a decision-making forum, argue that by moving towards voting on calls for action or resolutions, the WSF would betray its original spirit of providing a welcoming space for all who have only to agree on one point – opposition to neoliberalism (Whittaker, 2004). It is probably fair to say that, at the 2005 Forum, the proponents of the 'open space' model continued to have the upper hand in this debate.

Another way of considering the issue of the 'Forum as movement' is by reference to the academic literature on social movements. For example, Tarrow suggests that a social movement consists of four empirical properties: collective challenge, common purpose, social solidarity and sustained interaction (Tarrow, 1998: 5). The Forum meets two of these properties: it constitutes an arena of 'common or overlapping interests' and is characterized by 'social solidarity and collective identity' (Tarrow, 1998: 6). However, as an annual forum comprising a series of plenaries and workshops, it does not feature either collective challenge (other than simply at the level of ideology) or sustained interaction with authorities (Tarrow, 1998: 7), even if it brings together tens of thousands of activists who do these things on a regular basis. Other common definitions of social movement make reference to 'collective' or 'large groupings of people' who 'organise to promote change through collective action'. Again, the Forums do not in their own right constitute collective action other than simply the act of meeting collectively in mass assemblies or small workshops.

The debate over open space vs. social movement is not the only line of debate among participants at the Forum.[4] A further debate exists over the role of political parties in the WSF. No figure is allowed to speak at the WSF in the name of a political party, and parties have no organizational role in the WSF. Nonetheless, parties do play an important role, and it could hardly be otherwise in a process of this scale. There are two dimensions to the debate. The first issue concerns the uneven application of the rule. Critics point out that the Organizing Committee, with a large number of members of the Brazilian Workers' Party, has used the WSF as a platform for its leader and national President, Lula da Silva (Waterman, 2004b: 149). Likewise, the majority of the Organizing Committee for the 2004 WSF in Mumbai were members of one of the two major communist parties in India (Sen, 2004a). In all cases, to avoid an open breach of the policy, such figures are described as leaders of this or that non-government organization

(NGO) or social movement. In reality, these labels are merely fig-leaves. The problem with this approach is that, by attempting to disguise party alignments, the process prevents clarification of what are actually important political points of differentiation between forces involved in the Forum process (Callinicos and Nineham, 2005). The other criticism concerns the methods used by parties at Forums and organizing meetings. Sen (2004b: 211), in particular, charges that the Forum is no longer an open space but 'a tightly controlled corporation, a movement, or an institutionalized religion', which is lapsing back into the 'dogmatic' and 'fundamentalist' methods that he alleges to be characteristic of traditional parties.

A second criticism of the WSF process is one of elitism. Despite its lack of formal governance structures and the claim that it is structured horizontally rather than vertically, the WSF is in effect governed by the Brazilian Organizing Committee, comprising the original eight Brazilian NGOs, and an International Council of 125 representatives that was established in June 2001. Both the International Council and the Organizing Committee work on the basis of co-option, and none of the representatives is elected (Waterman, 2004b). This leads to a sense of disenfranchisement and the belief that the WSF is becoming a top-down process (Albert, 2004). For example, the major plenaries, with their themes and speakers, are decided by the Organizing Committee. There is, according to Keraghel and Sen:

> … a sharp contrast between the tendencies to autonomous self-organized behaviour exhibited by participants in a large process such as the Forum, which the organizers of the Forum profess to believe in, and the tendencies among organizers to somewhat centralized and opaque decision-making. (2004: 489)

Another aspect of this alleged elitism is the fact that the large majority of attendees at the WSF are essentially passive 'consumers' of sessions and workshops at which the speeches exhaust most of the allotted time, allowing at most a few three-minute contributions from the floor (Farrer, 2004).

Third, the WSF is criticized for its excessive dependence on non-government organizations (Farrer, 2004; James, 2004). Many NGOs, initially established on a shoe-string in the 1960s and 1970s, are now recipients of substantial funding from national governments or international agencies, such as the Ford Foundation or various agencies of the United Nations (UN). Some have learned not to bite the hand that feeds them, and are scorned by radical elements of the alter-globalization movement (James, 2004). A related criticism is the dependence of the Forums on direct funding from governments and related agencies (above). These twin issues – NGO domination and funding from agencies that are implicated in corporate globalization – came to the fore at the WSF in Mumbai in 2004, when a parallel and explicitly socialist conference, Mumbai Resistance, was organized by Indian leftists to coincide with the WSF.

The criticism that co-opted NGOs ('CoNGOs') enjoy inordinate influence within the WSF is associated with the criticism that the WSF shies away from 'naming the enemy'. If 'another world is possible', left-wing critics want the Forum to posit more definitely what kind of world this is. Indian leftists accuse the WSF of 'deviating the anti-imperialist struggles of working class people away from the badly needed alternative' and of 'de-ideologization and de-politicization' (James, 2004: 247). And, if the WSF cannot make decisions, pass resolutions or call actions, is it purely an extended 'talk shop' (James, 2004)? Again, these were criticisms levelled by the organizers of the Mumbai Resistance.

Other criticisms that have been made of the WSF include that it has become a victim of its own success and is simply too large and too fragmented to foster any meaningful dialogue (Albert, 2004); that it resembles too much an 'alternative' festival, not an serious arena for serious political debate (Tormey, 2004); that, by excluding organizations that use violence as a political weapon, it denies a space for national liberation struggles that have few alternative avenues, for example Basques, Palestinians or Zapatistas (Sen, 2004b); that it does not orient sufficiently to grassroots campaigns; and, finally, that it provides star billing to a handful of celebrity speakers (Albert, 2004).

Nonetheless, all these criticisms having been taken into account, there is no suggestion that the WSF process has run into the sand. The WSF process continues to go forward, to expand both in its geographic reach and in its depth. It constitutes, in an age of globalization, a globalized message of resistance that resonates in every continent.

Social forums arrive in Australia
The study

If forums do not constitute a social movement in their own right, simply an 'open space' where movement activists gather, discuss and strategize, they do represent a useful site for the study of such activists – their demographic characteristics, backgrounds, political affiliations and so on. The purpose of the second half of this article is to present some research findings on the characteristics of social movement activists in Australia as represented at the Brisbane and Sydney Social Forums of May and September 2004 respectively. Comparison is made with the literature on the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Dalton et al., 1990; Habermas, 1981; Melucci, 1989; Offe, 1987; Touraine, 1974). In addition, the author also brings to bear his own personal experience in the alter-globalization movement, as an organizer of protests at the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September 2000 ('S11'), the 'May 1' protests in Brisbane in 2001 and 2002, and the aborted Brisbane CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government

Meeting) in October 2001, and as a participant at the 2003 European Social Forum in Paris.[5]

The first Australian social forum was held in Brisbane in the first half of 2002, the second in March 2003, the third in May 2004, with the fourth in July 2005. Sydney followed soon after, with three forums in September 2002, October 2003 and September 2004 respectively, and a fourth in August 2005.[6]

Australian social forums are structured around four or five keynote speeches over a two- to three-day period, interspersed by numerous workshops and seminars presented by groups or individuals, scheduled on an open space model – some are prearranged, others are simply arranged on the day. In addition to these speeches and workshops, there are also live musical performances. Participating organizations also set up information stalls with brochures and information on their activities. Social forums are held in halls provided by universities, performance spaces and schools. Attendance at the forums, usually around 250–350, is small in comparison with the regional and world social forums, and small compared to the bigger city-based social forums in the United States – for example the 2004 Boston Social Forum, which attracted 5000 participants – but they still represent significant gatherings in the Australian alternative political scene and have established a 'brand name' for themselves.

The research methodology used in this study owes its origins to European research. In November 2003, Isabelle Sommier from the University of Paris undertook a large-scale quantitative survey of activists participating in the second European Social Forum in Paris, using a survey that had first been developed by a group of Italian researchers at the Genoa G8 protests in 2001 (Andretta et al., 2002). The Sommier survey was translated by the author into English, was piloted in Brisbane early in 2004, and was then amended on the basis of feedback. This editing process involved some re-phrasing of questions to render them more suitable for an Australian audience, some re-ordering of questions, plus deletion of other questions in order to reduce the length (as it was, survey completion took 15–20 minutes on average). Despite these changes, however, the final survey closely resembles that used by Sommier et al.[7]

At the Brisbane and Sydney forums, surveys were handed out to participants on the registration desk by social forum organizers as well as by the author. Surveys were anonymous and confidential. Respondents returned the survey by placing completed surveys in a box placed near the registration desk. No inducements were offered for completion of the survey. A total of 210 responses were received at the two forums, 112 in Brisbane and 98 in Sydney. Attendance at each of the social forums was approximately 250, plus a further 30 or so organizers and volunteers, representing a total population of 560. The 210 respondents therefore represent a response rate of 38 percent. Completed surveys were then coded and the results entered

into an SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) database. Preliminary analysis was then begun.[8]

In what follows I report on the main findings. All data are rounded to the nearest whole number, and missing responses have been eliminated except where indicated.

Results

Who participates?

The first point to note is that many of the participants in the two forums were, indeed, involved in one or more of Australian social movements. Table 1 indicates that the top four areas of activity were in the environmental/anti-nuclear movement; the pacifist/anti-war movement; the refugee, migrant or anti-racist organizations; and humanitarian (overseas or Australian focus) organizations. Areas where participants had been little involved, then or at any time in the past (35% or less), included feminist, gay and lesbian, AIDS advocacy, consumer rights, autonomist, socialist, unemployed workers' organization and religious organizations.

Table 1: Involvement in social movements and organisations (% valid responses)

	% currently active in the movement	% currently employed in the movement
Pacifist or anti-war movements	35.4	0.0
Environmental or anti-nuclear movement	33.0	4.3
Refugee, migrant or anti-racist, organization	32.6	0.0
Humanitarian or charitable organization (Australian focus)	24.4	1.0
Humanitarian or charitable organization (overseas focus)	24.0	2.4
Human rights organization	22.3	0.5
Neighbourhood or local community/suburban organization	18.5	1.4
Trade union	18.5	4.8
Alternative media	17.5	0.0
Student union	14.0	6.2
Socialist organization	12.4	1.0
Feminist organization	11.2	1.9
Religious community/organization	10.7	1.4
Autonomist movement	8.9	0.0
Consumer rights and information organization	5.2	0.0
Gay or lesbian organization	4.7	0.0
Movement in support of people with AIDS	4.7	0.5
Unemployed workers organization	1.2	0.0

Note: missing responses (15–20% in each case) omitted from analysis.

A common remark on the make-up of participants at the World Social Forum is the unusually high participation of women, at least compared to 'traditional' political assemblies. At the 2005 WSF, for example, women made up just shy of one-half of all participants (Ibase, 2005: 19). The figure in the case of the Australian forums was 54 percent. Not surprisingly, given what we know of participation in radical politics, participants at social forums tend to be younger than the population at large. At the 2005 WSF 42 percent of those in attendance were aged 17 to 24, and a further 30 per were aged 25 to 34 (Ibase, 2005: 16). Participants at the Australian social forums tended to be somewhat older, although still younger than the population in general. The corresponding figures were one-quarter and one-third. There was, however, also evidence of a 'Vietnam generation', with a further one-quarter of participants aged 45 or more, as compared to only 14 percent at the 2005 WSF. The age distribution was also reflected in the Australian participants' first involvement in a demonstration – nearly one-quarter participated in their first demonstration in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s. At the other end of the spectrum, 28 percent had only attended their first demonstration since 2000, and a further one-quarter in the 1990s.

Left-wing political activism in Australia, at least since the 1960s, has been a predominantly inner-city phenomenon, and this is borne out by our respondents. Two-thirds of forum participants lived within 10 km of the centre of Sydney and Brisbane, another 17 percent lived in the more distant suburbs of these cities, the balance being made up of those from nearby towns, elsewhere in the state, or, in a few cases, from other state capital cities in Australia. Very few were attending from overseas.

In line with the Australian population at large, a substantial minority of participants at the two forums had been born outside Australia or New Zealand (18%). This was made up of equal numbers (4%) from the UK or Ireland, other Europe, and the USA. A further 2 percent were born in Asia, rather less than the Asian-born weighting in the population at large. One-third of respondents had mothers or fathers born outside Australia, with the UK or Ireland being the most significant source country (11–12% for both fathers and mothers).

Our respondents were highly educated and tended to come from middle-class backgrounds. In two-thirds of cases, the highest qualification attained by participants was an undergraduate or a postgraduate degree. For another 20 percent, their highest qualification was Higher School Certificate.

Just over one-third of respondents (35%) were tertiary students, and a further 31 percent were in full-time work. Fifteen percent were in precarious (temporary, casual) employment, and a further 14 percent worked part-time. Nine percent were unemployed, 5 percent were retired and 3 percent did domestic duties.

Educational background was reflected in current occupation. For those in work, three-quarters were in professional or para-professional (teaching, nursing, information technology) work. Eleven percent were in clerical, sales or service work. Six percent were managers or self-employed. A mere 3 percent were in trades, and only one respondent out of the entire sample was a labourer.

Of those in work, a disproportionate number of respondents worked in the public sector (34%) or not-for-profit sector (e.g. NGO, trade union, community organization) (26%), while less than one-quarter (23%) worked in the private sector. A further 11 percent were self-employed.

The salaried occupations of the respondents were reflected in those of their parents. Forty-one percent of respondents had fathers in professional or para-professional jobs. In addition, 29 percent had fathers who were in business, self-employed or farmers, and a further 7 percent had fathers in managerial positions. Nearly one-half reported that their mothers were in professional or para-professional positions, 12 percent were in business or were self-employed, and one-quarter were engaged in domestic duties or were unemployed.

Australia is a mostly secular country and this is reflected in our respondents. Only 43 (20%) indicated that they were a religious believer. Of these, 46 percent indicated a Christian affiliation, 41 percent 'New Age' of various kinds and 13 percent Muslim. Religious observance is lower still, with no more than 12 respondents regularly praying or attending religious services or rituals.

To conclude, the backgrounds of participants at the Australian social forums closely match those of the new social movements of the 1980s (Brand, 1990; Dalton et al., 1990) and, indeed, the radical movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Flacks, 1971). They are highly educated, come from professional families and are either students, full-time activists, or work in the public sector and/or social/ community professions. To the extent that the concept of a 'new middle class' is meaningful (Kriesi, 1993), it would appear to fit the current or likely future occupations of the large majority of participants. A significant number are newly radicalized young people under the age of 25 as well as a layer radicalized in the earlier wave of social movements, who have in some cases been re-energized by the alter-globalization movement.

Political outlooks
What were the general political outlooks and preferred strategies for social change espoused by participants at the two forums? A key debate in the alter-globalization movement is that between those who seek to reform existing institutions of governance and economic management and those who want their abolition. Commonly underpinning these views is the

debate as to whether 'another world' should involved a revolutionary over-throw of capitalism or amelioration of its worst aspects.

A number of questions were used to ascertain participants' views on this issue. On the simple question of whether international financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank, IMF) should be reformed or abolished, a slightly larger number favoured the former (23% vs. 18%). There were also hopes for the United Nations as an avenue for political change, with one-half of the respondents indicating that they were very or partially confident in the UN. When asked to choose the three steps most likely to 'really change society', the most popular option, selected by more than one-half of respondents (54%) was 'developing democratic participation, bringing citizens closer to decision-making institutions in our society'. Nearly 40 percent looked to reinforcement of international law (in the areas of environmental protection, human rights and multinational company abuses). All of these views are quite consistent with the broadly left-liberal reform option.

There was however, a substantial minority who favoured a more radical approach. Twice as many felt that overturning capitalism (28%) as compared to reforming capitalism (13%) was necessary in order to 'really change society'. One-third thought that 'a radical break with actual models of economic development' was required, and one-quarter felt that 'instituting democratic alternatives to the state' was needed. And if one-half thought that the UN could be used as an avenue of political change, nearly the same proportion (46%) had no confidence in the UN at all, suggesting that attitudes towards the UN are quite polarized. There was relatively little support for introduction of a world parliament (11%) or 'reinforcement of state intervention in social and economic matters' (9%).

Respondents had relatively little confidence in mainstream government structures at the national or state level as an avenue for promoting their political demands. Only one respondent reported that s/he was very confident in either the federal or state government, with 93–5 percent having no or only partial confidence in these institutions. Likewise, 91 percent had no or only partial confidence in the mainstream political parties – only 3 out of 210 respondents suggested that they were 'very confident' that the mainstream parties could be used to advance their interests. Only one-third had confidence in the media, and only one-quarter in the church or other organized religion.

However, this did not mean that they were completely opposed to *all* existing political structures. Nearly one-half (45%) were very or partially confident that working through their local council could bring about real change, and 86 percent trusted the Greens (or other non-mainstream parties) as a vehicle for change. Nearly three-quarters were partially or very confident in trade unions and 91 percent were confident in NGOs.

As might be expected from participants at a political gathering, there was a disproportionately high experience of membership of political parties now

or in the past. Forty-two percent were or had been members of a political party. Of those who had been or were party members, 40 percent had been or were in the Greens, 36 percent in 'other left' parties, and 27 percent in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) (multiple responses possible). The political sympathies of respondents who were not a member of any party were overwhelmingly with the Greens – 82 percent – easily outpolling the ALP (7%), other left parties (6%) or the Democrats (4%). Only eight respondents indicated that they 'never vote' in national, state or local elections.

More than 90 percent identified themselves as on the left of the political spectrum (at points 1, 2 or 3 on a nine-point scale from left to right). When asked how they would describe themselves politically (open question, up to three answers allowed), 43 percent nominated environmentalist, 38 percent communist or socialist, 25 percent feminist, 22 percent anarchist or autonomist and 19 percent social democrat.

Participants in the Australian social forums exhibit the classic split between radicals and moderates evident in the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. There was tension between fundamentalism and pragmatism (Dalton et al., 1990), with the latter wing of the movement eventually entering the political mainstream in the earlier generation. In the alter-globalization movement, this takes the form of divisions between the radical anti-capitalists (e.g. autonomists, revolutionary socialists, 'deep green' activists) (Epstein, 2001) and the moderates such as those involved in non-government organizations or lobby groups such as ATTAC.

The classic new social movement literature suggested that activists in the earlier social movements were drawn into activity on the basis of 'post-materialist' demands (Melucci, 1989). Their overarching approach was marked by a distinct anti-materialism, with an emphasis on social, cultural and quality of life issues (Pakulski, 1990). They had broad ideological goals and focused on collective goods not personal gain (Dalton et al., 1990). Unlike the classic social movement, the labour unions, which mobilized workers on the basis of their immediate material interests, the women's movement, the green movement and the anti-nuclear movements did not, by and large, mobilize people on the basis of their direct experience of oppression for the purpose of seeking immediate relief. The demands were for wider social justice beyond individual or class redress, occasionally even perceived as being *on behalf of* other social groups at home or internationally. The participants at the Australian social forums fitted this pattern by and large. Their class background and likely future trajectories were not suggestive of harsh exploitation experienced at an individual level.

A further feature of the political outlooks of the 1970s and 1980s social movement activists was the desire to transcend traditional demarcations between left and right. Ethical lifestyles and compassion for others took the place of the idea of the need for the struggle for political power. There were certainly elements of these political outlooks among participants at the

Australian social forums – when asked to identify where they stood on the spectrum from left to right, 20 percent of respondents either ignored the question or ticked the box indicating that they 'do not identify' themselves in this way. Having said this, however, 80 percent did identify themselves on this spectrum, and the vast majority indicated an affiliation with the left. Furthermore, a significant number identified themselves as socialist or communist. This component of the social forums indicates that the movement is or has the potential to become 'anti-capitalist'. It may be that the 'retreat from ideology' apparent in some of the 1970s and 1980s social movements identified by Offe (1987) and Pakulski (1990) and others has now run its course. If 'another world is possible', our participants were clear that it would be left-wing in character, however diffusely expressed.

Political experience and activism

Participants in the social forums had a range of political experiences, ranging from the very informal to the highly formal and structured. Participants were generally politically engaged at an informal level: 78 percent of participants often talk about politics with their friends, 62 percent with their family and 50 percent with their workmates. At the other end of the scale, 4 of the 210 respondents were elected professional political representatives (two of whom were federal senators), 9 had been elected representatives in the past, 17 had stood at some point unsuccessfully, while 165 (85 percent of those who responded to this question) had never stood for election. Positions either held or stood for were evenly distributed between federal parliament, state parliament and local council.

Table 2 demonstrates the respondents' involvement in and attitudes to a range of political activities beyond standing for political office. Stand-out results include the high level of past involvement in basic social movement activities such as signing petitions, distributing leaflets and writing letters to politicians, although none of these was regarded as particularly effective. Just as common, and regarded as more effective, was participation in demonstrations. Eighty-six percent had attended a demonstration against the war or occupation of Iraq since January 2003. Approximately 60 percent had attended a student demonstration against higher university fees, and the same figure had attended a demonstration supporting refugee rights.

Given the generally low level of strikes in Australia in the past two decades, and the professional and para-professional backgrounds of the respondents, the fact that one-half of respondents had undertaken strike action is remarkable, so too is the high level of effectiveness attributed to this tool of working-class struggle. A large majority had boycotted particular shops, products or countries, but perceived this tactic as only moderately effective.

Reflecting the relatively secular nature of our respondents, it is little surprise that so few had participated in a prayer or religious vigil, and that

Table 2: Activities and actions used by participants (% valid responses)

	Yes, I have done this	No, but I would be ready to do this	No, and I refuse to do this	Unsure	Very effective	Partially effective	Not at all effective	Unsure
Sign petitions	98	2	0	0	4	75	12	8
Participate in a demonstration	96	2	0	2	29	65	2	3
Distribute leaflets	89	7	2	1	19	72	4	5
Boycott certain products, shops or countries	87	8	3	2	24	61	10	5
Use the Internet	84	10	2	4	18	61	8	13
Write letters to politicians	79	15	3	2	17	61	15	6
Participate in symbolic actions (e.g. 'stunts')	65	22	6	6	21	67	3	9
Participate in a sit-in or occupation of a building (e.g. office, shop)	55	28	12	4	29	56	5	9
Participate in a strike	48	44	2	5	53	42	1	4
Lobby politicians in person	39	48	8	5	23	60	8	9
Physically resist a police attack	33	21	29	16	16	32	33	18
Damage property	26	11	49	14	9	27	50	14
Prayer or religious vigil	25	10	53	11	6	34	39	21
Use physical pressure against a person	9	10	74	6	7	11	66	16
Participate in a hunger strike	5	42	31	22	21	59	10	9

Note: missing responses (15–20% in the case of 'use'; 20–25% in the case of 'effectiveness') omitted from analysis.

many fewer again believe this action to be effective. Nonetheless, this did not mean that participants were inclined to violent direct action of the sort that we have seen in European mobilizations against the G8 or NATO. There was substantial opposition to damaging property or using physical pressure against a person, and, to a lesser extent, resisting a police attack on a demonstration or action.

Social forums emerged in the context of the sweep of mobilizations against agencies of neoliberalism in the early 2000s. It is of interest, therefore, how few of the participants at the Australian social forums had been directly involved in this movement themselves. Only one-quarter (28%) had attended the S11 demonstration against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September 2000, either as an organizer or participant. The relevant figures for the 1 May protests in Brisbane 2001 and 2002 were 36 percent and 28 percent, and less than one-quarter had been involved in any capacity in the protests against the CHOGM summit of 2001. No more than 17 respondents had played an organizing role in any one of these mobilizations.

Australian social forums draw in a combination of committed activists, some of whom devote many hours each week to activism; occasional activists, who may be mobilized to particular causes or at particular moments; and supportive observers who attend occasional public meetings but commit no further than that. Again, this reflects the pattern of the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. The younger participants in the forums tended to be the more active. Those with full-time jobs, not surprisingly, were less active

As indicated, the Australian social forums operate at least one step removed from the mobilizations that served as their inspiration in 2000–2. However, this does not mean that the alter-globalization movement was irrelevant to the participants' worldview. Despite their relatively low participation in the mobilizations of that period, more than two-thirds (69%) said that they identified a lot or quite a lot with the 'anti-globalization movement'. These data may be associated with the fact that many of the respondents were part of social or political networks, some of whose members were involved in the mobilizations of the earlier period. When asked if any of their friends, family, acquaintances or workmates were involved in these anti-corporate mobilizations, three-quarters of those who responded reported that their friends had been either very or somewhat active, 70 percent had acquaintances or colleagues who had been active, and 30 percent had family members who had been involved.

International orientation and linkages

It is said that the alter-globalization movement is intrinsically international. The targets of the movement are defined by their international scope. The methods used by the movement, the contentious repertoires (Tarrow, 1998),

are quickly copied from one country to another. Linkages are made between movement organizations in different countries and communication is facilitated by cheapened access to intercontinental flights, telephone and the Internet (Ayres, 2001). Is this internationalism reflected in the background and activities of participants at the Australian social forums?

In terms of their own life experiences, our respondents were fairly cosmopolitan. A very high figure of 56 percent had lived for more than six months in a different country to that in which they are now living. One-third had lived in Europe for at least six months, 13 percent of all respondents had lived in North America, and the same proportion had lived in Asia. Reasons for living overseas (multiple responses possible) were headed by work (32%), travel (26%), personal or family reasons (16%) and study (9%). A further 14 percent had been born and lived overseas prior to arriving in Australia.

Reinforcing the cosmopolitan outlook of the participants was their level of foreign-language proficiency. Nearly one-third (29%) spoke a foreign language, the most common being a European language (75% of the relevant sample), followed by an Asian or Middle Eastern language (22%) (multiple responses possible). In addition, our respondents were in touch with international issues via their consumption of media. Just under one-quarter (22%) regularly read a mainstream international newspaper, and 37 percent regularly read a left-wing international newspaper, magazine or journal (includes Internet sources such as *Z-net*).

We might conclude from these data that participants at Australian social forums are well connected to the world of international politics. However, this is not borne out so strongly in relation to their political practice – three-quarters had never travelled overseas for political purposes. Of those who have travelled overseas for political activities, numbers were fairly evenly split between those who travel fairly regularly (at least every two years – 11 percent) and those who travel infrequently (between every two and five years – 14 percent). Asia was mentioned as a destination by 18 respondents, Europe by 16, and Central or Latin America by 10 respondents. New Zealand/Pacific/Melanesia, North America, Middle East and Africa were all visited for political purposes by six or fewer respondents. Furthermore, only 17 of the 210 respondents had attended an anti-corporate mobilization overseas, although this may also reflect the fact that only a minority had attended such events at home.

To summarize, the arrival of social forums in Australia is a good example of Tarrow's (1998) cross-border diffusion of social movement activism. The inspiration for the forums and the underlying, albeit short-lived, activist phase of the alter-globalization movement of the early 2000s were clearly international. Australian activism now, as in the 1960s revolt against the Vietnam War, is clearly linked to international currents and trends.

Motivation for attending the social forums

Finally, what are the motivations for attending Australian social forums? The most common reasons given by participants were 'to be informed' (72%) or to make contacts (52%). One-third were attending to make a political intervention of some kind, while just under 30 percent were there 'to represent my organization' (multiple responses possible).

The most important issues motivating respondents to participate in the social forums (three responses allowed) were the natural environment (50%), inequality between North and South (40%), the power of multinational corporations (35%) and the threat to public services (34%). Close behind were the treatment of refugees (27%), the anti-war campaign (25%) and the anti-capitalist struggle (25%). The illegitimacy of institutions such as the IMF/World Bank (11%), gender inequality (7%), unemployment (7%), racism (4%) or homophobia (1%) were much less important as motivators.

These data broadly confirm the picture traced out already. Social forum participants are being moved into action, not because they are directly oppressed and are seeking redress, but out of broader social concerns.

Participants felt that the forums were effective in achieving certain objectives, such as allowing people to come together to discuss alternatives to the existing political/economic order (97 percent saying either very or partially effective), developing new solidarities and links between citizens (97%), raising public awareness (89%), developing a national protest movement (87%), 'improving the situation in the world in general' (76%), combating neoliberalism (69%), and promoting dialogue between citizens and political decision-makers (61%). Participants were rather less confident that the forums were effective in reducing North–South inequalities (44%), or influencing the decisions of national and international political authorities (42%).

Summary

To recap our main findings. The social movement literature of the 1970s and 1980s suggested that activists in the new social movements were distinct from those who populated the classic 'old' social movement, the labour movement and left parties, on a variety of social, demographic, attitudinal and political criteria. In the 1980s and early 1990s the fate of these new social movements varied, but a general characteristic was a decline in the energy that had given rise to their birth. Many new social movement activists dropped out of organized politics or, most evidently with the German Greens, became institutionalized and incorporated into the mainstream political machinery. The alter-globalization movement, which burst onto the political scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s, threw up a new generation of what might be called 'new new social movement' activists.

These activists have been involved in a range of social movements, some of which hark back to those of the 1960s and 1970s, some of which appear brand new. Their appearance has revived the kind of passionate street protests that gave the original new social movement activists their energy and their leaders. In some cases, this new new social movement has reinvigorated activists from the earlier period who had dropped out. From 2003 onwards, this new new social movement fused with the anti-war movement.

One *manifestation* of this new new social movement has been the social forum, held at global, international, national, regional and city levels. To emphasize an important point: these forums are not the new movement, just one element of it. And nor is the forum a social move-ment in its own right. The forums lack the essential criteria of collective challenge or sustained interaction with authorities discussed by Tarrow (1998). Judged on the basis of the experiences of successive World Social Forums, the social forums are, at best, a meeting space for established and new social movements. As such, however, they do comprise a useful research site for the study of these activists from the new new social movement, and thus present us with the ability to compare and contrast the two generations of activists.

What do our results tell us about these two generations? Much is similar – the age, the gender mix, the place of residence, the high levels of educa-tion, the student profile, the middle-class parental backgrounds, the rela-tively high-status jobs, and the public- and social-sector nature of their employers. Few were involved in active religious observance. There is the same division between the 'reformists' and 'revolutionaries' that was evi-dent in the feminist or environmental movements of the 1970s. Relatively few had much faith in existing political institutions, at least at national level. Similar to the activists from the 1970s, participants at the Australian social forums were not motivated to take political action in most instances by their own experience of harsh economic or political repression, but by a broader concern for social welfare and international justice, broadly defined. Their friendship circles were often interlinked with their political commitments and political networks. They were active in a range of social movement activities, both collective and individual. For the most part they were sceptical of the use of violence as a political tactic.

What were the differences? One is the greater preparedness to self-identify on a left–right political spectrum. In the vast majority of cases, our respondents do not believe terms such as 'left' and 'right' are redundant or meaningless. The explanation lies in the different nature of the political environment. Whereas the new social movements burgeoned in the 1970s in the context of a turn away from far-left politics among former student revolutionaries after the expectations of 'another 1968' were dashed, the alter-globalization movement has developed in a period when the far left,

particularly in Europe, has been on the upswing, and where their members form the backbone of the alter-globalization movement in countries such as France and Italy. Although the far-left groups are much smaller in Australia, their members are also intimately involved in the social forums. Indeed, while the social movements were a conduit out of revolutionary politics for many radical students and former students in the 1970s, for a period in the early 2000s, the alter-globalization movement contributed many dozens of new recruits to the Australian far-left groups. The result is that many activists involved in alter-globalization embrace rather than renounce the terminology of the 'old left'.

A second point of difference is the explicitly political agenda of the alter-globalization movement, understood conventionally. An important strand in the 'new social movements' of the 1970s was the idea that 'the personal is political'. In practice, this took the form of 'lifestyle politics' and a retreat to the private sphere. What mattered was 'living the politics' as regards sexual relationships, family structures or household practices. Activists participating in the Australian social forums in the 2000s did not share this outlook – their political methods were more likely to involve demonstrations or distributing leaflets. Many had participated in sit-ins or occupations, stunt actions or strikes. This is related to the earlier point – the alter-globalization movement represented an upswing in the political tempo, not a downswing, and the notion that collective action was needed to change the world was part of the 'common sense' of the new movement.

Two main limitations to this research must be noted before concluding. First is the fact that the profile of activists at social forums in Australia, a wealthy Western nation, may be very different from that of those participating in social forums in the global South. My study therefore only captures one component of the activists involved in alter-globalization. Second, at the time that the fieldwork took place for this article, the dynamism of the Australian alter-globalization movement had largely evaporated. Unlike social forums in, for example, Latin America and Europe, Australian social forums by 2004 were not clearly connected organically to an ongoing mass movement that was physically expressed on the streets. To that extent, the Australian social forums reported on in my study are devoid of the kind of activist spirit evident overseas, more resembling a meeting space for discussion than a space for organizing direct action. In coming years, the fate of Australian forums would appear to depend on the revival of the alter-globalization movement as a physical force to breathe new life and usher another new generation of activists into their deliberations.

Notes

1 See Buttel and Gould (2004) for a useful summary of the recent history of this new movement. Debates about the exact name for the movement reflect the fact

that very few of the participants are 'anti-globalization' in the sense of desiring nationalist autarky. 'Alter-globalization' reflects the desire for an 'alternative' form of globalization based on popular need not corporate profit. Other terms include 'anti-corporate globalization', 'globalization from below' etc. For a discussion of the debates associated with the terminology, see Teivainen (2002).

2 All figures provided by the WSF Secretariat in Brazil in a letter to supporters, 7 July 2005. It should be noted that government financial support is not an act of charity. The WSF Secretariat estimated that the 2005 WSF generated approximately US $60 million in spin-off spending to the local and national economies.

3 This core requirement has been added to subsequently by opposition to war and militarism, and opposition to caste, communalism and patriarchy (Keraghel and Sen, 2004: 486).

4 See Foltz and Moodliar (2005) for a review of some of the most important criticisms that are made of the WSF process.

5 See Burgmann (2003) for more on the Australian alter-globalization movement.

6 Details of these forums may be found at www.brisbanesocialforum.org and www.sydneysocialforum.org respectively.

7 The Sommier results are not available in English.

8 The author would like to thank all those who cooperated in facilitating or completing the two surveys. I also thank Ngaire Kelly for data entry and Barry Maher for assistance with SPSS.

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