

Comments on Warren Wagar's "Toward a Praxis of World Integration"

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There is much in Warren Wagar's paper with which I agree. He questions the viability of a multiculturalist politics, draws our attention to the problematical nature of many movements that world-system theory would deem "antisystemic," and rejects "a purely relativistic multiculturalism." Similarly, I have addressed the deficiencies of political-cultural movements based on various claims of identity (see Moghadam, 1994), argued against a "mindless cultural relativism" (Moghadam, 1989), and described a secular intellectualism in the Middle East (Moghadam, 1990). I would agree with Wagar that the "ideology of a Left Enlightenment" holds the best promise for the future - but up to a point. I would also be much in favour of a World Party - but with some qualifications. There are gaps in Wagar's scenario. His rejection of all contemporary social movements as equally incapable of helping to effect a progressive transformative politics (global democratic socialism) is both politically and methodologically flawed.

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How do we get from A ("our system of predatory global capitalism flourishing in a political environment of competing sovereign states") to B ("a democratic, liberal, and socialist world commonwealth")? According to Wagar, it will not be through the workers' movement, or the national movements in the Third World, or such social movements as the women's movement -- because these are not intrinsically antisystemic. It will be through a World Party. But how will this World Party come into being? Apparently through "an overarching mobilized consciousness of the need to confront the capitalist world-system collectively." At the end of his paper, Wagar writes: "Before such a party can germinate and take root, a consensus must emerge among progressive forces throughout the world that our destination as a species is neither the global shopping center and sweatshop of capitalism nor the war of all against all, but a new planetary civilization in which every human being everywhere has an equal voice." So, we are back to progressive forces, even though Wagar has already dismissed them. What I would like to point out, quite forcefully, is that a World Party will never gain adherents outside of SUNY-Binghamton if the secular and democratic-socialist ideology is disseminated as

West European (yes, I know about the Enlightenment, but we need to conceptualize science and thought as universal, not as European), if the workers' movement is not supported, and if the women's movement is not taken seriously. And let us note that Wagar indicts Third World religious and nationalist movements but not the utterly bourgeois and, yes, particularistic, 1989 revolutions of East Central Europe.

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The Women's Movement and Global Feminism

Let's start with the women's movement. Professor Wagar opines that women really only want equality within the existing capitalist framework, but how does he know, since he cites only men? I have just returned from the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the Platform for Action - which had been drafted in a protracted and contentious process by government delegates, women activists, and U.N. staff - reflects a clear desire for the transformation of existing economic, political, and cultural structures, and not only women's access to and equality within them. Chief among the transformative objectives is the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the arms trade. And this is only the more conventional of the documents and aspirations of the women's movement. An even more radical vision is expressed by various international feminist networks. These include Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of Third World women's groups currently based in Barbados, Women in Development Europe (WIDE), a 12-country network now based in Brussels that is highly critical of current forms of development cooperation, and Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), an anti-fundamentalist network based in Montpellier, France and with an active regional center in Lahore, Pakistan. DAWN and WIDE are part of a larger network called Global Alliance for Alternative Development (Moghadam, forthcoming). Here is the famous "DAWN vision" from its 1987 manifesto (Sen and Grown, 1987): We want a world where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent from every country, and from the relationships among countries. We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships. In such a world women's reproductive role will be redefined: men will be responsible for their sexual behaviour, fertility and the well-being of both partners. Child care will be shared by men, women and society as a whole

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We want a world where the massive resources now used in the production of the means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression both inside and outside the home. This technological revolution will eliminate disease and hunger, and give women means for the safe control of their lives, health, sexuality and fertility. We want a world where all institutions are open to participatory democratic processes, where women share in determining priorities and making decisions. This political environment will provide enabling social conditions that respect women's and men's physical integrity and the security of their persons in every dimension of their lives. This is the kind of contemporary progressive movement that proponents of a World Party need to take seriously and, indeed, to court. When we talk about women we are not talking about particularistic identity politics (gay, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Tamil, Serb, and so on), or about multiculturalism (women do not constitute a culture). We are talking about (more than) half of humanity, who play a central role in global production and social reproduction. There are substantial elements within the women's movement that seeks to confront the capitalist world-system. If alliances are to be formed with a transformative global politics in mind, then global feminism has to be an integral part of the strategy and the coalition.

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Labour vs. Capital

The workers' movement is not at its strongest today, and it continues to be battered by global capitalism and by states. Women activists have criticized the traditional trade unions for ignoring women workers and for not broadening their scope to include the unorganized. This historic injustice is being rectified by some unions, and in some countries the most vigorous unions are those with large female memberships. The women's movement and the workers' movement intersect at the point of social justice issues, and an alliance would represent a powerful challenge to the capitalist system. In many ways the women's movement is more global than the workers' movement - and this despite the International Labour Organization (or, perhaps, because of it, as the ILO is based on a tripartite model of cooperation between governments, employers, and workers) - and unions typically strategize in defensive, national terms. However, at a time of increasing labour market "flexibility" and continuing globalization of production, trade, and finance, the unions may have to adopt new strategies and methods of organizing, communicating, and mobilizing. Currently, and in a post-Cold War era, the secretariat of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions includes some remarkably radical leaders who voice strong opposition to neoliberal economic policies. One such person is Nancy Riche, Vice Chairperson of the ICFTU Women's Committee, who was a speaker at an ILO-organized Special Event at the Beijing Conference (as was I), and who railed against structural adjustment, marketization, the deteriorating living standards of working people, the World Bank, the IMF, and so on. It must be understood that when the ICFTU, the Beijing Platform for Action, and various feminist networks demand, inter alia, job security, a

minimum wage, job creation measures, working times and patterns adapted to family responsibilities, social protection for homeworkers and those in the informal sector, continued public sector employment, expansion of labour standards to export processing and other industrial zones, paid maternity leave with job-back guarantees, these are profoundly radical economic demands which, if realized, would transform the system as we know it.

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What About the U.N.?

Wagar notes that Chris Chase-Dunn has written about a socialist world-system with a democratically-controlled world federation, and that Samir Amin has discussed a "world parliament" representing social interests on a global scale. Well, let's think about that for a moment. The United Nations is currently the only truly global organization, in that it represents and reflects the interests and viewpoints of every state and, increasingly, of non-governmental organizations. The U.N. Secretariat has a mandate from the General Assembly to carry out certain development activities, which are done through its departments, the specialized agencies, and other U.N. entities. These development efforts, it should be noted, have been largely welcomed by Third World states and movements, and increasingly criticized by Western states and organizations. The U.N.'s work in the area of women and gender issues has been important and impressive, and around the world women activists insist that their governments adhere to the standards of U.N. conventions. To some, the U.N. has held the promise of a kind of world parliament. Unfortunately, the U.N. is currently in a financial crisis due to the withholding of contributions by the U.S., and there is talk of having the U.N. seek funding from private-sector sources. From a progressive point of view, there are good reasons to resist these trends, defend the way the U.N. is currently organized, and support a greater role for (many) NGOs. However, there is the matter of the Security Council, the World Bank, and the IMF. These bodies have come to act in unilateral ways, and often at odds with world consensus. Unless these organs are reformed, the UN will

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continue to be held hostage to the economic and political power interests of the core. So once again we are back to progressive social movements. To conclude, I am in favour of a secular, democratic socialism on a world scale. But let's get real - Wagar's interesting novelistic idea of a World Party can only come about on the basis of actually existing

progressive movements. Immanuel Wallerstein may be on to something when he writes about "a self-conscious federation" of workers' movements, Third World national movements, and the array of social movements. However, against this "checklist" approach, I would single out the women's movement and a revitalized workers' movement as the way forward.

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