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 PANEL ON A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND THE REBIRTH OF A MATRISTIC¹ HUMAN SOCIETY

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*In reality,
 We live today
 Our dreams of yesterday.
 And, living those dreams,
 We dream again.*

I am here to share with you the conviction of millions of us, who work for an economy based on cooperation and solidarity around the world, that **UNLESS WE MAKE ANOTHER ECONOMY POSSIBLE, ANOTHER WORLD WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE.**

I will address four questions.

- (1) What factors are contributing to the birth and the growth of a Solidarity Economy?
- (2) What are the visions and goals implied in the idea and the practice of a Solidarity Economy?
- (3) What possible strategy can we devise for the development of a global Solidarity Economy? And,
- (4) What challenges are we confronting as we build a Solidarity Economy in Latin America?

1. WHAT ARE THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BIRTH AND THE GROWTH OF A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

Ontological and historical factors are at the origin of the Solidarity Economy (SE) movement. The ontological factor is the deep human yearning for happiness, which cannot exist without self-respect, mutual respect and loving bonds. The historical factors include two failures. One is the failure of the System of Capital to provide the material basis for a meaningful and dignified existence as a right of all human individuals and societies. The other is the failure of Statism and all forms of hierarchical “communism” to provide a meaningful and viable alternative to the System of Capital. Let me briefly speak about each of them.

Today’s global system of Capital is configured in the following manner:

- * Capital is the subject, working people are the object.
- * Competition, domination and submission are the dominant forms of relationship.
- * Private appropriation is the emotion and the matrix of action. Structural subordination, inequality, unemployment and exclusion are the outcomes.
- * The State is a guarantor of market “freedom” and of private capital as the legitimate subject, whether through ideological manipulation or through coercion.

¹ *Matristic* is different from *matriarchal* because it affirms a relationship not based on order (*arche* in Greek) but on the motherly care, esteem, trust and affection for one another.

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- * Virtual, not real democracy is in place, for it is reduced to an electoral manner of conquering and perpetuating “political power”.
- * The cultural matrix is that those who *have* are the legitimate leaders. In one expression, it is the culture of *having* and of sheer individualism.

Statism presents the following characteristics:

- * The State and the Party are the subjects, civil society is the object.
- * Centralization of ownership and control of productive assets, of decision-making, of planning and implementation of economic activity are the rule. The outcome is bureaucratization of life in society.
- * State is the only owner and controller; it is the patriarchal, hierarchical guarantor of civil obedience through coercion.
- * The emotion that gives rise to these relations is the desire to maintain and assure the control of the appropriated privileges.
- * Virtual, not real democracy is in place, for the bureaucratic class ensures a hierarchical division of human activities and the stability of privileges, without or with the use of force.
- * The cultural matrix is that those who are now occupying the State and the Party *are* the State and the Party and, therefore, have the right to take decisions on behalf of the masses. In one expression, it is a culture of apparent collectivism masking hierarchy and control, uniform thinking, domination and submission.

2. WHAT ARE THE VISIONS AND GOALS IMPLIED IN THE IDEA AND THE PRACTICE OF A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

The Age of Neoliberalism is heavy with contradictions. Massive planetary alienation, structural unemployment, deep inequality and corporate oppression have been countered by a growing movement that started as antiglobalization (critique, denunciation, pressure for regulations and reforms) and developed into an alterglobalization movement whose basic motto is that of the World Social Forum: *another world is possible, another globalization is possible*. In this adverse environment, we have seen the emergence of various forms of **Popular Economy** as an alternative to unemployment and exclusion, aimed at mere subsistence, a job and an income. We have also seen the emergence of various forms of **Solidarity Economy** as a new proposal to organize the economy and society around the conviction that *Another Global Socioeconomy is possible, another Human Being is possible*. It aims at overcoming alienation with holistic individual and collective self-development.

Let us explore more attentively the vision of a Solidarity Economy. For some, it is simply a means to compensate for unemployment and exclusion generated by the profit-centered Economy. For a growing number of activists, thinkers and politicians, however, it is also the basis for a new form of organization of economic life, from local to global: it is economic activity organized for safe and sustainable individual and collective self-development, which implies the shared satisfaction of needs and wants and the co-management of the houses people share in common – the home, the community, the district, the county, the ecosystem, the country, the planet. It is an ethical, reciprocal and cooperative way of consuming, producing, financing, exchanging, communicating, educating, developing which fosters a new way of thinking and living. It engenders the following configuration:

- * Civil society, especially the working sectors, empower themselves to be the subjects of their livelihood and of their own development. The State, capital, economic and technical development are conceived as means for enabling social and human development.
- * Cooperation in solidarity is the prevailing form of social relationship.
- * Sharing and co-participation in production, distribution and consumption are the emotion and the action.
- * The democratic State is a common project, whose role is to foster a system of conviviality based on cooperation, mutual respect and fulfillment for each and every citizen and community.
- * Democracy is made real as a collective construction of a social human system, a socioeconomic, mental and psychic space of sharing, of mutual respect, of cooperation and co-participation.
- * The cultural matrix is that each and every *worker* - the *social individual* - is the legitimate leader and, therefore, share the power and the responsibility of decision-making. In one expression, a culture of social individualism or collective personalism, or individual socialism.

3. WHAT POSSIBLE STRATEGY CAN WE DEVISE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GLOBAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

I envisage three moments in the development of a Solidarity Economy.

The first moment is expanding the SE in unfavorable national and global contexts - Solidarity enterprises and cooperatives, under the current hegemony of neoliberalism, develop a three-pronged strategy: (1) compete in the capitalist market, while seeking to overcome the patriarchal mode of relationship based on power as competitiveness, domination and submission; (2) develop solidarity collaborative networks, productive chains and markets in which cooperation and solidarity can be fully practiced, and (3) participate in national and global networks that struggle for regulations and controls on capital, and for improved public policies and democratic rights for the working majority.

In the solidarity networks the profit motive is replaced with the satisfaction of those needs considered a priority by the majority as the driving force of the economy; the concept of wealth encompasses material, emotional, mental and spiritual wealth - *having* is seen as a means for *being* and *doing*; and competition gives place to cooperation in diversity and in mutual respect.

Three tasks are crucial in the process of self-development in solidarity: (1) increase and diversify the number of associative initiatives and the socioeconomic sectors they cover; (2) create solidarity synapses among them, that is, economic, commercial and financial interconnections based on the matristic values of mutual care, collaboration, reciprocity, mutual respect and self-respect; and (3) introduce cooperation and solidarity as structural elements of the education of children, youth and adults in the school system and in the solidarity networks.

The second moment is that in which a mixed Socioeconomy prevails - Gradually, as they develop locally, nationally and internationally, these networks begin to constitute a new system and a new culture which blooms inside the old system and the old culture. Cultural change is characterized by a change in the language flow and in the flow of emotions that make up the mode of inter-relations among the members of a community

and that is conserved and transmitted from one generation to another. It embodies a set of values that inspire attitudes, behaviors, aspirations and modes of relation.

The **patriarchal culture** developed in history, first, as appropriation or privatization of common resources and goods (withholding from others the normal access of something that is legitimately theirs), second, as dominating power and obedience (negation of oneself and the other in order to possess something) and, third, as hierarchy and authority (negation of the other and of oneself made acceptable by rational, abstract or transcendental arguments). The **matristic culture** developed in history was based on the care, total trust, mutual respect and collaboration in solidarity that marked the conviviality of our first ancestors and mark the relation child-mother in our infancy and childhood.³

Translated into economic and political relations, the matristic culture fosters economic and political democracy understood as cooperation, sharing and co-participation as parts of the fundamental emotions that inspire action to overcome scarcity, as participatory distribution instead of appropriation. This is the moment that can be called a Mixed Socioeconomy, in which two different modes of production co-exist, one informed by the patriarchal culture, the other by the matristic culture.

The third moment is that of a Local-Global Solidarity Socioeconomy – A neomatristic culture may gain hegemony as the outcome of the conservation of the positive consequences of socioeconomic agents interacting with each other on the basis of cooperation, sharing and co-participation. The means to achieve this are to create educational and practical dynamics that foster the awakening in people and communities of their deepest yearning and most profound aspiration to achieve forms of co-existence that are mutually caring and liberating from all fears, from childhood to adult and mature life. This includes the concrete establishment of a collaborative equality in the socioeconomic relations as well as in the relations man-woman and the relations human being-nature.

Collaborative equality means sharing the collective abundance according to needs and wants, instead of private appropriation and chronic scarcity. This collaborative equality is the only environment that is capable to generate the psychic space that enables men and women of all ages and occupations to become equal collaborators in the common livelihood of social life. If we succeed in making these collaborative socioeconomic networks a living reality, they may be strong enough to operate a cultural change of enormous magnitude and consequences for human history: the birth of a neomatristic economy and culture, now transformed into a planetary *ethos*.

4. WHAT CHALLENGES ARE WE CONFRONTING AS WE BUILD A SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN LATIN AMERICA?

1) Pseudo-socialist governments who opted for the capitalist neoliberal or the populist pattern of capital accumulation are responsible for a loss of credibility of alternative proposals and modes of government. **How can social movements make sure that elected socialist parties abide by their programmatic commitment to social change?**

2) Social movements are becoming stronger and better organized in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and elsewhere in the continent. But the peoples of Latin America have not yet understood that the challenge is that they empower themselves to become the main subject of their own individual and collective development, increasingly reducing their dependence on State and capital institutions. They are the force that can

³ For a deeper discussion on these concepts and their application to economics and politics, see MATURANA, Humberto e VERDEN-ZÖLLER, Gerda, 1997, *Amor y Juego – Fundamentos Olvidados de lo Humano: Desde el Patriarcado a la Democracia*, Instituto de Terapia Cognitiva, Santiago, Chile.

constitute democratic State institutions (local, national, global) aimed to facilitate the empowerment and the development of human civil society in dynamic harmony with the rest of Nature. **How can social movements and democratic governments play a more effective role in fostering the awareness and empowerment of the working grassroots – the women, the ethnic and other minorities, employed, marginalized, excluded, the elders?**

3) Innovative solidarity practices are multiplying in the continent: rural and urban cooperatives constituted by families or by indigenous groups working in solidarity (Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil); solidarity financial agencies and solidarity micro credit (Bolivia, Mexico, Peru, Brazil); solidarity commercial markets (without currency or using community currency, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil); eco-consumption cooperatives (Uruguay, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil); ecovillages using permaculture, co-management and self-reliance as bases of socioeconomic activity (Brazil); equitable trade networks (all over the continent); cooperative education (Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil); and public agencies and policies aimed at fostering a Solidarity Economy (Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina). **How can their successes and their mistakes become shared collective knowledge and the basis for qualitative progress in building a Solidarity Socioeconomy?**

4) However, innovative practices at the micro level can only be viable and structurally effective for social relational change if they interweave with one another to form always-broader collaborative networks and solidarity chains of production-finance-distribution-consumption-education-communication. This is one important challenge facing the Latin American SE movements. **How are participants of these networks responding to this challenge in each country?**

5) Another challenge is a systematic endeavor to expand the networks nationally and globally, reaching all sectors of society who may be sensitive to the democratic practice of cooperation in solidarity – trade unions, social movements, professional associations, churches and the ecumenical alliances, democratic governments etc. **How are participants of these networks to this challenge in each country?**

6) Finally, a key challenge is to overcome the culture that fosters consumerism and dependence with regard to the State, to dominant technical patterns of production and to financial markets. An all-embracing process of education for self-reliance and for self- and co-management is needed, associated with raising awareness about our inner yearning for freedom and mutual respect as bases for sustainable, gratifying conviviality. **How to make cultural change that recovers the deep yearning for a life of self- and mutual respect and conscious solidarity, a daily practice in the lives of our families, communities, firms and networks?**

I thank you for your attention and invite you to go deeper in the discussion of these questions.