

Werner Ulrich's Home Page: *Picture of the Month**Now "Ulrich's Bimonthly"**February, 2005**The New Globalization*

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**Economic globalization** "Globalization" has become one of the most overused and misunderstood words in recent years (e.g., in phrases such as "anti-globalization protest"). We have come to associate it mainly with the forces of neo-liberal global capitalism. Following the Tsunami tragedy in South-East Asia, however, we have witnessed a new, unexpected face of globalization. Suddenly we realize that globalization goes far beyond economics; that it involves ethics as much as economics. Unexpectedly, Kant's vision of world citizenship, to which I have been referring in last month's page, has come to life in the planetary effort of non-governmental solidarity that the catastrophe engendered.

**A new face of globalization** With due historical distance, the Tsunami catastrophe and the unprecedented global solidarity it has brought forth, may well be recognized one day as a turning point in the history of mankind. For the first time, millions of people around the world experienced that globalization is a source of hope as much as it undoubtedly is a source of problems; that it can mean world-wide connection and solidarity among people as much as free movement of capital and goods.

**Global civil society as a counterbalance to economic globalization** I believe this experience of a new face of globalization has the potential to change our view of the process of globalization substantially. Why, many people begin to ask themselves, should we let economic forces alone shape the process, rather than shaping it actively ourselves in the way all progress and development comes about: through mutual aid, solidarity and cooperation; through individual and collective processes of learning, education and emancipation; through political reforms and democratization; through the building of a living civil society at the local, regional, national as

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well as transnational levels. Why can't we be *agents*, rather than remaining merely observers and victims, of the process of globalization? So much seems clear: only to the extent that citizens everywhere come to regard it as both their right and their responsibility to "civilize" the globalization process, by subjecting it to democratically established rules of law and conduct, can we hope to give it a human face. The aim, then, must be to create a *global civil society* – a cosmopolitan society of citizens, that is –, as a solid basis for the global democratic governance of economic globalization, rather than the other way round. In one phrase: *We need to globalize civil society to civilize globalization.*

**An action plan for global development** The question is, how do we get there? First of all, the call for the development of a global civil society in control of the economic globalization process is not in any way to distract attention from the need for economic development, of course, nor to blame the process of economic globalization for all the evils of the world. Eradicating poverty, hunger and disease world-wide is not only an ethical imperative but also a vital economic condition for the growth of a global civil society. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, is leading the way with his *Millennium Project*. On 17 January 2005, the UN released a remarkable action plan for cutting global poverty in half by 2015.\* It not only proposes a practical strategy for reaching the goal, but also demonstrates that it can be financed. There could have been no better time than now, that the Tsunami catastrophe made us experience what global solidarity can achieve, for presenting such a plan, and I trust it will be followed (in the terms of the report) by "a decade of bold action."

\* *Investing in Development: Practical Action Plan to Combat Poverty* (United Nations, New York)

**Building a global civil society** Secondly, I remain equally convinced that *Kant's vision* of a *cosmopolitan constitution* of world citizenship and world-wide peace remains as important a perspective as that of reducing world-wide economic disparities through well-understood economic globalization. Humanity needs to develop peaceful and democratically controlled ways of deciding about matters of global concern and settling conflicts of interests. Such development cannot be decreed from above (not even by a world

government, were it ever to exist) but needs a foundation that must grow from below, in the form of conditions of equal and meaningful participation in the *res publica* at the local level. Creating such conditions requires a long, patient process of the building of civil society everywhere. Only by first recovering and developing the "local" – community control over political and economic processes – can we expect to create a solid basis for democratic global politics.

### What is global civil society all about?

(Glimpses of the New Globalization)

- Global civil society is about understanding globalization not only in terms of economics and technology, but equally in terms of international solidarity and ethics, international law and peace, and the development of world citizenship.
- Global civil society is about giving a global public space to people as citizens – not only of their nation-states but of the world.
- Global civil society is about building the political will for democratic social reform everywhere.
- Global civil society is about giving a voice to people in an increasingly interdependent (but unjust) world.
- Global civil society is about viewing key contemporary issues from a cosmopolitan rather than a national perspective.

**This month's picture** I can find no better metaphor of this alternative kind of globalization, and of the way to achieve it, than that of an oak tree. Remember the oak tree I introduced to you in November 2003? It has quietly continued to grow since, continuing its over 100 years of patient and solid development towards an ever more splendid and mighty oak tree. Nothing can supersede this process of growth from below. Slow as it is, what it achieves is ultimately solid, reliable, and sustainable.

**Technical data** Digital photograph taken on 24 February 2004 around 10 a.m., shutter speed 1/500, aperture f/5.6, ISO 50, focal length 13.6 mm (equivalent to 63.5 mm with a conventional 35 mm camera). Original resolution 2272 x 1704 pixels; current resolution 864 x 648 pixels, compressed to 79 KB.

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## February, 2005



*Oak tree: symbol of patient development from below*

„We need to globalize civil society to civilize globalization.”

Werner Ulrich, "The New Globalization" (*in this reflection*)

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