

What is at stake?

The proponents of globalization like to portray anti-WTO protesters as people who are devoid of social responsibility, lacking ideas, and looking for a fight. They use this description to explain the property destruction and violence that sometimes occurs at protests.

The reality is much different. Most of the anti-globalization movement isn't opposed to globalization per se. Rather, it opposes corporate globalization, pushed forward by the industrialized countries and the large corporations, usually transnationals.

This is why many within the movement have started to call themselves "alterglobalists." Alterglobalists want to push their governments toward a different type of globalization. They favour a globalization where fair trade is more important than free trade, one in which Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) supersede multilateral trade agreements, and one that makes the international trading system accountable for its actions. They reject the premise that unfettered trade will bring democracy.

They make the links between various poverty-causing factors: the size of the foreign debt, environmental degradation, human rights abuse, the ranking of economic priorities over those of people, the lack of accountability of transnational corporations.

Alterglobalists are critical of the lack of accountability and public debate surrounding international trade issues. They are also very critical of the increasing police repression observed at international gatherings, such as a WTO ministerial meeting.

In a democracy, it is one thing to protect buildings and people during a protest, but quite a different matter to quash dissent by erecting security walls (like the "wall of shame" for the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City) and arresting people without just cause. This last tactic is now more common and involves police arresting dissenters before or in the early stages of an event, jailing them for the duration of the event, and then releasing them without having ever charged them.

They say:

"Street protesters are modern-day Luddites who want to make the world safe for stagnation... They [the multinationals] spread wealth, work, technologies that raise living standards and better ways of doing business. That's why so many developing countries are competing for investment."

Richard D. MacCormick, International Chamber of Commerce President, January 26, 2001

We say:

This is only one of the many examples of the paternalistic attitudes one can find from the government and corporate leaders at economic gatherings. Protesters have very good reasons to be opposed to corporate globalization and simply dismissing them as Luddites and "professional protesters" is simplistic and deceptive. Corporate globalization is undemocratic at its core and protests are the consequence of the lack of debate nationally and internationally.

ABOUT PROTESTING

Peaceful demonstrations are one of the key means by which citizens can protest the actions of their leaders, making them more responsive to their wishes.

Until recently, demonstrations were overwhelmingly local or national in scope. However, the nature of demonstrations has changed since the emergence of globalization.

Nowadays, protest itself is increasingly transnational in character. People are assembling all across the globe to protest the actions of international institutions rather than individual governments.

(Source: BBC World Service, What is anti-globalization?
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/ihavearightto/four_b/casestudy_art20.shtml)