

## The Anti-Globalization Movement After September 11

by Murray Dobbin

*This examination of the post September 11 world and the anti-globalization movement by respected author and activist Murray Dobbin is meant to stimulate discussion and provide an opportunity for activists and supporters of democracy and social justice to pause and revisit some of our assumptions, language and political focus. The world has certainly changed since 9-11 but what has not changed is the desire of people everywhere to make it better. (October 26, 2001)*

### **"Everything has changed."**

While this phrase has been used often in the aftermath of the events of September 11 (9-11) it is, of course, not really intended to convey the whole truth about the world and its travails. For workers in Indonesia or Vietnam earning a few cents an hour, or Ogoni tribes people fighting Shell Oil in Nigeria or Canadians fighting to save their Medicare and schools from privatization through WTO agreements, the issues and struggles for social and economic justice are still there and just as important as before.

Then what has changed? As the dust settles on the horrible events of September 11 in the US, ordinary Canadian citizens are conflicted with a whole set of mixed feelings: horror at the death and destruction, doubts about the bombing of Afghanistan, fears for their own safety, confusion about Islamic fundamentalism and its virulent anti-Americanism. While the many issues and problems they face are still there, it is true that they have been temporarily pushed aside by the violent events and particularly by the media preoccupation with them.

While not everything has changed, the events and the response of the US (and other countries including Canada) to them has changed the world in ways that will inevitably affect the way social activists do their work. Some of these are relatively minor, mostly to do with the sensitivity we need to apply in the language we use and tactics we employ when involved in demonstrations (or how we react to the violent tactics of others).

Others involve the question of civil liberties and the simple ability to do our work of promoting social change and challenging the power of corporations and governments. The whole issue of the criminalization of dissent has been given added impetus as loud calls for security inevitably threaten the right to democratic dissent. Powerful elements opposing our vision of society are and will continue to use 9-11 to both demonize us and restrict our freedoms.

Other changes are more fundamental and more long-lasting. Most of these involve a re-examination of our analysis of corporate globalization and our strategy for opposing it. We can, in the most positive view of the post-9-11 world, identify opportunities to change our progressive politics for the better - making our work more effective and our analysis more thorough and inclusive of the global problems that the September 11 attacks reveal. The main changes in this category I think fall into three areas:

1. These are extremely depressing and threatening times for Canadians - we need to give people hope and that means changing both our language and the focus of our work to put forward a positive vision of the future. This means moving from being "anti-globalization" to being "pro-democracy" in the broadest sense of that word - that is, social, economic and political democracy. You cannot give people hope by telling them how bad things are. They already know things are bad. What they want to know is if they can get better. Right-wing governments and corporations have been successfully lowering people's expectations for 15 years. We have to raise them again.

The anti-globalization movement has tended to focus on corporate power because it is transnational corporations which have designed the global economic system. And while we have also focussed on governments as complicit and often willing partners in globalization, we need to re-examine how we portray governments. The impending global economic recession has brought the role of government - downplayed and denigrated in recent years by right-wing politicians and commentators - back into stark relief. The nation-state is suddenly not irrelevant. We need to take advantage of this development to talk about the positive role of government.

2. Additionally, we must now make a serious effort to look at the military/corporate complex which characterizes so much of globalization. The domination of the world by corporations has always implicitly been backed up by military power - mostly that of the US but also of NATO and thus Canada. And now, governments are committing to huge increases in military and police spending - using revenue they say is not there for health and education and child care. We have paid scant attention to this issue and also, because of this, to the issue of peace. It is a weakness of our analysis and our movement's efforts to appeal to ordinary citizens. We now have the opportunity to address it and integrate it into our analysis and our movement.
3. The new reality we are facing has highlighted the oppression and suppression of peoples in the so-called "developing" world. We have always known that corporate globalization - especially through the World Bank and IMF - has been driving working people and peasants of poor countries into desperate poverty. We have talked about the impact of trade agreements on these countries. We need, now, to focus even more attention on the impact of globalization on the developing world.

The issue of the "third world" has been placed front and centre again because the attacks on the US came from that part of the world. People are now seeking answers to questions which many of us have been aware of for years: "Why do people hate the US so much?" It comes as a genuine shock to most Americans, and many Canadians, that people could hate the US so much that they are willing to die to exact revenge.

One of the effects of the 9-11 attacks has been to drive home in horrid and dramatic fashion just how unsustainable the economic and political exploitation of the third world is. The attacks have their own very important, specific Middle East roots, and it is too simplistic to say that "globalization" was their cause. But what the developed world has done to the developing world is no longer invisible, no longer far away, no longer a vague notion. Ordinary citizens are demanding to know why the US is hated - and despite the war propaganda, answers are getting through. Part of the answer is that people forced into hopeless poverty and lack of

social and political democracy will not be quiet forever. If politics fails, if the major world powers refuse to use their power to resolve these issues through dialogue, people will turn to violence. Just weeks before 9-11 the US walked out of a world conference on racism because delegates insisted on trying to deal with the issue of Israel and the Palestinians. The resort to violence is the flip side of the millions of poor people desperately trying to get into Europe, the US and Canada to find a better life - they hate the West but know life is better there. We have made life so unbearable for millions of people that they believe their only hope is escaping their own country.

## **Anti-globalization or pro-democracy?**

In the wake of the horror of 9-11 many activists world-wide have expressed doubts about continuing the aggressive anti-globalization actions and organizing of the past two years. While there has been grass roots organizing and public education on the issue, most of the public opposition to globalization has been confrontational, often angry and highlighted, especially in the media, by violent clashes with police. These actions and our language - "fighting" corporations, "attacking" globalization, being involved in a "class war" - can seem inappropriate when people are in shock and hyper-sensitive to violent imagery. They are too reminiscent of the violence of 9-11. And, of course, activists themselves have been traumatized and are also grieving. Confrontational tactics, even non-violent ones, have lost some of their appeal and meaning.

Many people have made the obvious point that many more thousands of poor people die needlessly everyday around the world from the effects of corporate globalization and neo-liberal "restructuring." But the numbers don't matter: 9-11 was a horrific event, a slaughter of innocents and it has had an enormous impact on activists and those people we want to reach with our message.

But of course we cannot retreat in our efforts to make the world a better place and to reduce the power of corporations versus that of citizens and governments. And there is simply no denying that the movement for social and economic justice does involve conflict. People die in this global conflict everyday and corporations and their political backers ruthlessly "fight" every effort we make to change the world. We are involved in what the Council of Canadians' Maude Barlow has accurately called "class war." It is just that these descriptive phrases and analytical terms, right now, may be counter-productive. They can make it easier for those who would like to discredit us to suggest that we are, somehow, in the same camp as terrorists who attack the corporate World Trade Center, the ultimate corporate symbol. Indeed, WTO officials post 9-11 have actually referred to anti-globalization activists as "intellectual terrorists."



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This re-assessment of our language and tactics - forced by a temporary situation - actually comes at an opportune time. Many people around the world have been saying for some time that we need to focus on our own vision and go beyond talking about what's wrong with corporate globalization. The hugely successful Social Summit at Porto Alegre, Brazil where 20,000 people from around the world gathered to exchange ideas for a better world is just the most famous example. At meetings everywhere in Canada people are asking social movement leaders

and spokespersons to articulate what we stand for not just what we are against. The Council of Canadians has responded to this desire for hope with the Citizens' Agenda, an initiative intended to stimulate discussion of our collective vision of a just, equitable and sustainable future for Canada.

In addition, while most of the coverage of 9-11 focuses on the terrorists and the war, significant attention has been paid to the obvious fact that people in Arab countries have turned to violent, Islamic fundamentalism mostly out of being driven to despair. The lack of control over their own lives, the lack of equality in their countries, has led them to embrace a distorted form of their religion that promises justice through revenge. This same despair over lack of social and economic justice affects people around the world. It is rarely noted in the media that corporate globalization has its own ideological fundamentalism: neo-liberalism and its imperatives of de-regulation, privatization and "free" trade.

Our argument should be that unless we have global democracy and the social justice it brings, unless people are allowed to have accountable governments that act in their interests, unless the world's resources are shared more equitably, the threats from terror and economic instability will never end. The call for democracy is a compelling one and if argued effectively obliges corporations and their apologists to argue against democracy, against social justice and against greater economic equality. By emphasizing our vision we put them on the defensive against our vision of the world.

Of course when we argue for democracy we must argue for it in the broadest possible way. Many countries, for example in Central America, have the institutional trappings of western-style democracy - political parties and elections - but real democracy does not exist. These institutional trappings exist side-by-side with continued human rights abuses, lack of civil liberties and with grinding poverty next to obscene wealth. We must argue for a substantive social and economic democracy and a pluralist approach to democratic institutions - highlighting, for example, the participatory democracy of Porto Alegre and other Brazilian jurisdictions. In several communities in Brazil, government spending is actually determined by the people in a participatory budget process involving all who wish to take part. We should promote similar visionary democratic institutions for Canadian communities.

The shift to pro-democracy, from anti-globalization could and should involve a very broad range of elements, again not restricted to narrow institutional notions of what democracy is. Demonstrators in the streets chant "This is what democracy looks like" implying that real democracy involves active, critically thinking citizens. It could also imply taking back the streets - in other words, the public space that belongs to us all, collectively versus the increasingly private space owned and controlled by corporations. The fight for democracy is one of property rights versus human rights.

The anti-globalization movement has, of course, always talked about democracy so this would be a shift in emphasis not a change in philosophy. The movement against so-called "free trade" has also been a struggle to defend national sovereignty without which genuine democracy is impossible. This shift in our movement's focus will require the creation of a new language to express this vision.

In the current context of governments' preoccupation with security, we need to focus even more attention on human rights and civil liberties. Again, this is nothing new as politically-directed police violence has been increasing everywhere anti-globalization activists have taken to the streets. While we have criticized the police and governments for these abuses we need to make civil liberties and human rights part of our positive message about democracy.

We must also address the very complex question of how we deal with violent elements amongst our anti-globalization allies. For Canadians conscious of their democratic privileges, the use of violence is at best confusing and at worst, unacceptable. For many peaceful activists the demand that we be "inclusive" of those using violence ignores the fact that their violence effectively excludes those who wish to be demonstrating peacefully.

Beyond how we portray our movement in terms of Canadian democracy, we now have an opportunity to call for the strengthening of international institutions which promote democracy and economic equality. The US war on Afghanistan is increasingly seen not only as a brutal assault on Afghan civilians but also as completely ineffective in the fight against global terror. It is also a unilateral American action camouflaged by a mostly reluctant coalition. In contrast to the US approach of taking action and finding allies to support it, the United Nations is the only legitimate organization to deal with this crisis. Even the US is now calling on the UN to help establish a government in Afghanistan after it has defeated the Taliban. Though it is the only superpower in the world even the US realizes it needs the UN for legitimacy, despite having deliberately starved the institution financially for years.

The anti-globalization movement has pointed out that the UN, its agencies and other international agencies and agreements have little power to enforce their decisions. Typical is the comparison of environmental agreements like the Kyoto accord on reducing greenhouse gases and trade agreements. The former have no enforcement mechanism and are, in effect, completely voluntary. But trade agreements are backed by extremely powerful enforcement measures.



## **Internationalism**

The post 9-11 world is a smaller world where every action really does seem to affect everyone, everywhere. Only a true internationalism, backed up by international institutions of governance, can legitimately and effectively deal with this new "globalization" reality. That means our movement should pay much more attention to these institutions and promote them more vigorously - or critique them, as the situation demands. Many observers have pointed out that the UN itself is rapidly becoming "corporatized" with ever-increasing corporate influence in all its operations. But, while the UN is now often complicit in corporate globalization - as are our own governments - it is the only global institution that has a legal mandate establishing the principle of democracy amongst nations. We need to take it back so that it can achieve its original purpose. We should be pressuring the federal government to oppose this corporate trend and support the UN and its agencies in their original mandates and to strengthen international agreements and agencies dealing with the environment, labour standards and human rights.

This work of promoting the enhancement and empowerment of truly international, democratic institutions would involve the same sort of work we do now - education, organizing, lobbying, coalition building. It would not be separate from our work of opposing trade agreements like the WTO and FTAA (and the World Bank and IMF) but would mean that we cast our work differently - contrasting our democratic model with their corporate, elitist, anti-democratic model. We would be contrasting hope with despair. What is new in this includes casting a wider coalition net to include those concerned with civil liberties, the United Nations, and groups/movements promoting various aspects of democratic globalization. And it means continuing and expanding our efforts to create effective international forums for democratic change, such as the international movement on the water issue the Council of Canadians is leading.

Closely associated with a renewed emphasis on the positive message of democracy is a revisiting of the notion of government as a force for good. While this is implied by our criticism of what governments are currently doing - their complicity in the corporate agenda - we can inadvertently fall into the trap of promoting cynicism about government. This plays into the hands of those neo-liberal, pro-corporate forces who would downsize democracy out of existence. If we portray "all politicians" as dishonest, or opportunist or bought off then we

close off the possibility that people will see the possibility of government as an institution promoting democracy and working in the interests of community.

The fact is, that the only institution with enough power - to pass laws, to pay for social programs, to redistribute wealth, to enforce human rights - to challenge corporations is government. Part of the way we need to rethink how we portray government is to come to terms with how we approach parliamentary, and party, politics. We need to work on ways of being effective players in elections while maintaining our non-partisan stance. Engaging more with party politics, putting our policy demands forward and publicly commending those parties which respond, is just part of this approach.

## **The military-corporate complex**

It is remarkable to realize that the anti-globalization movement has for the most part been disconnected from and unaware of the role of militarism in the global domination of transnational corporations. The post 9-11 world brings this analytical weakness to the forefront. While it is, again, too simplistic to say that the "cause" of 9-11 was globalization, it is clearly the case that US foreign policy ensuring open access to middle east oil has played a key role. Our almost exclusive focus on transnational corporations as the key institution of globalization has resulted in our paying scant attention to the role of the military in protecting corporate interests around the world. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman put it best when he wrote, "the hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonalds cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F15 warplane. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

And this reality goes beyond the role of the United States military to the military, as well as the police forces, of virtually every country in the world. While the military's role may seem obvious it is one that is, in fact, carefully nurtured and protected by the world's most powerful governments. Those who have planned the global economy are acutely aware of the need for a strong military presence.

The role of the military in corporate globalization is actually written into free trade agreements. Every one has a clause called a security exception. They are patterned after article XXI of the GATT, the precursor of the WTO, which was negotiated in 1949. The security exceptions state that despite the restrictions on national sovereignty in the agreements, governments are free to take whatever action necessary for national security. The military and police are the only areas of government completely protected from the powerful terms of trade agreements.

As militarism researcher Steve Staples, Chair of the International Network on Disarmament and Globalization points out, "Globalization exacerbates economic inequality, human rights violations, and environmental degradation. These are exactly the conditions underlying war, and pose a threat to corporate interests either by local uprisings, moves by Third World government to nationalize foreign investments, or conflicts between states."

This fact is hardly unknown to those governments smoothing the way for and protecting corporate interests around the world. Indeed, in the actual policy paper of the institutions of corporate globalization, social unrest is quite coldly expected as one of the results of their "structural adjustment" in developing countries. Guardian Journalist Gregory Palast, who writes extensively on the World bank and IMF states: "In one [World bank document], last year's Interim Country Assistance Strategy for Ecuador, the Bank several times suggests - with cold accuracy - that the plans could be expected to spark 'social unrest'. That's not surprising. The secret report notes that the plan to make the US dollar Ecuador's currency has pushed 51% of the population below the poverty line."

Obviously if the WB's plan includes the virtual certainty of unrest, the country in question has to have the capacity and the will to put it down or corporations, the beneficiaries of the plan, will not invest. This is why the WB and IMF turn a blind eye to how much money countries can spend on the police and military - only on social programs and wealth redistribution. As Staples argues, even the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe was needed to protect corporate interests from any resurgence of Russian power. The US also openly admitted, writes Staples, that "...the weaponsization of space is necessary to protect US interests and investments."

The fact that 9-11 coincided with a looming world recession has revealed another important role of the military in this new phase of globalization. Military spending is the government's safety net for corporations. It is instructive that governments are quite able to find billions of dollars for increased spending on the military that they claim they cannot find for medicare or education. That's a boon to corporations who benefit much less from social spending. It is not question of smaller or bigger government as it is a question of government for what purpose and for whom. The attacks on New York and Washington, and the call for a global war on terrorism, will be used to justify enormous new military spending world wide, at the expense of social spending, just as the economy hits recession and social unrest becomes more likely.



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At no other time has it been more clear that militarism and the development of the security state - preoccupied with policing and social order - are integral parts of corporate globalization. It will be even more clear over the next few years. Our movement must work hard to determine how we can integrate opposition to militarism into our resistance to globalization. We have to develop our analysis of the role militarism plays in the global corporate agenda. Part of the answer lies in building closer ties with the peace movement, making them part of our

coalitions, learning from them, and persuading them to see their movement in the broader context of corporate globalization.

## **Re-focussing on the developing world**

The anti-globalization movement in Canada has tended to focus most of its attention on the impacts of globalization and "free trade" on Canada. For example, when it comes to the WTO we focus on how it will effect Canada, particularly public services threatened by the GATS agreement. We have spent much less time and effort addressing the impact of corporate domination on developing countries. This is an opportune time to re-examine and re-balance our approach. The Council of Canadians has already begun this process. For example, in working with our fellow-activists in Latin America it has translated important analytical pieces on the FTAA and its water campaign focuses a lot of attention on water shortages in the third world. But we need to appeal even more to Canadians directly on behalf of third world peoples.

Progressive social movements have generally been based on the unstated assumption that ordinary citizens will respond most readily to issues that affect them directly, in other words out of enlightened self-interest. This assumption implies that we think an appeal to principle or morality may not work as well. In fact we always appeal to both in varying degrees and most campaigns demonstrate that people will respond as citizens if given the opportunity. Polls consistently show that Canadians do care about the poverty and injustice in the "third world" and are willing to make sacrifices to address this inequality.

The events of 9-11 and their violent aftermath in the US war against Afghanistan, bring home in the most dramatic fashion possible that the so-called "first world" cannot continue exploiting the rest of the world with impunity. This suggests that we must address the issue more thoroughly in our education and organizing work, in both our criticism of corporate globalization and in our work developing our own hopeful view of a future democratic globalization.

This will require a greater effort at analysis of the current situation and of our alternative ideas for the structure of the global economy and role of international institutions. And it will mean, in our organizing work, broadening our coalition work considerably. Of all the changed emphases suggested in this paper this will be the most difficult because it is an area where we have done the least work. It will also be difficult because taking on new, complex issues challenges our ability to present such issues in a manner easily expressed in the kinds of campaigns we engage in.

Ideally, people need to know, in the current crisis, the role of American foreign policy in the Middle East in order to understand the roots of the conflict. This leads back to the militarism aspect of globalization but also speaks to the economic exploitation of the developing world, exploitation that is the basis for our high standard of living. The global corporate economy depends on oil from the Middle East and that in turn has led to the suppression of democracy in oil-producing states and of self-determination for Palestinians.

Similar analyses can be done for virtually every part of the developing world. Dealing with these issues comprehensively would mean a shift in our work that the anti-globalization movement would have great difficulty accomplishing given its current resources. But the movement could incorporate new elements into its current analysis and public education which would enhance the attention paid to globalization's impact on the third world. Other

progressive organizations have focussed their exclusive attention on these issues and we need to work with them and take advantage of their insights on these complex issues.

Just one example of how our campaigns might be affected is on the broad economic globalization front. We have led the way in campaigns against trade agreements. If our goal was to refocus our attention to the third world, it would make sense to pay more attention to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These two organizations, over which the US exercises virtually complete control, have an enormous impact on literally billions of people through their draconian structural adjustment policies. The World Bank's former chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, fired for criticizing the bank's policies, bluntly says "It has condemned people to death." We could incorporate references to these institutions, and the call for debt cancellation, in our literature and work more closely with organizations like the Halifax Initiative.

Corporate globalization not only creates the conditions in which terrorism thrives. The hopelessness and despair leads to what could become a catastrophic refugee problem. The very principles by which transnational corporations operate ensures that hundreds of millions of people will be completely excluded from any economic activity, either production or consumption. Until now the planners of the global economy have paid scant attention to this enormous population of economically disenfranchised. It has been assumed that they will quietly starve or at least behave themselves and stay put. That assumption is being proven wrong everyday and will become one of the dominant issues of the next decade, especially given the prospect of a world recession or even depression.

The anti-globalization/pro-democracy movement should begin to deal more explicitly with this crisis in its analysis, literature and organizing. This would also entail addressing issues that it has not seen as key parts of its mandate: immigration and racism, and working with organizations that focus on these issues. Trade agreements have facilitated the free flow of investment but closed the door on the free flow of people who need that investment to survive. Without a focussed effort to explain the root causes of the global refugee and immigration crisis, ordinary Canadians are vulnerable to racist explanations that blame the victims of globalization.



It would also mean further development of our analysis of what a fair and equitable global economy would look like. The movement has often used the phrase "fair trade" to counter the term free trade but we might want to examine this approach as well. Trade itself, even if "fair", may be damaging to countries in the third world. Even if Canadians paid a much higher, fair price for bananas, is it appropriate that up to 85% of the arable land of some countries is devoted to their production?

Current levels of trade, in the context of a global market economy, are inherently destabilizing and environmentally unsustainable. Should we be examining, with our third world partners, a return to what was called import substitution, a policy aimed at self-sufficiency? Whatever the specific policy response, we should be putting any global economic alternative through the lens of economic democracy and focussing on the importance of the public sector and the public ownership of key elements of developing economies. By going beyond the issue of trade we open up the debate about what domestic economies, which most people still depend on, should look like in the future.

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*The Council of Canadians is a member of the September Eleventh Peace Coalition, which is opposed to racism and Canada's military role in the U.S.-led war against Afghanistan.*

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