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Sand in the wheels

Weekly newsletter - n°101 – Wednesday 24 October 2001.

BE A POET: STRIKE BACK!

Content

1- War Is Peace

When he announced the air strikes, President George Bush said, "We're a peaceful nation." America's favourite ambassador, Tony Blair, (who also holds the portfolio of Prime Minister of the UK), echoed him: "We're a peaceful people." So now we know. Pigs are horses. Girls are boys. War is Peace.

2- Only Poetry Can Address Grief: Moving Forward after 911

I think of that moment now as a metaphor for where what I like to call the Global Justice movement is today. We are facing an array of forces telling us to get back, to disperse, to leave the scene. The forces of the state, the media, all the powers that support global corporate capitalism would like to see us go away. But we have nowhere to go.

3- Now, More Than Ever: A Global Movement for Global Justice

Almost from day one, activists began improvising an appropriate response. They defined the attacks as criminal acts, not acts of war. They defined the appropriate response as mobilizing international law, not unilateral military violence. They opposed attacks that would harm people who had not committed the crime. They emphasized protection for those, including but not limited to Muslims and Arabs, who had almost immediately become the targets of bigotry and violence.

4- Doha is coming. Further Briefing on the GATS

Most elected officials and civil servants, let alone the general public, are not aware of GATS, nor of its implications. But several countries are demanding that a wide-ranging assessment of the impact of a free market in services be carried out before any more so-called trade barriers are removed. And non-government organisations (NGOs) and trade unions are demanding that services in the public interest be clearly exempt from GATS.

5- Meeting ATTAC worldwide

War Is Peace

By Arundhati Roy

As darkness deepened over Afghanistan on Sunday, October 7, 2001, the US government, backed by the International Coalition Against Terror (the new, amenable surrogate for the United Nations), launched air strikes against Afghanistan. TV channels lingered on computer-animated images of Cruise missiles, stealth bombers, Tomahawks, 'bunker-busting' missiles and Mark 82 high-drag bombs. All over the world, little boys watched goggle-eyed and stopped clamouring for new video games.

The UN, reduced now to an ineffective abbreviation, wasn't even asked to mandate the

air strikes. (As Madeleine Albright once said, "The US acts multilaterally when it can, and unilaterally when it must.") The 'evidence' against the terrorists was shared amongst friends in the 'Coalition'. After conferring, they announced that it didn't matter whether or not the 'evidence' would stand up in a court of law. Thus, in an instant, were centuries of jurisprudence carelessly trashed.

Nothing can excuse or justify an act of terrorism, whether it is committed by religious fundamentalists, private militia, people's resistance movements or whether it's dressed up as a war of retribution by a recognised government. The bombing of Afghanistan is not revenge for New York and Washington. It is yet another act of terror against the people of the world. Each innocent person that is killed must be



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added to, not set off against, the grisly toll of civilians who died in New York and Washington.

People rarely win wars, governments rarely lose them. People get killed. Governments moult and regroup, hydra-headed. They first use flags to shrink-wrap peoples' minds and suffocate real thought, and then as ceremonial shrouds to cloak the mangled corpses of the willing dead. On both sides, in Afghanistan as well as America, civilians are now hostage to the actions of their own governments. Unknowingly, ordinary people in both countries share a common bond-they have to live with the phenomenon of blind, unpredictable terror. Each batch of bombs that is dropped on Afghanistan is matched by a corresponding escalation of mass hysteria in America about anthrax, more hijackings and other terrorist acts.

There is no easy way out of the spiraling morass of terror and brutality that confronts the world today. It is time now for the human race to hold still, to delve into its wells of collective wisdom, both ancient and modern. What happened on September 11 changed the world forever. Freedom, progress, wealth, technology, war-these words have taken on new meaning. Governments have to acknowledge this transformation, and approach their new tasks with a modicum of honesty and humility. Unfortunately, up to now, there has been no sign of any introspection from the leaders of the International Coalition. Or the Taliban.

When he announced the air strikes, President George Bush said, "We're a peaceful nation." America's favourite ambassador, Tony Blair, (who also holds the portfolio of Prime Minister of the UK), echoed him: "We're a peaceful people."

So now we know. Pigs are horses. Girls are boys. War is Peace.

Speaking at the FBI headquarters a few days later, President Bush said: "This is our calling. This is the calling of the United States of America. The most free nation in the world. A nation built on fundamental values that reject hate, reject violence, rejects murderers and rejects evil. We will not tire."

Here is a list of the countries that America has been at war with-and bombed-since World War II: China (1945-46, 1950-53); Korea (1950-53); Guatemala (1954, 1967-69); Indonesia (1958); Cuba (1959-60); the Belgian Congo (1964); Peru (1965); Laos (1964-73); Vietnam (1961-73);

Cambodia (1969-70); Grenada (1983); Libya (1986); El Salvador (1980s); Nicaragua (1980s); Panama (1989), Iraq (1991-99), Bosnia (1995), Sudan (1998); Yugoslavia (1999). And now Afghanistan. Certainly it does not tire-this, the Most Free nation in the world. What freedoms does it uphold? Within its borders, the freedoms of speech, religion, thought; of artistic expression, food habits, sexual preferences (well, to some extent) and many other exemplary, wonderful things. Outside its borders, the freedom to dominate, humiliate and subjugate-usually in the service of America's real religion, the 'free market'. So when the US government christens a war 'Operation Infinite Justice', or 'Operation Enduring Freedom', we in the Third World feel more than a tremor of fear. Because we know that Infinite Justice for some means Infinite Injustice for others. And Enduring Freedom for some means Enduring Subjugation for others.

The International Coalition Against Terror is largely a cabal of the richest countries in the world. Between them, they manufacture and sell almost all of the world's weapons, they possess the largest stockpile of weapons of mass destruction-chemical, biological and nuclear. They have fought the most wars, account for most of the genocide, subjection, ethnic cleansing and human rights violations in modern history, and have sponsored, armed, and financed untold numbers of dictators and despots. Between them, they have worshipped, almost deified, the cult of violence and war. For all its appalling sins, the Taliban just isn't in the same league.

The Taliban was compounded in the crumbling crucible of rubble, heroin, and landmines in the backwash of the Cold War. Its oldest leaders are in their early 40s. Many of them are disfigured and handicapped, missing an eye, an arm or a leg. They grew up in a society scarred and devastated by war. Between the Soviet Union and America, over 20 years, about \$45 billion worth of arms and ammunition was poured into Afghanistan. The latest weaponry was the only shard of modernity to intrude upon a thoroughly medieval society. Young boys-many of them orphans-who grew up in those times, had guns for toys, never knew the security and comfort of family life, never experienced the company of women. Now, as adults and rulers, the Taliban beat, stone, rape, and brutalise women; they don't seem to know what else to do with them. Years of war have stripped them of gentleness, inured them to kindness and human compassion. They dance to the percussive rhythms of bombs raining down



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around them. Now they've turned their monstrosity on their own people.

With all due respect to President Bush, the people of the world do not have to choose between the Taliban and the US government. All the beauty of human civilization-our art, our music, our literature-lies beyond these two fundamentalist, ideological poles. There is as little chance that the people of the world can all become middle-class consumers as there is that they'll all embrace any one particular religion. The issue is not about Good vs Evil or Islam vs Christianity as much as it is about space. About how to accommodate diversity, how to contain the impulse towards hegemony-every kind of hegemony, economic, military, linguistic, religious, and cultural. Any ecologist will tell you how dangerous and fragile a monoculture is. A hegemonic world is like having a government without a healthy opposition. It becomes a kind of dictatorship. It's like putting a plastic bag over the world, and preventing it from breathing. Eventually, it will be torn open.

One and a half million Afghan people lost their lives in the 20 years of conflict that preceded this new war. Afghanistan was reduced to rubble, and now, the rubble is being pounded into finer dust. By the second day of the air strikes, US pilots were returning to their bases without dropping their assigned payload of bombs. As one pilot put it, Afghanistan is "not a target-rich environment". At a press briefing at the Pentagon, Donald Rumsfeld, US defense secretary, was asked if America had run out of targets.

"First we're going to re-hit targets," he said, "and second, we're not running out of targets, Afghanistan is..." This was greeted with gales of laughter in the Briefing Room.

By the third day of the strikes, the US defense department boasted that it had "achieved air supremacy over Afghanistan". (Did they mean that they had destroyed both, or maybe all 16, of Afghanistan's planes?)

On the ground in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance-the Taliban's old enemy, and therefore the International Coalition's newest friend-is making headway in its push to capture Kabul. (For the archives, let it be said that the Northern Alliance's track record is not very different from the Taliban's. But for now, because it's inconvenient, that little detail is being glossed over.) The visible, moderate, "acceptable" leader of the Alliance, Ahmed Shah Masood, was killed in

a suicide-bomb attack early in September. The rest of the Northern Alliance is a brittle confederation of brutal warlords, ex-communists, and unbending clerics. It is a disparate group divided along ethnic lines, some of whom have tasted power in Afghanistan in the past.

Until the US air strikes, the Northern Alliance controlled about 5 per cent of the geographical area of Afghanistan. Now, with the Coalition's help and 'air cover', it is poised to topple the Taliban. Meanwhile, Taliban soldiers, sensing imminent defeat, have begun to defect to the Alliance. So the fighting forces are busy switching sides and changing uniforms. But in an enterprise as cynical as this one, it seems to matter hardly at all. Love is hate, north is south, peace is war.

Among the global powers, there is talk of 'putting in a representative government'. Or, on the other hand, of 'restoring' the Kingdom to Afghanistan's 89-year-old former king, Zahir Shah, who has lived in exile in Rome since 1973. That's the way the game goes-support Saddam Hussein, then 'take him out'; finance the mujahideen, then bomb them to smithereens; put in Zahir Shah and see if he's going to be a good boy. (Is it possible to 'put in' a representative government? Can you place an order for Democracy-with extra cheese and jalapeno peppers?)

Reports have begun to trickle in about civilian casualties, about cities emptying out as Afghan civilians flock to the borders which have been closed. Main arterial roads have been blown up or sealed off. Those who have experience of working in Afghanistan say that by early November, food convoys will not be able to reach the millions of Afghans (7.5 million according to the UN) who run the very real risk of starving to death during the course of this winter. They say that in the days that are left before winter sets in, there can either be a war, or an attempt to reach food to the hungry. Not both.

As a gesture of humanitarian support, the US government air-dropped 37,000 packets of emergency rations into Afghanistan. It says it plans to drop a total of 5,000,000 packets. That will still only add up to a single meal for half-a-million people out of the several million in dire need of food. Aid workers have condemned it as a cynical, dangerous, public-relations exercise. They say that air-dropping food packets is worse than futile. First, because the food will never get to those who really need it. More dangerously, those



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who run out to retrieve the packets risk being blown up by landmines. A tragic alms race.

Nevertheless, the food packets had a photo-op all to themselves. Their contents were listed in major newspapers. They were vegetarian, we're told, as per Muslim Dietary Law(!) Each yellow packet, decorated with the American flag, contained: rice, peanut butter, bean salad, strawberry jam, crackers, raisins, flat bread, an apple fruit bar, seasoning, matches, a set of plastic cutlery, a serviette and illustrated user instructions.

After three years of unremitting drought, an air-dropped airline meal in Jalalabad! The level of cultural ineptitude, the failure to understand what months of relentless hunger and grinding poverty really mean, the US government's attempt to use even this abject misery to boost its self-image, beggars description.

Reverse the scenario for a moment. Imagine if the Taliban government was to bomb New York City, saying all the while that its real target was the US government and its policies. And suppose, during breaks between the bombing, the Taliban dropped a few thousand packets containing nan and kababs impaled on an Afghan flag. Would the good people of New York ever find it in themselves to forgive the Afghan government? Even if they were hungry, even if they needed the food, even if they ate it, how would they ever forget the insult, the condescension? Rudy Giuliani, Mayor of New York City, returned a gift of \$10 million from a Saudi prince because it came with a few words of friendly advice about American policy in the Middle East. Is pride a luxury only the rich are entitled to?

Far from stamping it out, igniting this kind of rage is what creates terrorism. Hate and retribution don't go back into the box once you've let them out. For every 'terrorist' or his 'supporter' that is killed, hundreds of innocent people are being killed too. And for every hundred innocent people killed, there is a good chance that several future terrorists will be created.

Where will it all lead?

Setting aside the rhetoric for a moment, consider the fact that the world has not yet found an acceptable definition of what 'terrorism' is. One country's terrorist is too often another's freedom fighter. At the heart of the matter lies the world's deep-seated ambivalence towards violence. Once violence is accepted as a legitimate political

instrument, then the morality and political acceptability of terrorists (insurgents or freedom fighters) becomes contentious, bumpy terrain. The US government itself has funded, armed, and sheltered plenty of rebels and insurgents around the world. The CIA and Pakistan's ISI trained and armed the mujahideen who, in the 1980s, were seen as terrorists by the government in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. While President Reagan posed with them for a group portrait and called them the moral equivalents of America's founding fathers. Today, Pakistan-America's ally in this new war-sponsors insurgents who cross the border into Kashmir in India. Pakistan lauds them as 'freedom fighters', India calls them 'terrorists'. India, for its part, denounces countries who sponsor and abet terrorism, but the Indian army has, in the past, trained separatist Tamil rebels asking for a homeland in Sri Lanka-the LTTE, responsible for countless acts of bloody terrorism. (Just as the CIA abandoned the mujahideen after they had served its purpose, India abruptly turned its back on the LTTE for a host of political reasons. It was an enraged LTTE suicide-bomber who assassinated former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991.)

It is important for governments and politicians to understand that manipulating these huge, raging human feelings for their own narrow purposes may yield instant results, but eventually and inexorably, they have disastrous consequences. Igniting and exploiting religious sentiments for reasons of political expediency is the most dangerous legacy that governments or politicians can bequeath to any people-including their own. People who live in societies ravaged by religious or communal bigotry know that every religious text-from the Bible to the Bhagwad Gita-can be mined and misinterpreted to justify anything, from nuclear war to genocide to corporate globalisation.

This is not to suggest that the terrorists who perpetrated the outrage on September 11 should not be hunted down and brought to book. They must be. But is war the best way to track them down? Will burning the haystack find you the needle? Or will it escalate the anger and make the world a living hell for all of us?

At the end of the day, how many people can you spy on, how many bank accounts can you freeze, how many conversations can you eavesdrop on, how many e-mails can you intercept, how many letters can you open, how many phones can you tap? Even before September 11, the CIA had accumulated more information than is humanly



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possible to process. (Sometimes, too much data can actually hinder intelligence-small wonder the US spy satellites completely missed the preparation that preceded India's nuclear tests in 1998.)

The sheer scale of the surveillance will become a logistical, ethical and civil rights nightmare. It will drive everybody clean crazy. And freedom-that precious, precious thing-will be the first casualty. It's already hurt and hemorrhaging dangerously.

Governments across the world are cynically using the prevailing paranoia to promote their own interests. All kinds of unpredictable political forces are being unleashed. In India, for instance, members of the All India People's Resistance Forum, who were distributing anti-war and anti-US pamphlets in Delhi, have been jailed. Even the printer of the leaflets was arrested. The right-wing government (while it shelters Hindu extremists groups like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal) has banned the Students' Islamic Movement of India and is trying to revive an anti-terrorist act which had been withdrawn after the Human Rights Commission reported that it had been more abused than used. Millions of Indian citizens are Muslim. Can anything be gained by alienating them?

Every day that the war goes on, raging emotions are being let loose into the world. The international press has little or no independent access to the war zone. In any case, mainstream media, particularly in the US, has more or less rolled over, allowing itself to be tickled on the stomach with press hand-outs from militarymen and government officials. Afghan radio stations have been destroyed by the bombing. The Taliban has always been deeply suspicious of the Press. In the propaganda war, there is no accurate estimate of how many people have been killed, or how much destruction has taken place. In the absence of reliable information, wild rumours spread.

Put your ear to the ground in this part of the world, and you can hear the thrumming, the deadly drumbeat of burgeoning anger. Please. Please, stop the war now. Enough people have died. The smart missiles are just not smart enough. They're blowing up whole warehouses of suppressed fury.

President George Bush recently boasted: "When I take action, I'm not going to fire a \$2 million missile at a \$10 empty tent and hit a camel in the butt. It's going to be decisive." President Bush

should know that there are no targets in Afghanistan that will give his missiles their money's worth. Perhaps, if only to balance his books, he should develop some cheaper missiles to use on cheaper targets and cheaper lives in the poor countries of the world. But then, that may not make good business sense to the Coalition's weapons manufacturers. It wouldn't make any sense at all, for example, to the Carlyle Group-described by the Industry Standard as 'the world's largest private equity firm', with \$12 billion under management. Carlyle invests in the defense sector and makes its money from military conflicts and weapons spending.

Carlyle is run by men with impeccable credentials. Former US defense secretary Frank Carlucci is Carlyle's chairman and managing director (he was a college roommate of Donald Rumsfeld's). Carlyle's other partners include former US secretary of state James A. Baker III, George Soros, Fred Malek (George Bush Sr's campaign manager). An American paper-the Baltimore Chronicle and Sentinel-says that former President George Bush Sr is reported to be seeking investments for the Carlyle Group from Asian markets. He is reportedly paid not inconsiderable sums of money to make 'presentations' to potential government-clients.

Ho Hum. As the tired saying goes, it's all in the family.

Then there's that other branch of traditional family business-oil. Remember, President George Bush (Jr) and Vice-President Dick Cheney both made their fortunes working in the US oil industry.

Turkmenistan, which borders the northwest of Afghanistan, holds the world's third largest gas reserves and an estimated six billion barrels of oil reserves. Enough, experts say, to meet American energy needs for the next 30 years (or a developing country's energy requirements for a couple of centuries.) America has always viewed oil as a security consideration, and protected it by any means it deems necessary. Few of us doubt that its military presence in the Gulf has little to do with its concern for human rights and almost entirely to do with its strategic interest in oil.

Oil and gas from the Caspian region currently moves northward to European markets. Geographically and politically, Iran and Russia are major impediments to American interests. In 1998, Dick Cheney-then CEO of Halliburton, a major player in the oil industry-said: "I can't think



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of a time when we've had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian. It's almost as if the opportunities have arisen overnight." True enough.

For some years now, an American oil giant called Unocal has been negotiating with the Taliban for permission to construct an oil pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan and out to the Arabian Sea. From here, Unocal hopes to access the lucrative 'emerging markets' in South and Southeast Asia. In December 1997, a delegation of Taliban mullahs traveled to America and even met US State Department officials and Unocal executives in Houston. At that time the Taliban's taste for public executions and its treatment of Afghan women were not made out to be the crimes against humanity that they are now. Over the next six months, pressure from hundreds of outraged American feminist groups was brought to bear on the Clinton administration. Fortunately, they managed to scuttle the deal. And now comes the US oil industry's big chance.

In America, the arms industry, the oil industry, the major media networks, and, indeed, US foreign policy, are all controlled by the same business combines. Therefore, it would be foolish to expect this talk of guns and oil and defense deals to get any real play in the media. In any case, to a distraught, confused people whose pride has just been wounded, whose loved ones have been tragically killed, whose anger is fresh and sharp, the inanities about the 'Clash of Civilisations' and the 'Good vs Evil' discourse home in unerringly. They are cynically doled out by government spokesmen like a daily dose of vitamins or anti-depressants. Regular medication ensures that mainland America continues to remain the enigma it has always been—a curiously insular people, administered by a pathologically meddling, promiscuous government.

And what of the rest of us, the numb recipients of this onslaught of what we know to be preposterous propaganda? The daily consumers of the lies and brutality smeared in peanut butter and strawberry jam being air-dropped into our minds just like those yellow food packets. Shall we look away and eat because we're hungry, or shall we stare unblinking at the grim theatre unfolding in Afghanistan until we retch collectively and say, in one voice, that we have had enough?

As the first year of the new millennium rushes to a close, one wonders—have we forfeited our right to dream? Will we ever be able to re-imagine

beauty? Will it be possible ever again to watch the slow, amazed blink of a new-born gecko in the sun, or whisper back to the marmot who has just whispered in your ear—without thinking of the World Trade Center and Afghanistan?

Ms. Roy is winner of the Booker Award for her novel based in India, *God of Small Things*

Only Poetry Can Address Grief: Moving Forward after 911

By Starhawk

In the middle of the Anti-Capitalist Convergence march in Washington DC last month, I found myself nose to nose with a line of police attempting to push the crowd back. I was facing an angry but very short policewoman so in my case it was actually nightstick to bosom. "Get back, get back!" she was shouting, but our line was not giving ground. I explained to her, calmly and I thought, quite reasonably, that we were not going to get back, because there was nowhere for us to go.

I think of that moment now as a metaphor for where what I like to call the Global Justice movement is today. We are facing an array of forces telling us to get back, to disperse, to leave the scene. The forces of the state, the media, all the powers that support global corporate capitalism would like to see us go away.

But we have nowhere to go.

We have nowhere to go because the conditions we have been fighting have not gone away. The disparity between rich and poor has not grown less, the attempts of the corporate powers to consolidate their hegemony have not ceased, the environment has not miraculously repaired itself, and our economic and social systems have not suddenly become sustainable. We're on the Titanic; our efforts to turn the course of the ship have just been hijacked, and we're churning full steam ahead into the iceberg.

We don't have the luxury of defraying action to a more favorable moment. We need the movement to keep moving forward.

How do we do that in the face of increased repression and much potential public opposition?

I. Stand our ground: First, we don't panic, and we stand our ground. Fear is running rampant at the



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moment, and every effort is being made by the authorities to increase and play upon that fear. While the general public may fear more terrorist attacks, we in the movement are equally or more afraid of what our governments may do in restricting civil liberties and targeting dissent. But either way, fear is the authorities' greatest weapon of social control. When we are in a state of fear, we're not taking in information, we're unable to clearly see or assess a situation, and we make bad decisions. We're more easily controlled.

We can learn to recognize fear, in our own bodies, in our meetings, in our interactions. When fear is present, just stop for a moment, take a deep breath, and consciously set it aside. Then ask, 'What would we do in this situation if we weren't afraid?' From that perspective, we can make choices based on reasonable caution but also on vision.

II. Acknowledge the grief: 911 threw us as collectively into a deep well of grief. We have had to face the awful power of death to intrude on our lives, to sear us with pain and loss, to reorder all our priorities and disrupt all our plans, to remind us that we walk the world in vulnerable, mortal flesh.

The political task that faces us is to speak to the depth of that grief, not to gloss it over or trivialize it or use it to further stale agendas. If we simply shout at people over bullhorns, recycling the politics, the slogans, the language of the sixties, we will fail. The movement we need to build now, the potential for transformation that might arise out of this tragedy, must speak to the heart of the pain we share across political lines.

A great hole torn has been torn out of the heart of the world. What we need now is not to close over the wound, but to dare to stare more deeply into it. To comprehend that grief, we must look at the possibility that it was present within us before the 11th, that the violence and death of that day released a flood tide of latent mourning. On one level, yes, we mourned for the victims and their families, for the destruction of familiar places and the disruption of the patterns of our lives. But on a deeper level, perhaps many of us were already mourning, consciously or not, the lack of connection and community in the society that built those towers, the separation from nature that they embodied, the diminishment of the wild, the closing off of possibilities and the narrowing of our life spaces. This frozen grief, transmuted into rage, has fueled our movements, but we are not

the only ones to feel it. With the grief also comes a fear more profound than even the terror caused by the attack itself. For those towers represented human triumph over nature. Larger than life, built to be unburnable, they were the Titanic of our day. For them to burn and fall so quickly means that the whole superstructure we depend upon to mitigate nature and assure our comfort and safety could fall. And without it most of us do not know how to survive.

We know, in our bones, that our technologies and economies are unsustainable, that nature is stronger than we are, that we cannot tamper with the very life systems of the earth without costs, and that we are creating such despair in the world that it must inevitably crack open, weep and rage. The towers falling were an icon of an upcoming reckoning we dread but secretly anticipate.

The movement we need to build now must speak to the full weight of the loss, of the fear, and yet hold out hope. We must admit the existence of great forces of chaos and uncertainty, and yet maintain that out of chaos can come destruction, but also creativity.

III. Develop a new political language: Faced with the profundity of loss, with the stark reality of death, we find words inadequate. "What do I say to someone who just lost his brother in the towers?" a hard core New York activist asks me. "How do I talk to him?" The language of abstraction doesn't work. Ideology doesn't work. Judgment and hectoring and shaming and blaming cannot truly touch the depth of that loss. Only poetry can address grief. Only words that convey what we can see and smell and taste and touch of life, can move us.

To do that we need to forge a new language of both the word and the deed. We on the Left can be as devoted to certain words and political forms as any Catholic was ever attached to the Latin Mass. We incant "imperialism" or "anti-capitalist" or "non-violence" or even "peace" with an almost religious fervor, as if the words alone could strike blows in the struggle.

Those words are useful, and meaningful. But they're like the cliché that the bad poet turns to. They are the easy first answer that relieves us of the work of real expression. Lately I'm hearing some of my most political friends say, "I can't go to another rally. I can't stand hearing one more person tell me in angry tones what the answers are." What if we stopped in the middle of our



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rallies and said, "But you know, these issues are complex, and many of us have mixed feelings, and let's take some time for all the people here to talk to each other instead of listening to more speeches." If we could admit to some of our own ambiguities, we might also find that we are closer than we think to that supposed overwhelming majority of war supporters, who in reality may have deeply mixed feelings of their own.

IV. Propose our own alternative to Bush's war: Defining the September attacks as an act of war rather than a criminal act has only dignified the perpetrators. Going to war has turned us into Bin Laden's recruiting agency, rapidly alienating the entire Muslim world. Bombing Afghanistan has made us look like thugs to the Muslim world, (and to everyone else with a heart and sense) and bred thousands of new potential ready-to-die enemies. The bombing, by preventing relief trucks from delivering serious food supplies before winter, now threatens to impose starvation on up to seven million Afghans.

In spite of what the polls and the media tell us, I don't necessarily believe that the bulk of the U.S. population is frothing at the mouth with eagerness for Afghani blood. The phrase I kept hearing is a plaintive "We need to do something." Bush's program is the only one laid out for us. The attacks are real, and devastating; simply calling for 'peace' and singing "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" does not address their seriousness. If we oppose Bush's war, we need a clear alternative.

Diplomacy does not mean weakness. It means being smarter than the opposition, not just better armed. Diplomacy also does not mean simply issuing ultimatums backed by bombs. It means actually understanding something of the culture of the people you're negotiating with. It means actually negotiating, offering a carrot as well as a stick, being willing to let the other side come out with something less than total humiliation. If the goal of the war is truly to get Bin Laden, well, the Taliban just offered to deliver him to a third country. This could be moment to switch our policy, to negotiate, to work with and strengthen international institutions and the U.N., to begin to deliver massive and meaningful humanitarian aid to the region. Any or all of those acts would increase our long term security far more than our present course.

V. Expose the real aims of the war: We have about as much chance of doing any of the above

as I have of being offered a post in the current Administration. All the indications are that Bush wants a war, to establish U.S. hegemony in Central Asia and the East, to forestall an Asian alliance that might oppose our vested interests with interests of their own, to take control of rich oil resources of Central Asia and provide a safe passage for an oil pipeline across Afghanistan, to deflect from the illegitimacy of his own presidency, to implement the entire right wing agenda. We need to continue educating the public about those aims and about the real consequences of the war. To do that, we need to talk to people-not just at rallies and teach-ins, but in our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools, on the bus, in the street, on talk shows, with our families. It can be easier to march into a line of riot cops than to voice an unpopular opinion where we live, but we've got to do it and to learn to do it calmly and effectively.

And while we're talking about the war, we need to make the connections to the broader issues we were working on before the eleventh of September. The war can be an opening to challenge racism, and to spotlight the U.S.'s historic role of training, arming, and supporting terrorists-including Bin Laden and the Taliban in previous years. In an age of terrorism, does an economy entirely dependent on oil-based long distance transport really make sense? (Especially as it didn't make sense before, but never mind that.) The Anthrax scares are a perfect opportunity to push for true domestic security in the form of a well-funded, functioning public health system, availability of hospital beds and medical care, support for local food producers, development of alternative energy resources, etc. The right wing has used the attacks and the war to justify their agenda, but with a little political judo we can redraw their picture of reality.

VI. Develop our vision: Despair breeds fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism.

A world of truly shared abundance would be a safer world.

The policies of global corporate capitalism have not brought us that world. They've been tried-and found wanting. We need to replace them with our own vision.

The global justice movement has often been accused of not knowing what it wants. In reality, we know clearly the broad outlines of what we want even though we have a multiplicity of ideas



of how to get there. I can lay it out for you in five short paragraphs: We want enterprises to be rooted in communities and responsible to communities and to future generations. We want producers to be accountable for the true social and ecological costs of what they produce.

We say there is a commons that needs to be protected, that there are resources that are too vital to life, too precious or sacred to be exploited for the profit of the few, including those things that sustain life: water, traditional lands and productive farmland, the collective heritage of ecological and genetic diversity, the earth's climate, the habitats of rare species and of endangered human cultures, sacred places, and our collective cultural and intellectual knowledge.

We say that those who labor are entitled, as a bare minimum, to safety, to just compensation that allows for life, hope and dignity, and to have the power to determine the conditions of their work.

We say that as humans we have a collective responsibility for the well being of others, that life is fraught with uncertainty, bad luck, injury, disease, and loss, and that we need to help each other bear those losses, provide generously and graciously the means for all to have food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, and the possibility to realize their dreams and aspirations. Only then will we have true security.

We say that democracy means people having a voice in the decisions that affect them, including economic decisions.

VII. Develop our strategy: We might begin by acknowledging that we have had a highly successful strategy for the past two years. Since Seattle, what we've done is to oppose every summit, as a means of focusing attention on the institutions of globalization that were functioning essentially in secret, and delegitimizing them. Systems fall when they hit a crisis of legitimacy, when they can no longer inspire faith and command compliance. Our strategy should continue to work toward creating that crisis for the institutions of global corporate capitalism. In the meantime, in spite of all appearances the government may already be creating that crisis for itself. For ultimately, nothing delegitimizes a government faster than not being able to provide for the physical or economic security of its people.

Now our strategy needs to broaden and become more complex.

Contest the summits when and where we can, but perhaps with some new tactics that clearly embody the alternatives we represent.

Turn more of our attention to local organizing, bringing the global issues home and making organizing and activism an ongoing, sustained process. And find ways to make that process as juicy and exciting as some of the big, global actions.

Find ways to link local issues and actions regionally and globally.

Start to build the alternatives: alternative economic enterprises on new models, directly democratic systems of governance such as neighborhood or watershed councils or town meetings, everything from alternative energy co-operatives to community gardens to local currencies. Look for ways to let those alternatives delegitimize the status quo.

VIII. Organize openly: In times of increasing repression, the strongest way to resist is not to hide, but to become even more open in our organizing and our communications. The more out there we are, the harder we'll be to brand as terrorists. The more faces they photograph at rallies and marches, the less meaningful any single face will be. The more information they collect, the less they'll be able to collate, analyze and make sense of it all. And if they read my email-they're welcome to read my email. Somebody ought to, and I don't have time to read it all myself. Maybe I could pay one of them a small extra fee to sort it for me and send me a summary of the high pointsS.

Security culture either has to be so good you can outspook the CIA, or it simply makes you look like you have something to hide and attracts the attention of the authorities. And it makes it extremely difficult to mobilize, educate and inspire people. Yes, there are actions that depend on surprise, but with a little cleverness we can figure out how to do that in a basically open setting. "And tonight, each affinity group spoke receives a sealed envelope-open it at five A.M. tomorrow and it will give you two alternative beginning points for your march. Flip a coin to decide which one to go toS"



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IX. Make our actions count: Political action may well become more costly in the next months and years. That simply means we need to be more clear and thoughtful in planning and carrying out our actions. Most of us are willing to take risks in this work and to make sacrifices if necessary, but no one wants to sacrifice for something meaningless or stupid. We can no longer afford vaguely planned, ill considered actions that don't accomplish anything-and believe me, I've done more than my fair share of them. We should never carry out an action that involves significant risks, unless the following five points are addressed: 1. We know what our intention is-are we trying to raise public awareness, delegitimize an institution, influence an individual, end an immediate wrong? 2. We have a clear objective and know what it is--are we trying to close down a meeting, deliver a petition, pressure an official to meet with us, provide a service? What are we trying to communicate, to whom, and how? What would victory look like? 3. We make sure the acts we take, the symbols we use, the focus we choose and the tactics we use reflect our intentions and objectives. We resist the temptation to do extraneous things that might detract from our focus.

4. We have an exit strategy. How are we going to end the action? How are we going to get out once we get in? 5. We have ongoing support lined up for afterwards-legal, medical, political support, people willing to offer solidarity if needed.

X. Use tactics that fit the new strategy and situation: All of us are rethinking our tactics in the light of the current situation. We often argue tactics on the grounds of morality-is it right or wrong, violent or nonviolent, to throw a tear gas canister back into a line of police? To break a window? We might do better to ask, "Do these particular tactics support our goals and objectives," and "Are they actually working?" Those who advocate highly confrontational tactics, such as property damage and fighting the cops, are generally trying to strike blows against the system. But at the moment, the system has been struck harder than we could have imagined, and is reeling toward fascism, not liberation. In the present climate, such tactics are most likely to backfire and confirm the system's legitimacy.

Many classic nonviolent tactics are designed to heighten the contrast between us and them, to claim the high moral ground and point out the violence of the system. But many of those tactics no longer function in the same way. Static,

passive tactics become boring and disempowering. Symbolic, cross-the-line arrests don't seem to impress the public with our nobility and dedication any more, even when they are noticed at all. Mass arrests may be used to justify police violence, even when the arrestees were completely peaceful. When the police cooperate in making the arrest easy and low risk, the process confirms rather than challenges the power of the state. When they don't, even symbolic actions are costing heavily in jail time or probation. The price may well be worth it, but there's only so many times in a lifetime we can pay it, so our choices need to be thoughtful and strategic.

We need a new vocabulary of tactics, that can be empowering, visionary, confrontational without reading as proto-terrorist, and that work toward a crisis of legitimacy for the system. We also need tactics and actions that prefigure the world we want to create, but that do so in a way that has some edge and bite to it. Here are a few we are already using that could be further developed: Mobile, fluid street tactics: Groups like Art and Revolution, Reclaim the Streets, the Pink Blocs of Prague and Genoa and the Living River in Quebec have brought art, dance, drums, creativity and mobility to street actions, and developed mobile and fluid street tactics. Such actions are focused not on getting arrested (although that may be a consequence of the actions) nor on confrontations with the cops, but on accomplishing an objective: claiming a space and redefining it; disrupting business as usual, etc., while embodying the joy of the revolution we are trying to make. In Toronto on October 16, snake dancing columns of people managed to disrupt the financial district in spite of a very tense police presence. The Pink Bloc has sake danced through police lines. The Pagan Cluster in Quebec City and and DC was able to perform street rituals in the midst of a dangerous situations, in ways that allowed participation by people with widely varying needs around safety. The Fogtown Action Avengers in San Francisco combined an open, public ritual which distracted the police from a surprise disruption of the stock exchange carried out by an affinity group dressed as Robin Hood.

Claiming space: Reclaim the Streets takes an intersection, moves in a sound system and couches, and throws a party. A Temporary Autonomous Zone is a space we take over and then exemplify the world we want to live in, with free food, healing, popular education, a Truly Free Market where goods are given away or traded, workshops, conversations, sports, theater. Street



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services and alternative services: Groups like Food Not Bombs have been directly feeding the homeless for decades. One of the most successful direct actions I've ever been involved with was a group called Prevention Point that pioneered street based needle exchanges for drug users to prevent the spread of AIDS. In DC in September, during the Anti-Capitalist Convergence's Temporary Autonomous Zone and during the Sunday peace march rally, the Pagan Cluster set up an Emotional Healing Space that offered informal counseling, massage, food, water and hands-on healing. The IndyMedia Centers provide alternative news coverage and a powerful challenge to corporate media. The medical and legal services we provide during an action could be expanded. Guerilla gardeners could be mobilized in new ways. Imagine a convergence that left a community transformed by community gardens, with toxic sites healing, worm farms thriving, and streets lined with fruit trees.

Popular education: One of the values of mass convergences has been the education and training we've been able to provide for each other, from teach-ins on the global economy to climbing instruction. Almost every Summit has had its CounterSummit. Most of these have followed the rough format of an academic conference, with presenters talking to an audience or facilitating a discussion. But many more interactive and creative ways of teaching and learning could be brought into them: role plays, story-telling circles, councils. We could hold a giant simulation of a meeting, with people role playing delegations and grappling with the issues on the table, but from the starting point of our own values. People are hungry to talk about the war, about their fears and beliefs and opinions. The Zapatistas give us the example of the Consulta-a process of going out to the people to both listen to concerns and mobilize. We might halt the speeches at a rally for ten minutes to let people talk to each other. Or do away with the speeches altogether, and instead ask groups to facilitate smaller-group discussions on their issues and tactics, run short training sessions, offer games or dances or rituals. And we could develop ways to create instant Public Conversations as actions and as education. Caravans can bring discussion and education out of the urban centers, and could embody alternative energies and possibilities, running their vehicles on vegetable oil, bringing solar panels to power sound systems.

These are just a few ideas that can stimulate our thinking and awaken our creativity.

XI. Renew our spirits: These are hard times. Many of us have been working intensely for a long time and are now seeing the possibility of our hard won political gains being swept away. Fear and loss surround us, and many forces are at work trying to make us feel isolated, marginalized and disempowered. At best, the work ahead of us seems overwhelming.

If we are going to sustain this work and regain our momentum, we need to allow ourselves time to rest, to go to those places we are working so hard to save and be open to their beauty, to receive support and love from the communities we are working for. We need to nurture our relationships with each other, to offer not just political solidarity but personal warmth and caring. Death and loss rearrange our priorities, teach us how much we need each other, and make it easier to drop some of the petty things that interfere with our true connections.

Many activists mistrust religion and spirituality, often for good reasons. But each of us is in this work because something is sacred to us-sacred in the sense that it means more than our comfort or convenience, that it determines all of our other values, that we are willing to risk ourselves in its service. It might not be a God, Goddess or deity, but rather a belief in freedom, the feeling we get when we stand under a redwood tree or watch a bird winging across the sky, a commitment to truth or to a child. Whatever it is, it can feed and nurture us as well. For activists who have some form of identified spiritual practice, now is a good time to seriously practice it. For those who don't, it might still be worth taking time to ask yourself, "Why do I do this work? What is most important to me? What does feed me?" The answer might be grand and noble, or it might be small and ordinary, hip hop or sidewalk chalk. Whatever it is, make it a priority. Do it daily, if you can, or at least regularly. Bring it into actions with you. Let it renew your energy when you're down. We need you in this struggle for the long haul, and taking care of yourself is a way of preserving one of the movement's precious resources.

The goal of terrorists, whether of the freelance or the state variety, is to fill all our mental and emotional space with fear, rage, powerlessness and despair, to cut us off from the sources of life and hope. Violence and fear can make us shut down to the things and beings that we love. When we do, we wither and die. When we consciously open ourselves to the beauty of the world, when



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we choose to love another tenuous and fragile being, we commit an act of liberation as courageous and radical as any foray into the tear gas.

There is nowhere left to go, but forward. If we hold onto hope and vision, if we dare to walk with courage and to act in the service of what we love, the barriers holding us back will give way, as the police eventually did in our Washington march. The new road is unmarked and unmapped. It feels unfamiliar, but exhilarating; dangerous, but free. We were born to blaze this trail, and the great powers of life and creativity march with us toward a viable future.

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Now, More Than Ever: A Global Movement for Global Justice

By Jeremy Brecher

In the months before September 11, the Bush Administration undermined one effort after another to address world problems on an international basis. It skipped out on the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, scuttled efforts to control biological weapons, refused to support a war crimes tribunal, withdrew from efforts to limit nuclear proliferation, and announced withdrawal from the treaty against anti-ballistic missiles.

In contrast, a swelling global justice movement demanded adequate responses to problems ranging from genetically modified organisms to AIDS drugs for poor countries, from global warming to the destruction of indigenous lifeways by global corporations. While its most visible expressions were large global demonstrations in places like Quebec and Genoa, its real strength lay in its linkage of people at the grassroots around the world - its "globalization from below." This movement was mobilizing for massive demonstrations at the IMF/World Bank meetings in Washington, DC at the end of September.

The terrorist attacks on September 11 posed this movement new and unanticipated questions. In contrast to the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, or the bombing of Serbia, there was an attack on and a

threat to the United States in reality, not just in the rhetoric of American leaders. To treat mass murder and war crimes committed on American soil as somehow equivalent to past resistance to American imperialism would have been grotesque and, at least for the movement in the US, suicidal.

Almost from day one, activists began improvising an appropriate response. They defined the attacks as criminal acts, not acts of war. They defined the appropriate response as mobilizing international law, not unilateral military violence. They opposed attacks that would harm people who had not committed the crime. They emphasized protection for those, including but not limited to Muslims and Arabs, who had almost immediately become the targets of bigotry and violence.

Over the course of two weeks, a peace movement calling for "justice not vengeance" emerged in the US. Its base included students, religious communities, peace activists, and many from the global justice movement. Similar movements have emerged around the world to oppose an accelerating cycle of violence. [for more information, visit www.indymedia.org, www.zmag.org, and sites linked to them.] Organizers cancelled the Washington demonstrations planned for late September, while going ahead with associated educational activities and initiating a major discussion about responses to the post-September 11 situation.

In the face of calls to equate vengeance with patriotism, it was easy to fear that the fragile unity of the broad coalitions that have challenged globalization in the US might rapidly turn into a battle between peacniks and warniks. Notwithstanding some divergences of response, that hasn't happened.

On the one hand, even those most critical of US imperialism have mourned the lost, condemned the terrorist attacks, and supported international cooperation to bring the perpetrators to justice. On the other hand, even trade unions with "hard hat" constituencies have largely rejected "bomb them back to the stone age" responses: The Steelworkers union's September 12th statement, for example, demands "justice for the victims, their families and humanity, and strongly urges that all available resources be used to track down and punish those individuals and organizations responsible," but warns that "care must be taken not to repeat this most recent tragedy by harming innocent men, women and children who, because of geography, find themselves in harm's way."

The Bush Administration now seems to be backing off from the threat of a Gulf War-style juggernaut. It's hard to weigh how much this results from the unlikelihood of success, the probable risks, other countries' objections, fear of war's impact on the deflating global economy, and the sheer irrationality of such an enterprise. Even without massive retaliation, millions of war-battered and desperately poor Afghans have already fled their homes and been cut off from food aid as a result of the threat of US attacks. And the world still faces a "War on Terror" redolent of the "War on Drugs," with the US asserting its right to use military force against any country that doesn't accept whatever demands it chooses to make.

While no one in the Bush Administration has uttered the words "New World Order," at least in public, it's hard not to hear echoes of the past. George Bush, Senior's "New World Order," as I described it a decade ago, "aimed to create a consortium of powerful political regimes, corporations, and military establishments which would cooperate to preserve their access to the resources of the Earth, the products of past human activity, and the fruits of future labor. . . . The predictable consequences were repression of insurgencies and increasing concentration of wealth on a global scale."

The Bush Administration is already moving to make the new international coalition not just a coalition to protect against terrorists but also a coalition to protect against the critics of unrestrained economic globalization. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick recalled that "Throughout the Cold War, Congress empowered presidents with trade negotiating authority to open markets, promote private enterprise and spur liberty around the world - complementing U.S. alliances and strengthening our nation." He called for new global trade negotiations and "trade promotion authority" (the pleasant-sounding new P.R. term for Fast Track). "America's trade leadership can build a coalition of countries that cherish liberty in all its aspects." People and governments around the world need to ask whether they are being signed up to fight terrorism, to promote US trade policy, or to initiate a new "New World Order."

Zoellick also absurdly and abusively linked the terrorist attacks on the US with opposition to US trade policy. "On Sept. 11, America, its open society and its ideas came under attack by a

malevolence that craves our panic, retreat and abdication of global leadership. . . This president and this administration will fight for open markets. We will not be intimidated by those who have taken to the streets to blame trade - and America - for the world's ills." This is guilt-by-association without even an association.

The global justice movement blames neither trade nor American for the world's ills. Rather, it is grounded in an understanding that no community or country can solve its economic problems by trying to beat out others - that the result of such competition is instead a race to the bottom in which all lose. It argues that the world's people and environment will suffer unless a global people's movement imposes rules on countries and corporations to block the destructive effects of that competition. It calls for worldwide cooperation to protect human and labor rights, the environment, and people's livelihoods.

This same kind of understanding must now be applied to global conflict. The September 11 attacks show that the era is over in which nation states - even the world's single military superpower - can protect their people. There is no longer such a thing as national security -- security must be global to be secure. Broad human interests require limits on the use of violence by anyone in the world, whether they initiate their attacks from caves in the wilderness or war rooms in national capitals. The so-recently-unilateralist President Bush's frenetic coalition-building is an implied tribute to this view: It reflects a recognition that even the US can't by itself deal with the real threats it faces.

The future remains uncertain. New attacks by either terrorists or the US are always possible. But we shouldn't assume that purveyors of violence will be able to monopolize public attention forever. The Oklahoma City bombing cornered national attention for a few weeks, then faded to just one more news story. George Bush, Senior's poll ratings were nearly as high after "victory" in Kuwait as George W. Bush's are today; a year later in the midst of a recession he was voted out of office. The Seattle demonstrations that kicked off the current phase of globalization from below came hard on the heels of "victory" in the bombing of Serbia.

Much as the Bin Ladens and the Bushes may have other ideas, the fundamental conflict in the world today remains globalization from above vs. globalization from below. If the Bush



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Administration sincerely seeks to bring the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks to justice without committing new crimes along the way it will receive worldwide support. If it tries to use the "War against Terrorism" as a cover for a new consortium of political regimes, military establishments, and private economic interests imposing their will on the world - a new "New World Order" -- it will find the ground crumbling beneath its feet.

Jeremy Brecher is the author of Globalization from Below and Strike! and the producer of the video Global Village or Global Pillage? [www.villageorpillage.org].

Doha is coming: Further Briefing on the GATS

Compiled by Sarah Sexton

Most elected officials and civil servants, let alone the general public, are not aware of GATS, nor of its implications. But several countries are demanding that a wide-ranging assessment of the impact of a free market in services be carried out before any more so-called trade barriers are removed. And non-government organisations (NGOs) and trade unions are demanding that services in the public interest be clearly exempt from GATS.

Origins

The 1986-94 Uruguay Round of GATT, the widest-ranging multilateral trade agreement ever negotiated, covered for the first time not only services but also agriculture, investments and intellectual property rights, such as patents, trademarks and copyright. The 28 agreements which now come under the WTO fall into six broad categories:

- I Multilateral Agreement on Trade in Goods
- II General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)
- III Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs)
- IV Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU)
- V Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM)
- VI Plurilateral Trade Agreements

The WTO administers and implements these various agreements, acts as a forum for multilateral trade negotiations, resolves trade disputes, oversees national trade policies and cooperates with other international institutions involved in global economic policy-making.

The WTO's legislative and judicial power to challenge the laws, policies and programmes of countries that do not conform to all its agreements, particularly if they are regarded as too "trade restrictive", sets the WTO apart from other international agreements.

GATS Main Obligations

Trade in services used to be considered ancillary to manufacturing and trade in goods. In the mid-1980s, however, many Western governments, faced with worldwide recession, inflation and unemployment, decided that removing obstacles to international trade in services, particularly national regulations, could increase the momentum to export services.

The US thus pushed for the provisions of the agreements governing trade in goods to be transposed into the area of services as a whole (although financial services were of prime interest), a move which "could easily have sunk the Uruguay Round and crippled the GATT", according to current WTO Director-General Mike Moore. Many countries reluctantly agreed to GATS only if they could choose which of their services were covered by the Agreement. The US took care, however, to include clauses mandating further liberalisation in future.

Two GATS obligations apply directly and automatically to all WTO members for all services: most-favoured-nation treatment and transparency.

.- Most-favoured-nation (MFN) treatment (Article II) does not mean one country is preferred over another - it means the opposite. Favour one, favour all. Treat all countries the same.

If a WTO member country grants favourable treatment to another country (even a non-WTO member) regarding the import of a service, it must grant all other WTO signatories the same treatment. If a country allows any foreign competition in a service sector, it must allow service providers from all WTO member countries to compete to supply that service.



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A country could list any exemptions to this MFN principle by 1995, but exemptions were to be reviewed after five years and could not last more than 10 years anyway. The WTO interprets this MFN obligation as prohibiting not only de jure discrimination (discrimination specifically set out in regulations) but also de facto discrimination (discrimination resulting from regulations or measures not formally discriminatory).

.- Transparency (Article III) requires governments to publish all relevant laws and regulations governing all service sectors. By 1997, governments should have set up enquiry points for foreign companies and governments to obtain this information.

Once a government has committed itself under GATS to opening a service sector to foreign competition, it must not keep money from being transferred out of the country to pay for the relevant services (Article XI), except when the country is experiencing serious balance-of-payment difficulties (Article XII). Such exceptions must be temporary and justified by an International Monetary Fund assessment of the country's financial situation.

GATS thus provides almost guaranteed conditions for foreign exporters and importers of services and investors in any sector which a country has listed in its Schedule.

Following the GATS "built-in agenda" mandating successive rounds of negotiations, talks opened on 25 February 2000 in Geneva, home to WTO headquarters. The United States would like these negotiations to be completed as soon as possible, and suggested the end of the year 2002 as a deadline. Other countries, however, want the negotiations to be open-ended, or integrated within a broader and comprehensive revision of all the WTO agreements.

Despite the requirement for "transparency" in GATS, the renegotiations are taking place between government representatives behind closed doors (but in close consultation with international corporate lobbyists). Few of the results of discussions are made publicly available by the WTO or individual countries. It is next to impossible for citizens' organisations to find out the current state of negotiations while access to many background documents is restricted. Thus even negotiations on apparently technical issues such as reclassification of services are evading

public accountability and public and parliamentary debate.

A Working Party on Domestic Regulation - one of the three sub-groups of the Council for Trade in Services (the body within the WTO that oversees GATS) - has been drawn up to discuss "reform" of domestic regulation. This involves drafting a "necessity test" - a legal formula which could be used "to assess the level of trade-restrictiveness of a measure".

If proposals for this test are adopted, a government challenged by another through the WTO would first have to show that a disputed regulation met a "legitimate objective" - and the WTO would determine what counted as "legitimate".

Then, to clarify "burdensome" and "restrictive" as applied to the means of achieving that objective, the Working Party has considered importing into Article VI.4 the definition of "least burdensome" from a GATS Annex on Telecommunications: "pro-competitive".

The European Union has gone further and identified "anti-competitive practices", including cross-subsidising by monopoly providers of network infrastructure and services. It argues that this practice restricts competing suppliers from being able to provide services in a market. Instead, it maintains that charges for each part of a service should be at: "cost-oriented rates that are transparent, reasonable, having regard to economic feasibility, and sufficiently unbundled so that the supplier need not pay for network components or facilities that it does not require for the service to be provided".

Governments that currently use non-market mechanisms, such as risk pooling, social insurance funds, block contracts and cross-subsidising, to deliver public services to as much of their population as possible could find such practices challenged as anti-competitive.

The European Union has also suggested that a measure should not be considered trade-restrictive if it is "proportionate" to the objective pursued. But what might be considered proportionate, reasonable or rational would be a matter of judgement, reflecting the values of those with decision-making power.

Worse, Article VI.4 could be interpreted as applying to all services, not just to those which a

country has offered to liberalise. The other clauses in Article VI clearly apply only to those services listed in a country's schedule of commitments. The WTO Secretariat believes the different phrasing of Article VI.4 is "intentional".

If these proposals were adopted, all domestic regulations would have to be "pro-competitive", even if no foreign firm was involved. A WTO disputes panel could require countries to unbundle a public monopoly such as health care and substitute competing service providers or competing health care insurers. Health systems researchers Allyson Pollock and David Price point out that these proposals "would transform the WTO from a body combating protectionism to a global agent of privatisation".

"The WTO's strategy is shifting from persuasion to the development of new global regulations which will over-ride national sovereignty in domestic policy and impose unprecedented market reform obligations on all the processes of service delivery and throughout all service sectors".

In essence, the aim of GATS is to regulate governments, not corporations. Compared to

markets in goods, those in services and access to them are more constrained by government interventions. The power of a GATS article on domestic regulation clause is that many governments may censor themselves by not instituting legislation or public policy objectives which could be interpreted as being against WTO rules. There has been no challenge to any domestic regulation under GATS as yet, but as the WTO Secretariat itself acknowledges, "cases may arise in the future". GATS sets in place a legal framework which governments could use in future to challenge other countries' domestic regulations.

The WTO stresses that governments can still regulate under GATS. Discussions about domestic regulation, however, raise the question: how?

Cornerhouse briefings : cornerhouse@gn.apc.org

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Thursday 25: AUSTRIA: SALZBURG / DEUTSCHLAND: BONN / ESPANA: MADRID / FRANCE: LILLE – LYON – IEP BORDEAUX – BLOIS / ITALIA: L'AQUILA – PONZIANA – BOLOGNA / SUISSE: LAUSANNE

Friday 26: AUSTRIA: SALZBURG / FRANCE: BERNAY – LYON / ITALIA: RIVA TRIGOSO / SVERIGE: STOCKHOLM

Saturday 27: AUSTRIA: SALZBURG / BELGIQUE: CHARLEROI / FRANCE: PARIS 11 – TOURNON / ITALIA : RIVA TRIGOSO – ANZIO – GENOVA / SVERIGE: GA - ARVIKA

Sunday 28: FRANCE: PARIS 11 – LILLE / IRELAND: DUBLIN / ITALIA: BOLOGNA – ROMA (NETTUNO)

Monday 29: FRANCE: MARTIGUES – LA ROCHELLE / ITALIA : BOLOGNA / SVERIGE: STOCKHOLM

Tuesday 30: DEUTSCHLAND: BAD HERRENALB / ESPANA: MADRID / FRANCE: LAVAL / SUISSE: LAUSANNE / SVERIGE: OREBRO

Wednesday 31: DEUTSCHLAND: BAD HERRENALB / FRANCE: PARIS 11 – ATTAC SORBONNE – CLERMONT FERRAND