

AFTINET Bulletin No. 24, July 26, 2001

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1. Developing Countries reject Doha Agenda at WTO at Geneva and African Meetings

Developing country governments in rejected several proposals for a DOHA agenda by the WTO secretariat in Geneva last week. The proposals were based on documents prepared by the US, Canada, Europe and Japan and were intended to address developing country concerns about existing WTO agreements as part of an agenda for the November WTO meeting in Doha, Qatar. The proposals did not address key concerns including on intellectual property (TRIPs Agreement) trade-related investment measures, (TRIMs Agreement) and problems of net food-importing countries. This followed earlier statement by both India (reported in previous bulletins) and group of African countries that they did not support a new negotiating round in the WTO, but wanted the implementation of existing WTO agreements reviewed.

This means that the WTO timetable for agreement on the agenda by the end of July will not be achieved.

See Bridges Trade Digest 24 July <www.ictsd.org> The African story is below.

From the BBC and Agence France Presse

Officials from the world's 49 poorest countries had talks last week in Zanzibar to try to shape any further liberalisation in the World Trade Organisation in their own interests. They are concerned that they are being forced to open up their markets while the West is not opening up to them.

They will consider a proposal that they should not enter new rounds of trade negotiations until the commitments made by the developed world to them in the past are honoured.

Tanzania's Trade Minister, Idi Simba, told the BBC that Europe and the US subsidise their agricultural sectors, while lecturing poor countries not to do the same. "

The world's poorest 49 countries account for less than 1% of world exports and they think the developed world should be able to afford their demands. They may not have much money but they do have votes and Mr Simba told the BBC's David Loyn that they will block the next trade round unless earlier promises made to them are kept. He says he is not opposed to the principle of globalisation, "provided everybody sticks to the rules, but the rules are not yet kept".

The least developed countries are defined by the UN as countries with an average per capita income of less than \$900 a year. Haiti is the only country in this category in the western hemisphere. There are also a number of Pacific islands represented but apart from Bangladesh, the poorest countries with the largest populations are all in Africa.

Following the riots in Genoa and the last WTO meeting in Seattle, the meeting's spokesman, Hassan Mitawi, told the French news agency AFP: "We don't expect any protestors here...but we are not going to take things easily." Asked whether the Genoa protestors had the interests of poor countries at heart, Mr Simba replied: "The system as it is now is not fair to us and those fellows in the streets are telling that story."

2. NGO reply to WTO Mike Moore's attack reported in Bulletin 23

The following letter has been signed by NGOs which attended the WTO symposium on July 6 in Geneva.

Dear Mr Moore

Follow up to WTO NGO Symposium, Geneva, 6 & 7 July 2001

Since there was no opportunity for contributions from the plenary floor during the above symposium, we feel obliged to send this open letter responding to comments made by you and your fellow panelists during the opening session.

Firstly, our main concern has to be your personal bias in favour of the interests of the richest and most powerful members of the WTO (as formally reported back to the plenary by one of the rapporteurs, Dr Sylvia Ostry). We view it as completely unacceptable and indeed disingenuous that an intergovernmental official appointed to serve the needs of all the members of the WTO should publicly and persistently argue that a new round is needed on the basis that the "development argument is compelling". Several developing country members have clearly stated that they are opposed to bringing new issues into the WTO. Do you really claim to know better?

Secondly, we are alarmed by your characterisation of all organisations criticising the WTO as "masked stone-throwers" or "anti globalization dot.com types who trot out

slogans that are trite, shallow and superficial." Having listened to the opening speeches we believe that the WTO's current conduct towards NGOs is nothing less than contemptuous. Members of the WTO: Shrink or Sink! coalition, representing millions of people around the world, North and South, have been campaigning against the unjust and unsustainable nature of current trade policies and agreements for many years and have produced a wealth of detailed positions papers and statements. If you really believe, as you claim, that NGOs are ill-informed and have no positive agenda, we must begin to wonder if you have actually read any of these documents.

Finally, we are concerned that you may have been serious when you suggested that the WTO should have some role in determining which civil society organisations are 'legitimate' and which are not. This is of course, an issue which governments deal with through charity law: it is no concern of the WTO. We look forward to further correspondence and dialogue concerning the real and substantive concerns being raised by millions of people around the world.

Yours sincerely

3. AID/WATCH sign on letter to World Bank for Tues Aug 31 and Soup Kitchen Protest August 1, 5pm ANA Hotel, 176 Cumberland St, the Rocks, Sydney.

The following letter is being signed by a wide range of community organisations and will be presented to the President of the World Bank at the Soup Kitchen protest on August 1 advertised in our last bulletin. If your organisation has not signed and wishes to do so, please email your signature to AID/WATCH by Tues August 31 <aidwatch@mpx.com.au.

Dear Mr. Wolfensohn

Re: World Bank track record on resettlement, reparation, workers rights and debt.

We are writing to you on the occasion of your visit to Australia to demand some fundamental and far-reaching reforms at the World Bank.

Millions of people have been forced from their lands or suffered from lost livelihoods as a result of World Bank projects. These communities have then endured the devastating consequences of failed resettlement. Internal Bank studies have consistently shown poor performance and compliance problems regarding the Involuntary Resettlement policy, problems which translate on the ground into impoverishment and increasing disillusionment with the World Bank by project-affected people. Despite these failures more than 3.2 million people are being displaced by current World Bank projects. Bank-financed resettlement should be voluntary and based on negotiated settlements with affected people to which project developers can be held accountable. The relevant provisions of the World Commission on Dams guidelines should be incorporated into the Bank's policy on resettlement.

In addition to the millions of people who have lost their homes and lands as a result of World Bank-funded projects, are the many millions more who are affected by the

crippling debt burden their countries face. The IMF and World Bank are major creditors, owed about \$70bn by the poorest people of the world. This debt constitutes 33% of the debts of these highly indebted poor (HIPC) countries. A total of \$5.8 billion was transferred by the HIPC countries to the World Bank in debt repayments over the period 1992-8.

The negative transfer of funds from the poorest people in the world to one of the most powerful and well-resourced banks in the world, was balanced only by taxpayer donations to the poor countries, channelled via the World Bank's soft lending facility, IDA. A significant proportion of aid, intended for development, is instead used by the poorest countries to finance debt repayments to the IFIs. Under HIPC, the Bank plans to write off only 32% of the debts owed to both its lending arms, and it will take many years before these write-offs take effect.

This is simply not enough. According to the Jubilee 2000 Coalition, the Bank has sufficient resources to write off 100% of the debts owed to its market lending arm, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and at least two thirds of the debts owed to its soft-loan arm, the International Development Association (IDA). The additional resources should come from governments of the 7 richest nations in the world, the G7

.The World Bank must take responsibility for the ongoing environmental, social and economic impacts of many of its projects and programs. The need for reparations for those who have suffered past harm is a well-founded legal principle accepted by the international community. Reparations imply that those responsible for damages or suffering have an ongoing responsibility to right the wrongs they committed, and that the victims of these actions have a permanent right to achieve redress. Finally, we, the undersigned are deeply concerned that the World Bank does not actively support the core conventions of the ILO. The Bank's competitive bidding process for procurements encourages firms to reduce wages and neglect safety aspects in order to reduce overall costs. The World Bank has also funded projects, such as the Shangri-Lachain of hotels in South-East Asia, which have actively repressed the right to organise and the right to collective bargaining of their workers.

We call on the World Bank to :-

1. write off 100% of the debts owed by the HIPC countries
2. develop guidelines, in a participatory manner, for the provision of reparations to the millions of people who have been displaced by Bank-funded projects and are still suffering the consequences.
3. ensure that no people are resettled without their freely given, prior and informed consent.
4. withdraw all current and planned World Bank support for the proposed Nam Theun 2 hydropower project in Laos, which would not only cause massive social dislocation and environmental destruction, but is also fraught with economic risks and uncertainty for the government and people of Laos.
5. include labour clauses in World Bank guidelines to ensure that all direct borrowers of funds, plus all firms contracted and sub-contracted under Bank project funding, to

observe at least minimum labours standards. We await your response to these pressing issues.

Yours sincerely

4. Waldon Bello's Account of the Battle of Genoa

The Battle of Genoa by WALDEN BELLO Friday, July 20, the Nation.

The police van came careening down the Via Giovanni Tomaso Invrea, moving crazily from one side of the narrow street to the other in pursuit of protesters. I flattened myself against the wall, and it missed me by two feet. Another six inches and it would have mowed down the man in front of me. "Assesino, assesino," people screamed as the vehicle stopped a few yards away. A bald carabinieri opened the door and glared at us.

Everything happened so quickly. Just twenty-five minutes before, at around 2:15 pm, a column of around 8,000-10,000 people, led by the famed specialists in civil disobedience the Tute Bianche, were marching down the Via Tolemaide, with marshalls using megaphones announcing, "This is a nonviolent march. We believe in nonviolence." The goal of the marchers was to reach the twenty-foot wall of iron that the authorities had erected around the Group of Eight meeting site at the Piazza Ducale about two kilometers away. They never reached the wall. At the foot of the hill, at the intersection with Via Corsino, carabinieri hidden in a small side street started firing tear gas in an unprovoked attack that scattered the advance ranks of the march where there were many reporters and television crews. The Battle of Genoa had begun.

Throughout the next four hours, the battle unfolded in the narrow sidestreets and the small piazzas of the Corso Torino area, with the battle lines shifting constantly. The police would attack with teargas, vans and armored personnel carriers. The protesters would retreat, then come back with stones and bricks ripped from the pavement. Huge trash bins were turned over to serve as barricades. "Genova Libera! Genova Libera!" would erupt from the crowd every time the police were forced back.

At 4:20 pm, I had my first glimpse of an injured man being carried away by the first aid personnel of the Tutte Bianche. It was at around the same time that one person was shot dead by carabinieri in the same vicinity. Ambulance sirens blared constantly. Later I would find out that about 150 people had been injured during the day--about fifty of them being members of the media. I also learned later that there were acts of civil disobedience throughout the day, the most dramatic apparently being that of a woman from the so-called "Pink Bloc" of marchers who tried to scale the steel wall to place grappling hooks on it, only to be hosed down brutally by the police when she had got nearly to the top.

Unfortunately, the anarchists--the so-called "Black Bloc"--were also around. Despite efforts by mainstream demonstrators to dissuade them with dramatic pleas for nonviolence, they went about burning a couple of cars, including an Alfa Romeo. They also moved down Genoa's beautiful seafront drive, the Corso Italia, selectively breaking

windows--breaking those of banks and car companies while leaving those of restaurants untouched. "Capitalism kills" with an anarchist logo alongside was painted on walls.

Many protesters were very upset about the antics of the few hundred anarchists in a global assembly of about 100,000 people. Fabio Bellini, a 25-year-old Genoan, told me: "It is right to demonstrate against the G-8. It's right to fight for a better world, and that's why I'm here. But I don't understand the window breaking. I'm sad for Genoa." Pam Foster, the coordinator of the Halifax Initiative in Canada, asked: "Why did the police go after peaceful demonstrators but take their time dealing with the anarchists?" The antics of the Black Bloc were the subject of many passionate debates when the protesters streamed back to the convergence center at Piazza Kennedy at dusk. Observing one of these spontaneous arguments, Han Soeti of Indymedia-Belgium commented, "There are reports that instead of arresting anarchists, the police were escorting some of them to critical areas. I heard the same thing in Prague and Barcelona."

It is, however, for the new Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, that the protesters, both Italian and non-Italian, reserve their greatest anger. During the struggle at the Corso Torino, Gino Pierantoni, another Genovese, told me, "I don't know where you will find truth in this mess. But I am sure that a great part of the blame rests with this man, who really is incapable of leading this country." Berlusconi is regarded as having militarized the situation, going against the moves of the local government, which tried to accommodate the protest movement. A retired Italian general who headed the United Nations peacekeeping force in Beirut in the seventies summed up the feelings of many Italians when he commented that he did not know why Berlusconi assigned 20,000 carabinieri to Genoa when he only needed 2500 troops to keep the peace in the whole of Beirut.

As in Seattle, Washington, DC, and Prague, organizers of what has been the biggest anti-globalization protest so far are worried that the street battles and the antics of the anarchists might overshadow the message that they wanted to deliver to the G-8. Over several months, the Genoa Social Forum was able to line up about 600 groups behind a pledge of non-violence. It also sponsored a week-long teach-in, involving international speakers, with topics ranging from "Who Needs Trade Liberalization?" to "Mechanisms for Global Democracy" to "Alternatives to Globalization." Among those who delivered talks were anti-globalization gurus Susan George, a critic of neoliberalism, and Jose Bove, better known as the man who dismantled a McDonalds restaurant.

The G-8, however, was deaf to the protests on the streets. While Berlusconi delivered a carefully crafted statement saying he was "saddened" by the death of the demonstrator, he also said it was not connected to the G-8. To add insult to injury, the G-8, on the evening on July 20, issued a statement in which it encouraged the launching of a new round of trade negotiations in Qatar. Opposition to a new round and the World Trade Organization was what had brought thousands of people from all over Europe and the world to Genoa.