

Reframing the trade debate



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WTO: Enclosure and exclusion

James Arvanitakis, The Commons Institute / AID/WATCH

The WTO road show goes to Hong Kong

The 6th World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial is scheduled for the 13th-18th of December 2005 in Hong Kong. There is a great deal on the table, with many commentators (once again) arguing that the very credibility of the WTO is at stake – particularly if no breakthrough is achieved. The WTO has raised particular concerns regarding a stalemate in the Agreement on Agriculture that could derail the so-called ‘Doha Development Round’, though recent moves by the G20 have given negotiations fresh momentum.

As the WTO road-show goes on, it is time to once again consider the effects of such an organisation.

According to Focus on the Global South’s Aileen Kwa it seems that (once again) low-income countries are being sidelined. It is important to note that Focus specifically use the word sideline to describe the treatment of the low-income nations by the WTO. This is not just a matter of being ignored but we are increasingly seeing processes of exclusion. This exclusion is being felt both throughout the publics of the low-income nations and the wealthy nations alike.

Exclusion from decision-making

This form of exclusion takes many different forms and is pronounced in both the processes employed and the forms that agreements take.

To begin with, we see exclusion from democratic processes – that is, our rights as citizens to decide. A reoccurring theme that emerges in discussions with the WTO is where the responsibility of decision-making lies. When discussing the processes with the WTO, representatives automatically direct concerns to national governments.

Nowhere was this better highlighted than in a recent NGO ‘consultation’ with WTO Director General, Pascal Lamy. When concerns were raised regarding the role of the WTO in increasing the gap between the wealthy and the world’s poorest, Lamy responded by stating that the WTO was concerned with wealth creation – wealth distribution is a challenge for national governments.

In a Kafkaesque nightmare, concerns about agreements raised by activists with national governments are directed towards the WTO.

But such exclusion does not end there as it continues into the specific agreements. Be it the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), TRIPS or GATS.

It is this process of exclusion that I believe is the most damaging aspect of the WTO. We are not only witnessing the commodification of every aspect of society, but the continued exclusion of those without access to capital – which just happens to be the majority of the world’s population.

Excluding us from what we rightfully share

In 1963, EP Thomson argued that a fundamental tendency of capital is the enclosure of the ‘commons’ – that is, the lands, seas and other spaces that were once shared and common to all. These ‘commons’ were claimed by entrepreneurs as their own as what were once public lands were privatised and subsequently displacement followed. This was the displacement of not only indigenous peoples, but of anyone without access to capital.

Today we are entering the fourth decade of neo-liberal dominance and this enclosure continues, though often in different forms. We are seeing the enclosure of what have been described as ‘institutional commons’ – that is, the public institutions such as



schools, hospitals and utilities that were once owned by all. In collusion with the WTO and large corporations, this is a process of enclosure that seems to know no bounds.

As a result, much of what has traditionally been thought of as commons has disappeared. Today there is very little left in our physical world that is shared, and there is little understanding of forms of ownership that do not rely on defined private property rights. Consequently, David Bollier believes that both the concept and term 'commons' have become unfamiliar in the modern world. In fact, the majority of economic textbooks state that if private property rights are not or cannot be appropriately defined then market failure will result.

The managerial justification for the enclosure of these commons can be found in the position that the 'free market' will deliver the best results. While we wait for the free market to deliver, we are witnessing a form of displacement that continues to creep into our public institutions – and once again, it is the most vulnerable who are going to suffer first and foremost.

As activists, it is important to re-ignite the trade justice debate and join the global movement that is 'reclaiming our commons'. Confronting the WTO and its tendencies is only the first step.

James is a member of the AID/WATCH Committee of Management and the Co-convenor of the Commons Institute (www.commonsinstitute.org). He can be reached by email at james.arvanitakis@uts.edu.au

The Great GATS Scandal (extract)

Aileen Kwa, Focus on the Global South

In the past month and the half in Geneva, the demandeurs in services liberalisation have been maneuvering the process to engineer a radical change in the current more "flexible" GATS architecture. The teamwork amongst a group of countries and players - spearheaded by EC, and also with India (and the US) - together with the Chair of the Council for Trade in Services (CTS), Mexican Ambassador Fernando de Mateo, and supported by the WTO Secretariat, has almost been flawless.

The academy award must be presented to Mateo - but he could only have played out his role if fully endorsed by some powerful Members, and the WTO Secretariat, the latter being the hand that writes the negotiating texts for Chairs.

The practice of Chairs of negotiating committees abusing their authority, and presenting negotiating texts, which reflect the positions of the powerful players, but not the majority, has been performed many times in the WTO. Combined with calls, threats and complaints from Washington, and intense lobbying from Brussels, this is one of the most effective ways of sidelining the less powerful players, and silencing them.

The new element that Mateo has so flamboyantly added, is the extent to which he has nonchalantly told Members, as if he were the one writing the rules of the WTO, that he cannot remove what he has decided without consensus to put into the text, unless there is complete consensus to take them out!

The more "development" friendly aspects of the GATS agreement are now being written over in Geneva. If the majority are not able to torpedo this - and they are fighting against major interests - the impact would be serious. Unemployment will be exacerbated since small and medium sized players will be squeezed out of a more concentrated market, the capacity for countries to regulate would be gravely weakened and across the developing world, access to services for the poor will be eroded, as the weight of WTO rules merge with the interests of the biggest services corporations.

I. Setting the Stage

Those with aggressive interests in services liberalisation have been waiting for some time now, to completely undermine the more flexible character of the GATS. Its "positive list" approach (liberalizing what a country chooses) was mandated

in the Uruguay Round, only because the developing countries did not want a GATS agreement in the first place, and by allowing such an agreement, had made a huge concession. The GATS has built-in “flexibilities” which takes into account countries’ development objectives, requiring Members to open up their markets at their own pace.

At the start of the GATS negotiating round, when the Negotiating Guidelines were being knocked together (early 2001), the developed countries - US, EC and Japan - pushed hard for a formula approach to the negotiations, along the lines of the “benchmarking” now being raised. This was strongly opposed by developing countries and the issue was dropped. For most of the past year, the EC, US, Japan et al, have bemoaned the low quality of “offers” they have received from their negotiating partners, even terming this a “crisis”. From the majority of developing countries’ point of view, there was no crisis. The promise of assessment of the impact of the last round of negotiations had not been delivered. In fact, the results of the last Round have been very disappointing for developing countries. According to UNCTAD’s assessments, the developing countries had undertaken a higher share of full bindings under the cross-border and commercial presence modes of supply. But in contrast, they did not receive concessions of any meaningful economic value to them under the movement of natural persons mode of supply (Mode 4). Access under Mode 4 was mostly linked with commercial presence, and only limited to professionals. In addition, services trade remains highly imbalanced. Markets are densely concentrated, with 80% of trade dominated by the major corporations from the developed world.

As of July 2005, due to the persistent pressures on countries to present initial and revised offers, 74 Members had made offers (counting the EC of 25 members as 1). Of these 64 were developing country Members. According to the CTS Chair, 24 developing non-LDC countries in July had not tabled an offer.

In the attempt to speed up market opening, an avalanche of proposals from EC, Japan, Switzerland, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan were tabled formally on September 13 on complementary approaches (i.e. “benchmarking” as they were called earlier). From then into October, more papers were presented by Canada, India, Chile, Hong Kong, China and Pakistan. The EC has also submitted a second more ambitious proposal on 27 October.

The proposals suggest a complete change in the negotiating modality of the GATS. Members at the start of the GATS round of negotiations, pushed by the developed countries, had agreed that liberalization could be advanced through “bilateral, plurilateral or multilateral approaches” (paragraph 11 of the Negotiating Guidelines S/L/93).

However, the guidelines also state that “the main method of negotiation shall be the request-offer approach”. The current moves go against what has been agreed since any more aggressive approach adopted, would supplant and replace the request-offer approach.

Furthermore, these more aggressive methods would contravene Article XIX of the GATS on progressive liberalisation, allowing countries to open “fewer sectors” and “liberali(ze) fewer types of transactions” according to their “national policy objectives and level of development”.

Aileen is a trade campaigner with Focus. For the full article see Focus on the Global South website: http://www.focusweb.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=679&Itemid=36



Trade negotiations and treatment access

AID/WATCH

In the lead up to the Hong Kong World Trade Organization ministerial meeting in December, the impact of trade negotiations on HIV treatment access has again been highlighted.

TRIPS

The Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement was established with the advent of the World Trade Organization in 1994. At the ministerial meeting in Doha, 2001, the WTO responded to concerns about access to medicines by delaying the deadline for least developed countries to implement patent law consistent with TRIPS, officially recognising that nothing in the agreement should be interpreted to prevent members taking action to defend public health objectives, and reconfirming the ability of countries to use compulsory licensing.¹

However, the WTO still came under pressure to find a solution to the problem of countries without adequate domestic manufacturing capacity. An agreement allowing import/export in these cases was drawn up at the end of 2002, but the US blocked consensus on this until a Chairman's statement was added (which included more conditions). On August 30 2003, just before the Cancun ministerial meeting, a draft agreement was released.

Fear of litigation, inexperience in contesting patent law and complex conditions for reporting limit the ability of countries to make use of these provisions. Applications are made on a case-by-case basis which limits the ability to make use of economies of scale. Additional conditions and other limitations have also crept into national legislation implementing the decision (e.g. Canada). Few countries have actually made use of the provisions. The agreement included a list of mostly developed countries which opted out of using the provisions. However, questions have been raised about how this might limit options in a public health crisis (such as might occur with bird flu).

The decision was only a temporary waiver. A permanent amendment has been held up by disagreement over how to incorporate it into TRIPS. The European Union and the US want the Chairman's statement to be included in the permanent amendment, while African countries are proposing an amendment without it. A meeting of the WTO Council on TRIPS in October failed to make significant

progress, but informal consultations are planned between the council chairman, a number of African countries, the EU and the US. However, others such as Argentina, Brazil and India, have asked to be included. This issue will be on the table again in December, along with a proposal from some "least-developed countries" to extend the deadline to become TRIPS-compliant.

This issue came to prominence in relation to the prices of the drugs used to treat HIV infection. While prices have come down in recent years, this is mostly due to competition with generics and it is still a complex process for many countries to access affordable and sustainable supplies of medication. Changes to patent legislation in India now potentially threaten the supply of generic medicines.

India

The beginning of 2005 marked the deadline for countries such as India to implement patent law in compliance with TRIPS. From 1970 India allowed the production of generic versions of patented medicines. Many countries are dependent on India's generics industry for cheap medicines and the active constituents needed in the manufacture of antiretroviral drugs. The vast majority of domestic manufacturers worldwide rely on India for the latter.

From 2005, patents of 20 years will be available for all new medicines. Medicines which were patented before 1995 (when TRIPS came into effect) will not be subject to patent. Medicines patented between 1995 and 2005 were placed in a "mailbox" and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The new act does allow for compulsory licensing and automatic licensing where a company has already made a significant investment in a product (for a "reasonable royalty"), but many of the conditions are complex and untested. It remains to be seen how the government will respond to pressure from different interests.

Footnote

¹ Compulsory licensing is domestic legislation which allows for the use of patented material within the country (outside of that permitted by the right holder) under certain circumstances. It can therefore be used to permit the manufacture or registration of cheaper generic versions of patented drugs.

For more information see www.aidwatch.org.au

Developing Countries, the Doha Round and Agricultural Trade (extract)

Tim Anderson, University of Sydney

Poverty reduction and debt relief programs, fixed by the big powers, have repeated the dogma of globalisation through 'free trade' as a means of salvation for poor countries. The Cairns Group, an agricultural export lobby, has reinforced this message in relation to farming. Yet agriculture in developing countries is far too important to be reduced to a function of the latest export opportunity. In poor, rural based communities, there is a huge cost in abandoning subsistence production and domestic markets to the vagaries of global markets. Nevertheless, international trade remains important as a source of income and foreign exchange, and whatever their attitude to global institutions, all countries engage in agreements in pursuit of trade opportunities. The problems lie in the terms of engagement.

The disadvantage faced by developing countries in international trade agreements has been characterised as an overemphasis on industrial trade and a failure of 'market access' arrangements for agricultural produce. An Agreement on Agriculture in the final round of the GATT and a new emphasis on agricultural 'market access' in the WTO's 'Doha Round' were said to be important means of addressing this disadvantage. These arguments were made most strongly by the grain exporting member countries of the Cairns Group, such as Australia. However tensions within the eighteen member Cairns Group have underlined some serious problems with this approach. The agricultural exporters are divided over the mechanisms of trade re-regulation, and the means towards establishing greater market access for their exports, while protecting food security and rural livelihoods.

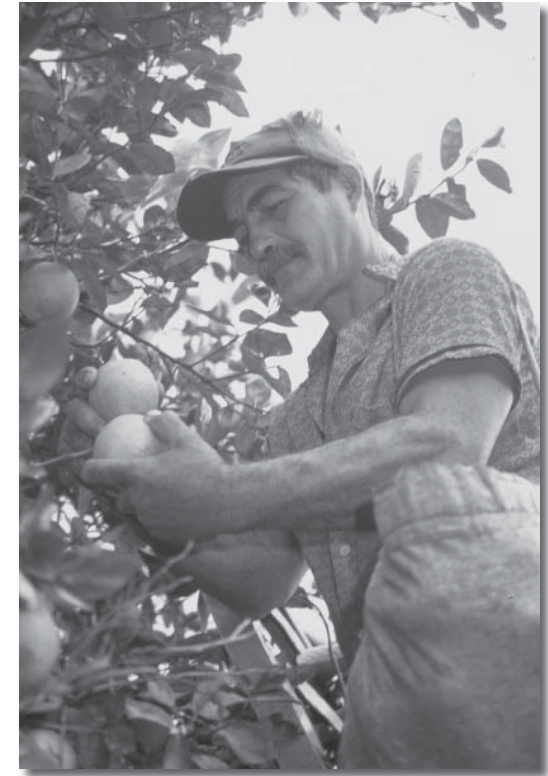
For developing countries, the two major problems with the globalisation of agricultural trade and its associated liberalisation ideology are the practical dilemmas of market access and food security. Trade negotiations are poorly represented by theoretical models of mutual advantage. They are rather exercises in power politics, with new rules constructed to suit the interests of the big powers (see Jawara and Kwa 2003). Capital intensive agriculture, carried out in the wealthy countries on large tracts of land and with substantial subsidies and infrastructural support, has an enormous commercial head start on the poor farmers of the developing world. To this advantage we must add the capacity of wealthy states to stay two steps ahead of trade re-regulation, through new and non-proscribed subsidies. This has been a particular feature of agricultural trade, where the wealthy countries have shifted, rather than reduced, their various forms of protection. This uneven capacity helps explain the need for the closest scrutiny of new 'market

access' proposals, and their associated and usually simplistic liberalisation rationale.

'Free trade' in agriculture has always been a more than usually strained concept. It took decades for the big powers (the US and the EU) to decide to seriously include agriculture in international trade agreements, with a focus on tariff reduction. Yet an increase in the range of subsidies has accompanied this tariff reduction, a shift which causes more grief for the poorer countries, which rely more on tariffs and can less afford subsidies.

Despite the expansion of global trade, most people in developing countries survive through farming, and have only a marginal stake in international trade. Yet the non-commercial value of their land use - as subsistence production, barter, informal employment, housing, ecological management, cultural reproduction, social security and food security - are critical factors that are poorly understood in the wealthy countries. Changes in international trade regulation force us to pay more attention to these non-commercial aspects of agricultural production (FAO 2000; Mazoyer 2001).

Tim is an academic at the University of Sydney and a member of the AID/WATCH Committee of Management. For the full article see www.aidwatch.org.au



Dying To Get AIDS Drugs To All

Peter Hawthorne/Cape Town

Zackie Achmat's t shirt reads: HIV positive. It is, pun intended, a positive message. South Africa's most influential AIDS activist wants people to know that the dreaded disease can be faced, can be treated, and--if sufficient pressure is brought to bear on drug companies and governments--can be beaten. The legend on the t shirt is also meant to be taken literally: Achmat has the virus. But such are his powers of persuasion that he has got people who are not infected to don the shirt in support of his Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). Thousands of South Africans proudly wear the distinctive t shirts. That's an achievement in a country where being HIV positive has been regarded as shameful. Achmat's message, he says, "is not about being proud to come out and admit that the disease is with us. It's about being realistic. That's when fighting it can begin."

Short, stocky and filled with a defiant energy, Achmat, 40, is an old hand at fighting deadly foes. As a schoolboy in the 1970s in a segregated Cape Town township, he was caught up in the violent student campaign against apartheid. He helped to set fire to his own school and was arrested and detained five times. For 10 years he operated as an underground activist for the banned African National Congress, evading the secret police and organizing youth resistance groups.

The end of apartheid brought a fearsome new enemy. In 1990 Achmat, who was openly homosexual and active in the gay and lesbian movement, discovered he was HIV positive. "The disease was regarded as taboo," he recalls. "The cost of treatment, if you could find any, was way out of the reach of poor people. To have AIDS was a death sentence." Achmat began working with voluntary community organizations concerned with the growing AIDS crisis in their midst; in 1998, he co-founded the TAC. Its objectives: to ensure access to affordable treatment for people with HIV/AIDS, to prevent new HIV infections and to improve health-care access for all. Before long church groups, civic groups and high-profile individuals were backing the TAC, which has become the country's leading AIDS pressure group and, through Achmat, its most compelling voice for people with the disease.

The TAC fights two battles: against international drug companies that Achmat accuses of manipulating the markets and profiteering at the expense of HIV/AIDS sufferers, and against bureaucratic bungling and political obfuscation, which, he says, delay treatment while each day thousands of people die from the scourge. Achmat has scored some notable successes. In 2000 he went to Thailand and defiantly brought back a shipment of generic drugs for AIDS treatment--enough for

700 sufferers--that he had bought for a hundredth of the South African cost. The following year lobbying by the TAC helped force 39 major pharmaceutical companies to withdraw their legal challenge against South African laws allowing the production and import of generic drugs for HIV/AIDS. In its battle against official neglect, the TAC has won an important court injunction ordering the government to ensure that HIV-positive pregnant women have access to affordable, if not free, antiretroviral treatment.



Achmat's energies are now focused on getting the government to finalize a long-delayed national treatment strategy. Time is running out. Without a campaign that makes treatment available to all, 5 to 6 million South Africans will die of AIDS by 2010.

The clock is also ticking for Achmat. In recent weeks he has lost 8 kg, and he's plagued by stomach cramps and diarrhea. He refuses to take antiretroviral drugs until everyone in South Africa has affordable access to them. "When the program of treatment is established and irreversible, then, and only then, I might go into some serious treatment of my own." In July, Achmat got a visit from Nelson Mandela, who pleaded with him to take his antiretrovirals. Mandela came away describing Achmat as "a role model whose activism is based on principles that are admired way beyond South Africa's borders." But Achmat still won't take his medicine.

Taken from Time International, April 28, 2003 v161 i17 p70+

AIDS: The new apartheid

Mark Gevisser

“Phanzi, Pfizer, Phanzi!” “Get out, Pfizer, go!” At rallies they sing the old liberation songs, replacing the names of apartheid leaders with those of multinational pharmaceutical companies. On the streets they chant demands, no longer for the vote or a living wage or freedom, but for fluconazole and cotrimoxazole and nevirapine. Their leaders and organizers might well be human rights lawyers and healthcare professionals, but most of the foot soldiers of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)--which has spearheaded the campaign for affordable medicine for HIV-related illnesses in South Africa--are ordinary South African men and women, HIV-positive but too poor to afford the drugs needed to keep them alive.

For most of us, globalization remains an abstract and troubling concept, but for the TAC's activists the pharmaceutical industry's cynical abuse of international trade agreements to keep its profit margins high has meant that globalization is literally killing them. What makes their activism so compelling is that their battle for access to treatment has brought them up against the consequences of the global economy--and that they appear to be triumphant.

In mid-April [2001], after a three-year fight, thirty-nine multinational pharmaceutical companies agreed to settle a suit against the South African government to prevent it from purchasing brand-name drugs from third parties at the cheapest rates possible.

This, Big Pharma had claimed, was in violation of international trade and property agreements the South African government had signed. The withdrawal was brokered directly by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who had been asked by the five biggest companies to help them find a way out of what had become a public relations nightmare. Annan called South African President Thabo Mbeki, whose officials drafted a last-minute settlement that committed the country to negotiate with the multinationals before implementing its policy. The victory, however, was the TAC's:

Not only had it proved that the suit was unwinnable, it had brilliantly mobilized a broad spectrum of support at home and abroad against the drug companies, which were shamed into the settlement--in effect, an honorable withdrawal.

The icon of this victory, broadcast all over the world, was the image of a large African man in the courtroom popping a bottle of champagne in a circle of jubilant celebrants.

This man was Zwelinzima Vavi, the general secretary of Cosatu, South Africa's largest labor federation and the backbone of the “Revolutionary Alliance” that brought the African National Congress to power--and that keeps it there. Surrounding him was a fascinating mix of working-class activists, high-powered lobbyists from international organizations like Medecins Sans Frontieres and Oxfam, and ecstatic government officials reliving, for one brief moment, the euphoria of activism. The TAC has managed to put together the first seriously effective social movement since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994. The keynote speaker at its first national conference, in March, was Cosatu president Willie Madisha. “There is no urgency from government,” he told an audience of 500 delegates from more than 169 organizations, including major religious and healthcare groups. “Sometimes it drags its feet, at other times its HIV/AIDS work is incoherent. Broader social mobilization is essential to engage government constructively.”

In 1994 most antiapartheid activists either went into government and became enmeshed in the workings of the new state or set off for the private sector to exercise their newfound freedom and follow their own interests. The result was that the broad-based social movements that brought apartheid to its knees in the 1980s ossified into bureaucracy or withered into nonexistence. The TAC offers a cogent example of the consequences: In the early 1990s, AIDS activists played a major role in the drafting of an exceptional National AIDS Plan, which was adopted by the African National Congress. But instead of mobilizing mass support to achieve the demands of the plan, AIDS activists found themselves inside the system and thus bound by the inevitable constraints of government, relying too heavily on what the TAC calls “the politics of access.” Outsiders became insiders, and without the oxygen of a mass movement to keep it alive, the plan was suffocated by red tape.

The TAC's brilliance was in recognizing that it had an issue that would appeal to the broad left wing of South African society not only because of the government's manifest ineptitude in the face of a horrifying pandemic (4.7 million infected out of a population of 40 million) but because the battle for treatment was a perfect vehicle for taking on the heartlessness of global capital and the perceived wrongheadedness of the ANC government's neoliberal macroeconomic policy. South Africa has been the good boy of the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, Achmat says, and we're sicker and poorer than we've ever been. Globalization, finally, has a face. TAC activists appeared at court wearing ghostly, leering masks of Big Pharma's mandarins. Globalization is itself on trial: The masked activists were in handcuffs.

Just last year, Mbeki accused the TAC of actually being in the employ of Big Pharma because of its strident criticism of the government's AIDS policy. Now, despite the brief and effective courtroom alliance between activists and government,

the same battle lines are drawn again, sharper than ever. Minister of Health Dr. Manto Tshabalala-Msimang held a press conference after the courtroom celebration at which she made it clear that providing AIDS drugs was not a government priority; the TAC shot back that it would do whatever was needed--including confronting government head on--to bring "real drugs to real people."

It remains to be seen whether the victory against Big Pharma is anything more than symbolic, whether it will have any effect at all in bringing affordable drugs to the ailing masses of South Africa. Its significance, rather, is in its creation of a mass-based, independent, critically minded social movement that takes the best of South Africa's tradition of struggle and engages it, in a sophisticated and tangible way, in a battle against the negative consequences of the global economy and the manipulation of institutions like the WTO by multinational corporations. The TAC's battle could provide the same brand of moral leadership in the global struggle that the antiapartheid movement did in decades past.

Taken from The Nation, May 14, 2001 v272 i19 p5

The People's Caravan

Jemma Bailey for Oxfam International Youth Parliament E-workshop

The People's Caravan for Justice and Sovereignty is a people's journey across Asia en route to the December WTO Hong Kong Ministerial. The People's Caravan calls for food sovereignty and an end to unequal trading systems and involves a wide range of activities across Asia, culminating in a collective action in Hong Kong in December. It is a powerful means of popular education and grassroots mobilization around issues of trade justice. Importantly, it is a celebration of people's resistance across Asia to the WTO's neoliberal agenda.

The People's Caravan 2005 was launched on 15 October and brings together an amazing alliance of organisations and activists from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Because this is a collaborative initiative, the Caravan builds and strengthens networks of NGOs, as well as informs local communities about the Caravan's concerns. The journey comprises all types of transport "from bullock carts to bicycles, elephants to camel and horses and trucks to buses" and uses a wide range of people's struggles from mass rallies, public meetings, cultural performances, petitions, film shows and media briefings.

The People's Caravan has its historical roots in the People's Caravan 2000. Again, this Caravan involved a large alliance of grassroots organisations. The People's Caravan 2000 was a 17 day journey with the theme "Citizens on the move for land without poisons" which covered 2500 km and visited 200 villages in India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Korea and Japan. It highlighted monopoly control by agribusiness and agrichemical transnational companies over farming practices and the threat of pesticides and genetic engineering to people, food sovereignty and the environment. It is estimated that the People's Caravan 2000 made contact with 50,000 people during the 17 days.

As explained by the Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific: "As a result of the People's Caravan 2000, a farming community in Bangladesh where the Caravan passed through pledged that they would practice sustainable agriculture. It is now a pesticide-free community and a strong advocate of ecological agriculture. Similar impact has been monitored in various communities that took part in the PC 2000. Indeed, for most people who took part in it, the PC 2000 was a symbol of empowerment for marginalised sectors especially the women; it was a symbol of solidarity among Asian grassroots organisations despite the diversity of cultures; and it was an occasion to celebrate for having a common agenda and determination



to continue the resistance against oppression and injustices.”

Jemma is campaigner with the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network.

The following article is extracted from the 2005 People’s Caravan for Justice and Sovereignty website. For more information, please see www.peoplescaravan.com

Peoples’ Caravan for Justice and Sovereignty 2005

At a time when vital issues of peoples’ rights, livelihood and access to resources are at stake in WTO, people across the world are demanding their rights of agriculture and fisheries, services, and intellectual property free from the clutches of corporate interests and end of subjection to the dominant States. The peoples’ movement challenges WTO advocacies and demands that Asian governments put the interests of people above that of trans-national companies. It utterly opposes the WTO’s and TNCs’ aim to de-industrialise the developing countries by plundering the resources and making them captive markets. It is against this backdrop, the struggle for peoples’ ownership of resources and subsequent freedom from poverty has become ceaseless for achieving the larger objectives of Justice and Sovereignty.

... there is a fight against privatisation and corporatisation of basic services and

resources in order to ensure that trade regime, genuinely respect people’s rights, and implement rights based sustainable development, freedom of Association and collective bargaining rights are left intact. Therefore, there is a need for creating a trade relationship that genuinely promotes pro-people and rights-based sustainable development. As in Seattle , as in Cancun , there is a need to come together, plan local, national and regional actions on WTO, and initiate allied actions in order to build a cohesive, region-wide strategy to impact on Hong Kong Ministerial.

Thus, we call for a People’s Caravan 2005 in Asia as a vehicle to articulate people’s voices, visions and demands, rooted in broader social and political mobilisation at the grassroots, national, regional and sub-regional levels. Since the WTO is all-encompassing - from food rights to livelihood, from access to drugs to agriculture, from labour to migration - we envisage in building a broader alliance to oppose the anti-people negotiations and compromises.

The collective objective of the Caravan is situated towards setting the peoples’ agenda in place of mercantilist WTO and other undemocratic structural adjustment politics of dominant States. The collective is also to bring back the concerns of masses to the fore, synergy between issues related with WTO, food rights, HIV and AIDS, poverty, women’s rights, social justice and dignity, social and political mobilisation, visible and vocal cross-country and regional initiative, voicing people’s demands, slogans and issues in Hong Kong Ministerial.

People’s Caravan will not be a physical continuum but a vehicle of peoples’ resistance starting from one place in a country and after covering many countries will finally reach Hong Kong . The caravan will embody the spirit of peoples’ journey and with changing mode of transports in countries covered, will assemble or re-assemble in Hong Kong . Hong Kong must be a place of people’s rights and sovereignty. The outcome, to a great extent, depends on our journey, members, volunteers, strength of mobilisation and the unity of struggle. The Collective movement is aimed at achieving an alternative world of Justice and Sovereignty uplifting the culture and vision of people across the world.

For more information please see <http://www.panap.net/caravan/history.cfm>

Further resources

International organisations

AFTINET, Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network
www.aftinet.org.au

AID/WATCH
www.aidwatch.org.au

Focus on the Global South
www.focusweb.org

Friends of the Earth International
www.foei.com

International Agriculture and Trade Policy Institute
www.iatp.org

International Labour Organisation
www.ilo.org/

Oxfam
www.oxfam.org

PIAC, Public Interest Advocacy Centre
www.piac.asn.au

The Commons Intitute
www.mercury.org.au/tci%20home.htm

WTO
www.wto.org

Background information on previous WTO Ministerial Conferences

Cancun WTO Ministerial conference

www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/FreeTrade/Cancun.asp
Unofficial website about the WTO Meeting in Cancun in 2003

www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min03_e/min03_e.htm
The official website of the WTO meeting in Cancun.

Doha WTO Ministerial Conference

www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/FreeTrade/Doha.asp
Unofficial website analysing the WTO meeting in Doha

www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/min01_e.htm
Official website of the fourth WTO ministerial conference.

Hong Kong Ministerial Conference

www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min05_e/min05_e.htm
The official site

www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/bwi-wto/wto/2005/03cancunhk.htm
Highlights the issues from Cancun to Hong Kong

www.awid.org/go.php?stid=1476
Examines how is civil society is getting involved with the WTO in the run-up to the December ministerial meeting in Hong Kong.

Picture credits

Front cover: www.citizenstrade.org.ftaa_photos.php
Page 2: www.sauer-thompson.com/archives/opinion/cartoonpyrograph1.jpg
Pages 6, 10 and 17: www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources_photo_library.htm
Page 12: www.globalizationinstitute.org/blog/2005-07-16-drugs.jpg

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Designed by Georgina Bloomfield, AID/WATCH

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