

WILL THE ANTI-GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT SAVE US FROM THE GLOBALIZATION DEMON?

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Today, anybody is free to protest against anything they please: politics, fashion, the latest movie, education, globalization.... Globalization, a relatively new word in our vocabulary, a word so new that the first versions of Microsoft Word do not even recognise, is a world-wide phenomenon many agree with while some strongly criticize.

Some of these protests end up as quite big social issues, like the demonstrations against the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference in December of 2005, others in blood-baths and mass arrests, as many of us witnessed the “Battle of Seattle”.

In this article we aim to underline some of the major aspects of the anti-globalization movement, a social movement sustained by those who, understanding more or less this so-called new world-order, have chosen to fight against it.

At this very moment, an important question must be answered. What is this anti-globalization movement we are hearing about more and more often these days? One may be inclined to think that it simply stands for all that globalization does not. Or vice-versa. Well, it is not that at all.

First of all, it is vital to distinguish between the anti-globalization activists and those who define themselves as globophobes. Both groups believe that globalization is a phenomenon that causes poverty, social polarization, that aids rich countries in exploiting those less developed ones and which also seriously prejudices the environment. If the last group content themselves with expressing their pessimism concerning the international trade, the anti-globalization activists go to extreme measures in protesting against what they usually refer to as “The Enemy”.

Declared enemy of a global economy, we would expect the anti-globalization movement to stand against all those practices that would transform any phenomenon into a global one. Nonetheless, it is important to mention the fact that the movement itself has become global if we take into account its sympathizers or the extent of the demonstrations. Some members explain this by pointing out that in fighting against a global phenomenon there must exist a global residence which, in this case, is called the anti-globalization movement.

The anti-globalization movement has its precursors in such movements as the 1968 movement in Europe, and especially France, and the world-wide protests against the Vietnam War in the United States during the 1970s. The anti-globalization movement as it is known today stems from the convergence of these different political experiences when their members began to demonstrate together at international meetings such as the G7 summit in Bonn.

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In Germany, mass protests against meetings of the international elite date back to 1985, when the G7 was held in Bonn, West Germany's capital. The forms of protest used there were remarkably similar to those used 15 years later: the radical left organised „action days”, there was a counter-conference, and a big demonstration with 30,000 participants. For the autonomists, however, the campaign against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank meeting in West Berlin in September of 1988 was to have far greater meaning. The mobilisation lasted three years and attempted to combine mass militancy with clandestine actions, to formulate and express radical analyses, to bring different tendencies within the radical left together, to interact with the broader left and to publicly oppose all that the Conference stood for.

One of the first international anti-globalization protests was organized in dozens of cities around the world on June 18, 1999, especially London, U.K. and Eugene, Oregon. The anti-globalization demonstrations continued on over the years, but none was to have such a spectacular outcome as that of the „Battle of Seattle”.

The second major mobilization of the movement, known as N30, occurred on November 30, 1999, when protesters blocked delegates' entrance to WTO meetings in Seattle, USA. The protests forced the cancellation of the opening ceremonies and lasted the length of the meeting until December 3. The protesters and Seattle riot police clashed in the streets. Over 600 protesters were arrested and dozens were injured. One demonstrator miscarried her baby after being exposed to CS and OC gas. Black Bloc Anarchists and primitivists destroyed the windows of storefronts of businesses owned or franchised by targeted corporations such as a large Nike shop and many Starbucks windows. The mayor put the city under the municipal equivalent of martial law and declared a curfew. As of 2002, the city of Seattle had paid over \$200,000 in settlements of lawsuits filed against the Seattle Police Department for assault and wrongful arrest, with a class action lawsuit still pending.

In 2000, ample demonstrations in Prague took the world by storm. Various anti-capitalist protesters were blaming these institutions for being one of the reasons for the economic problems faced by the third world. Thousand of activists who travelled from all over the world protested and some even clashed with the police in the streets of Prague for several days. Police estimated more than 15,000 protesters were involved. Anger was directed against the way IMF and World Bank pushed for a policy of directing power to the market and the multinational companies. Tear gas and water cannon was used to force back a breakaway group of activists that attempted to reach the summit venue to shut down the meetings of the global financial institutions. In spite of the massive turn up of police, the protesters succeeded in breaking up the last day of the summit.

Next came the G8 demonstrations in Genoa in 2001 and the 5th WTO Ministerial Conference of Cancun in 2003. Genoa Group of Eight Summit protest from July 18 to July 22, 2001 was one of the bloodiest protests in Western Europe's recent history. Police have subsequently been accused of brutality, torture and interference with non-violent protests. Several hundred demonstrators and police were injured and hundreds were arrested during the days surrounding the G8 meeting. During the MC5, protesters were kept behind fences far away from the 5 Star Hotels where the delegates were meeting. This provoked confrontations with security forces and a KPL (Korean Peasants league) member stabbed himself to death in protest.

The 6th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, which was held in Hong Kong, in December of 2005, was to witness peaceful protests. The demonstrations started with around one hundred Koreans jumping into the Victoria Harbor to try to swim to the Conference and Exhibition Centre where the talks were being held. Police in boats prevented the Koreans from swimming to the Convention Centre, pulled them out of the water and brought them back to the central area. Then the activists approached the police force with a burning coffin, and conflicts broke out. In less than five minutes, the police began to use pepper spray liberally to dispel the activists despite that the police outnumbered the protestors. The majority of protestors were peaceful, though, chanting slogans and playing instruments.

Who are they, these anti-globalization activists? The anti-globalization movement reunites under the umbrella of a broad coalition human rights activists, Third World-oriented groups who defend these countries' chance to development, protectionists, ecologists, but also nationalist and anarchist groups and even Marxists-Leninists. All these groups wish to be regarded as a civil society who opposes the global capitalist economic and political infrastructure.

We cannot understand the actual implication of the "Movement of Movements" unless we venture into an analysis of this process. Some believe that the anti-globalization movement can be analysed from two different perspectives, on one hand, from the point of view of its organization and on the other hand, from a ideological point of view.

From the organizational perspective, one must mention that this movement does not comprise of a single organization or of a single discourse. The link between its members is the Internet, undoubtedly a product of the very essence of globalization. It cannot be stated that without the Internet this movement would not have been able to develop, but it is certain that the Windows era had a crucial role to play in its existence. How else would all these activists have been able to meet, to exchange opinions, would have printed out manifests or would have participated in boycotts or other forms of protests?

Many a time devoid of economic means, the anti-globalization activists use the Internet as the cheapest and the fastest way of communication, which the process of globalization brought to us all. The Internet is the perfect answer for those meager budget groups which wish to organize extended demonstrations. The movement's sympathisers are reunited through the Internet, on special web-sites constructed namely for the sole purpose of announcing due demonstrations or on those that host fan clubs for anti-globalization books and forums.

From an ideological perspective, the anti-globalization movement is reunited in the fight against the "Enemy", identified as the global capitalism. Until now everything is crystal clear, the problem only arises when we approach the organization of the discourse. Because, thanks to the Internet, the goal of the different anti-globalization sympathizer groups was widely popularised, but due to the lack of an unique and coherent discourse, the public opinion is confronted with a series of ideas and demands which may not be linked to one another.

Nevertheless, the anti-globalization movement can boast a certain number of best-sellers, in which one may find some fundamental ideas of "The Global Justice Movement". Upon reading "Globalization from Below", written by Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costelano and Brendam Smith, we may be surprised to find out that not all of the sympathisers of this movement are against every aspect of globalization. Basically, these

authors state that the interconnectedness signified by globalization, though irreversible, may actually be a good thing. Only, the dominant values must be changed. The problem is that this book forgot to mention with what values the old ones should be replaced.

Amory Starr's "Naming the Enemy" proposes different alternatives to the global capitalism, while making an interesting point, namely the fact that "The Movement" should democratize globalization by making governments and corporations accountable to people instead of elites. For once, we are faced with a practical scenario? It is indeed very hard to imagine how this democratization can be achieved at a global level.

"No Logo", written by Naomi Klein, is by far the best known book that discusses this subject. In short, Naomi Klein advises the potential consumers world-wide to boycott the products of some (not all) multinationals, over which hangs the suspicion of exploiting their workers, while disregarding the environment. This book was tremendously well acclaimed, conquering a great many supporters for the movement. It even has its own web-site and it is extremely well branded. This book could very well have been a proper anti-globalization manifest if it was not so globalized. "No Logo" is a logo!

In "The Silent Take-over" Noreena Hertz argues that the public space, namely democracy, has become private (capitalism). This state of things can eventually bring about the death of the nation-state since "Economics is the new politics, and business is in the driving seat" (Noreena Hertz, *The Silent Take-over*). For all the problems that our society faces she points an accusing finger towards capitalism.

These mile-stones of anti-globalization literature propose different solutions to different problems and thus fail to achieve a strongly-bounded community of supporters.

Amongst many discourses lacking in consistency due to their impossibility to name the adversary or to come up with new, revolutionary ideas, the ATTAC association has a solution that the globalization process itself offered. This solution, the Tobin tax, was met by the greatest understanding and support ever to be generated by an anti-globalization proposal. The Tobin tax, an adaptation of the solution proposed by James Tobin some time ago in the 1970s, is a modest tax (between 0.05 and 0.25%) that is to be applied to every currency trade across borders. The purpose of this tax is a double one. On one hand, this tax will help regularize capital movements across borders, on the other, it will bring important yields to third-world countries. This proposal echoed all the way to the European Parliament, where such a measure was nevertheless rejected because of the lack of international regulations. Taxes are collected by the state and not by international institutions, thus levying this tax will be practically impossible in the absence of an authority which, in the end, could redistribute it to those countries in need of help. Also, ATTAC does not come forward with any basic requirements regarding the grant of the help, a grant ceiling or programs through which this tax could be redistributed.

What means do these activists use in their fight against globalization? Leaving aside such demonstrations as that of Seattle or Prague, where more and more protesters seem to get involved, one must first mention their discourses that urge their supporters to adopt different forms of protest. Most of these discourses are posted on different web-sites, web-sites that are made by and for these supporters. One must not forget the different manifests, articles and books through which the movement tries to recruit more activists. Many of these articles actually see the print in publications supported by different

associations, sympathizers of the movement. Also, many journalists, themselves supporters of the movement, who work for prestigious publications, disguise anti-globalization messages in their daily articles.

Commercial boycotts are also a form of active protesting against globalization. Activists are incited not to buy the products of those companies that fringe the human rights of their workers. Unfortunately, by not buying the products of those companies that have moved their production system to third-world countries, who pay low wages and use the work of children, a diminution of their returns is thus triggered. In the rare case in which such multinationals would yield up to the international pressure, an increase of the unit price, due to the readjustment of the level of wages, would be unavoidable. In this case, the multinational company would sell less or not at all its non-competitive products. The second scenario would imply a readjustment of their number of workers. On the other hand, if these companies would stop using the work of children, who can guarantee that these youngsters would have a better life? Statistically speaking, many of those children would end up on the streets. But there is another solution. These multinationals could simply pay better wages and thus agree to lesser returns. Or maybe not.

Who supports this movement? The great majority of the anti-globalization supporters are members of organizations that have not necessarily been formed with an anti-globalization purpose, but do actually embrace some of the movement's goals. The question is, how can they finance such forms of protest as demonstrations and the different publications? The peculiar thing is that some NGOs receive funding without checking up on their source, and thus end up being financed by some multinational companies, activists and even organizations sustained by terrorist's movements.

It is important to underline the fact that the majority of anti-globalization activists agree with one form of globalization, defined as global institutions (or global governance). These activists call themselves reformers and while they reject such international institutions as WTO or IMF, seen as mere products of the globalization process, they strongly support a global governance where NGOs sustained by anti-globalization activists would have a major role. It is indeed quite strange, but the two concepts, that of new global institutions and a global governance became known especially thanks to the anti-globalization discourse.

The anti-globalization movement is widely and openly criticized. One of the most common criticisms of the movement, which does not necessarily come from its enemies, is simply that the anti-globalization movement lacks coherent goals, and that the views of different protesters are often in opposition to each other. Many members of the movement are also aware of this, and argue that, as long as they have a common enemy, they should march together - even if they don't share exactly the same political vision.

Another important argument, made by The Economist, is that trade barriers, the very thing against which WTO fights, are the major reason for third-world countries' poverty. If the anti-globalization movement cares so much about these countries, then why not support the WTO activities instead of combating them? Maybe they just want to protect their workers, and not all workers everywhere?

Another criticism against the movement is that, although it protests about things that are widely recognized as serious problems, such as human rights violations, genocide and global warming, it rarely proposes detailed solutions.

Some have also criticized the movement for engaging in violent protest. Aside from the indisputably violent tactics used by a minority of protesters (possibly aggravated by the police), some see an enforced blockade of events and public thoroughways as a violent action, in and of itself. Many protesters counter that blockades are a time-honored technique of civil disobedience, and that the organizations they are protesting against are themselves guilty of crimes.

The motivations of the organizers of the protests are often questioned. Some critics point to pervasive anti-Americanism in the anti-globalist movement. They argue that anti-globalisation protesters in fact object to many people around the world voluntarily choosing American (or American-style) cultural products. Attempts to prevent the “Americanization” of French culture would be an example of this. In this sense, anti-globalisation is perceived as cultural chauvinism directed against American products, corporations and individuals, whereas their close European equivalents are ignored or even celebrated.

Finally, critics assert that members of the anti-globalization movement use anecdotal evidence to support their views, which are not supported by worldwide economic and social statistics. These critics point to statistical trends which suggest beneficial effects of globalization, capitalism, and the economic growth they encourage.

Many supporters of capitalism do think that different policies than today should be pursued, although not necessarily those advocated by the anti-globalization movement. For example, some see the World Bank and the IMF as corrupt bureaucracies which have given repeated loans to dictators who never do any reforms. Some argue that free trade may be harmful in certain instances or that spending on education and basic health care may be very important. Some, like Hernando de Soto, a Peruvian economist, argue that the most important thing for the developing world may be to develop the institutions of capitalism, like protecting the property rights and access to credit for the poor.

In short, the anti-globalization movement protests against the present world-order... without being able to come up with a viable replacement scenario. They have too many different ideas, promoted by too many different people, none which will be able to answer the demands of all the protesters. Supposing that the globalization process is so bad for our society, it is hard to see how much good can the anti-globalization movement bring to us all.