

# Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice

## Anti-Globalization Movement

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*Anti-globalization movement* is a disputed term referring to the international social movement network that gained widespread media attention after protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington, in late November and early December 1999. Activists and scholars debate whether it constitutes a single social movement or represents a collection of allied groups, a “movement of movements.” Including diverse constituencies with a range of ideological orientations, the global movement is broadly critical of the policies of economic neoliberalism, or “corporate globalization,” that has guided international trade and development since the closing decades of the 20th century. Varied communities organizing against the local and national consequences of neoliberal policies, especially in the global South, connect their actions with this wider effort. Movement constituents include trade unionists, environmentalists, anarchists, land rights and indigenous rights activists, organizations promoting human rights and sustainable development, opponents of privatization, and antisweatshop campaigners. These groups charge that the policies of corporate globalization have exacerbated global poverty and increased inequality.

Internationally, the movement has held protests outside meetings of institutions such as the WTO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the Group of Eight (G8) heavily industrialized nations. Its own annual gathering, the World Social Forum, serves as a site for activist networking and transnational strategizing. Movement participants have also launched campaigns targeting multinational corporations, such as Nike and Monsanto, and have mobilized resistance to U.S.-led military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While opposing neoliberalism, the anti-globalization movement advocates participatory democracy, seeking [p. 151 ↓ ] to increase popular control of political and economic life in the face of increasingly powerful corporations, unaccountable global financial institutions, and U.S. hegemony. A focus on democracy is reflected in many of the movement's organizational structures. These tend to emphasize grassroots participation, cooperative decision making, and “horizontalism” over hierarchy. Rather than promoting a single model for social reorganization, anti-globalization activists defend diversity and, adopting a slogan of the Mexican Zapatistas, envision a world in which many worlds fit.

# Terminology

The term *anti-globalization movement* has more often been imposed by movement critics and by the media than used for self-identification. Many activists reject the label, arguing that the term falsely implies a stance of isolationism. A hallmark of the movement is its use of advanced communications and Internet technology to unite activists across borders. In some cases, such as the No Borders campaign prominent in Europe, participants rally under the slogan “No one is illegal” and advocate the elimination of national boundaries altogether. Leading voices in the movement express the ambition to create a global network that is as transnational as capital itself. Countering the spread of multinational corporations, they aspire instead to globalize hope, globalize resistance, or globalize liberation.

To reflect this internationalism, activists commonly use terms such as the *global justice movement*, *globalization from below*, and *alter-globalization* as alternatives to *anti-globalization*. Some refer to the international network simply as the *globalization movement*.

Many globalization activists explicitly state their opposition to neoliberalism, a variant of market-driven capitalism promoted in the developing world through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s by the World Bank, the IMF, and the U.S. Treasury. Neoliberal policies include privatizing public industries, opening markets to foreign investment and competition, creating fiscal austerity programs to curtail government spending, removing controls on capital flows, reducing tariffs and other trade barriers, and ending government protections for local industry. Movement participants argue that these policies have created sweatshop working conditions in the developing world, threatened unionized jobs and environmental protections in the global North, benefited the wealthy at the expense of the poor, and endangered indigenous cultures.

Because the term *neoliberalism* is not widely used in the United States, advocates refer to this system as “corporate globalization” or “the Washington Consensus.” In opposing neoliberal policies, activists contend that the international debate does not concern whether or not globalization will take place in some form; rather, it concerns what shape globalization will take and whom it will benefit.

## Movement Origins

“It didn't start in Seattle” serves as the widely accepted slogan among globalization activists, refuting the belief common in the mainstream media that the movement first arose in protests against the WTO's Third Ministerial Meeting in 1999. Many participants and theorists instead trace the lineage of the movement through a 500-year history of resistance against European colonialism and U.S. imperialism. Other commentators see the anti-globalization movement as continuous with the anti-Vietnam War mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s, with worldwide uprisings in 1968, and with protests against structural adjustment in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s.

Perhaps the most symbolically significant moment of origin for the movement was the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994. On the same day that the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect, the Zapatistas launched a 2-week campaign of armed clashes with the Mexican military. Their effort subsequently became a nonviolent movement for land reform and indigenous rights. The EZLN eschewed traditional models of hierarchical leadership. It used the Internet to spread poetic critiques of capitalist injustice throughout a network of international supporters. As a rebel army seeking not to claim state power but to create spaces of autonomy and direct democracy, the EZLN both paid homage to [p. 152 ↓ ] earlier models of national liberation struggle and transformed them. Their example became an influential one for the nascent globalization movement.

In 1996, the EZLN hosted an International Encounter for Humanity Against Neoliberalism in the jungles of Chiapas. Some 5,000 activists from over 40 countries attended. A follow-up meeting in Geneva in 1998 resulted in the formation of Peoples' Global Action, a network of autonomous organizations united in their rejection of capitalism, imperialism, and cultural domination. Participating organizations include groups as diverse as the indigenous Maori of New Zealand; the Gandhian State Farmers' Association of Karnataka, India; and the Canadian Postal Workers' Union. The Peoples' Global Action has helped organize many of the international direct action mobilizations associated with the globalization movement.

The 1999 “Battle of Seattle,” while not the first appearance of the global movement, dramatically altered the debate about trade and development taking place within international institutions. It served as a prototype for many future protests and also marked the moment when *anti-globalization* as a term gained widespread usage. In Seattle, an estimated 75,000 activists organized an unusually colorful and confrontational demonstration against the meetings of the WTO. Groups like Art and Revolution created giant puppets to carry in the demonstrations, activists inspired by British Reclaim the Streets actions held parties in intersections blocked by protesters, and musicians formed activist marching bands. While the labor movement led a mass march on the organization's ministerial meetings, student, anarchist, and militant environmentalist “affinity groups” formed a nonviolent human blockade around the convention center, preventing trade ministers from holding the opening session of the meetings. Police responded to the blockades with tear gas and rubber bullets. Shortly thereafter, a black bloc of anarchists vandalized downtown storefronts of major banks and corporations like Nike. Authorities temporarily enacted martial law, and more than 600 protesters were arrested for acts of civil disobedience during the week of action.

Ultimately, the Seattle round of trade negotiations deadlocked when developing nations, bolstered by grassroots resistance, rejected U.S. and European demands. The week delivered a lasting setback to the WTO and represented a turning point for neoliberal advocates, who adopted a defensive posture in subsequent negotiations and in their public justifications of the free trade agenda.

## National and International Protests

Continued protests outside of international financial institutions serve as only the most highly publicized manifestations of a much broader body of action taking place at the local and national levels. More localized embodiments of the globalization movement include strikes by unions in South Korea, fights against water privatization in Bolivia and South Africa, the mass mobilization of civil society in Argentina following the country's 2001 economic collapse, the struggle against development of hydroelectric dams in rural India, Indonesian protests in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, actions of the landless farmers movement (MST) in Brazil, African efforts to secure access to low-

cost generic AIDS drugs, and demonstrations in Central America against the adoption of trade agreements with the United States.

Nevertheless, the financial institutions promoting corporate globalization have provided critical rallying points for the movement. By bringing together groups with diverse complaints about the international deliberations, these organizations have helped disparate movements make common cause and have strengthened transnational coalitions of activists. For example, resistance to the WTO has united labor unionists who argue that the organization is depressing wages and lowering protections for workers, farmers in the global South who protest agribusiness dominance in international markets, food safety advocates concerned about the spread of genetically modified foods, environmentalists who contend that current free trade agreements weaken local protections for the natural world, indigenous rights activists defending cultural diversity, and anti-capitalists who see the institution as a mechanism of corporate expansion. On college campuses, groups such as the United Students Against Sweatshops, an organization that has waged [p. 153 ↓ ] transnational campaigns to improve the labor conditions of garment workers who make university apparel, have energetically supported mobilizations against the international financial institutions.

While often not as large as mobilizations taking place at the local level in the global South, actions surrounding international summits have received the most attention from the media in the United States and Europe, and they have most consistently been identified as part of the anti-globalization movement.

Like the WTO, the World Bank and IMF have drawn significant protests for their role in promoting neoliberalism. Tens of thousands demonstrated against the institutions' meetings in Washington, D.C., in April 2000 and in Prague, Czech Republic, in September 2000. In response to movement criticism, the World Bank has worked to refashion its image as an anti-poverty institution. It officially ended its support of structural adjustment, although critics contend that its lending practices remain problematic.

The globalization movement has staged several mass protests against the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In April 2001, tens of thousands rallied

outside the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, Canada. The tightly guarded summit served as occasion for what was then the largest security operation in Canadian history. In an act of civil disobedience, protesters dismantled sections of a large chain-link fence that blocked the public from entering the summit grounds. Police clashed with activists and, as in Seattle, filled the city with tear gas. Subsequent FTAA demonstrations in Miami, Florida, in 2003 and in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 2005 also faced a heavily militarized police response and contributed to the collapse of the trade agreement.

In July 2001, some 300,000 demonstrators gathered outside G8 meetings in Genoa, Italy. One protester, 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani, was shot dead during a clash with Italian security forces. Giuliani became the first Northern protester killed at a major summit action, although many activists in the developing world had died previously in police and military repression of anti-neoliberal demonstrations.

Owing to large-scale civil uprisings and concerns about security, trade officials have opted to hold some meetings in remote and publicly inaccessible locations. Such meetings include the WTO's 2001 Ministerial in Doha, Qatar, and the 2002 G8 summit in Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada.

## World Social Forum and Anti-War Activism

The World Economic Forum, an annual convention of influential politicians and business elites held in a Swiss resort near the town of Davos, has attracted regular protest from globalization activists. More significantly, the meeting inspired the French-based Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC) and the Brazilian Workers' Party to organize a grassroots countersummit. First held in January 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) convened for several years in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The forum provides a space for local and national social movements to network, strategize for future action, and assert an identity as a unified international movement. The WSF has been institutionalized as a regular event and is organized by a committee of representatives from prominent civil society groups throughout the world. Additional social forums have also been organized at the regional level



on virtually every continent. While the first WSF hosted some 12,000 participants, subsequent forums have drawn crowds of over 100,000.

After September 11, 2001, critics charged that the anti-globalization movement would fade into obscurity. While summit demonstrations in U.S. and European cities indeed grew less frequent, challenges to neoliberalism continued throughout the global South. Meanwhile, many activists turned to highlight connections between corporate globalization and U.S. power, and led organizing against the George W. Bush administration's "war on terror." The November 2002 European Social Forum issued the first call for a February 15, 2003, day of action against the impending U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The resulting demonstrations involved tens of millions of people in over 500 cities and constituted the largest coordinated global day of action in history.

Protests against international financial institutions also continued. Demonstrations outside the WTO's [p. 154 ↓ ] Fifth Ministerial Meeting in Cancún, Mexico, in September 2003 turned sober after the suicide of South Korean Lee Kyang Hae, who stabbed himself while wearing a sign reading, "WTO Kills Farmers." Like at the Seattle talks, outside pressure helped to feed resistance from developing countries, organized in Cancún as the G20+, and resulted in the collapse of trade talks. The December 2005 WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong, at which the beleaguered organization was able to produce a compromise agreement, faced opposition from at least 10,000 protesters.

For over a decade, globalization movement groups like the Jubilee Coalition have vigorously campaigned for debt relief for poor countries. Protests and cultural events in July 2005 pressured G8 leaders meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, to act on this demand. Ultimately, the G8 agreed to an accord canceling debts owed by 18 of the world's poorest countries to the IMF, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank.

## Ideological and Strategic Debates

Although some constituent groups, especially within labor and non-governmental organizations, maintain more traditional leadership structures, the globalization movement as a whole claims no formal leaders. In the absence of official spokespeople,

well-known writers or intellectuals are often called on to represent the movement in public forums. Prominent figures include Canadian journalist Naomi Klein, Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, U.S. intellectual Noam Chomsky, Filipino analyst Walden Bello, ATTAC cofounders Bernard Cassen and Ignacio Ramonet, Brazilian MST leader João Pedro Stédile, Indian writer Arundhati Roy, South African community leader Trevor Ngwane, theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, British journalist George Monbiot, French farmer and anti-McDonald's activist José Bové, Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN, and Susan George of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam.

A lack of official spokespeople, agreed-upon manifestos, or overarching organizational structures means that many ideological and strategic issues within the movement remain unresolved. Diverse constituencies disagree about whether existing international financial institutions should be reformed or abolished, whether tactics such as property destruction should be deployed in international protests, and whether capitalism itself is responsible for global problems. In general, globalization movement organizations represent groups based in civil society, rather than traditional communist, socialist, or social democratic parties. Activists have long debated how the movement should interact with state power, and this discussion has intensified with the rise of progressive governments in Latin America.

## Conclusion

Because institutions such as the WTO, World Bank, and the IMF remain intact, countries continue to broker free trade pacts, and multinational corporations extend their reach, critics charge that the globalization movement has proven ineffective. Advocates, however, point to debt relief, expanding fair trade and anti-sweatshop agreements, the scuttling of the FTAA, a curtailed WTO agenda, local victories against privatization, and the rise of anti-neoliberal governments in Latin America as evidence of the movement's impact. Pressure from civil society, in addition to a series of regional financial crises, has gone far in discrediting the long-dominant Washington Consensus in trade and development policy, and the future of neoliberalism is now in question. Whatever its final legacy, the globalization movement will remain historically noteworthy for its contribution to revitalizing the international left in the post-Cold War era.

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*See also*

#### Further Reading

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