Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization

The World Trade Organization was created in 1995 by national governments to establish a legally binding framework of rules for global commerce that all 148 Member Nations were obliged to follow. Local and national governments could still pass their own laws, but now were required to conform their laws to the WTO or else they could suffer major trade penalties...

The WTO essentially functions as if it were a world government, which was clearly among the intentions of its first Director General, Renato Ruggero, who termed it "global government for the new millennium." It passes laws that all of its members are obliged to follow, it settles disputes in its own courts that Member Nations cannot override, and it has major enforcement powers, primarily financial...

Under WTO rules (which comprise some thirty separate agreements), sub-federal governments such as local, state, provincial, and tribal governments are also subordinated, i.e., restricted from exercising full autonomy over their own jurisdictions, including on tax policy, food safety measures, and natural resource management.

These are several agreements:

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

Established in 1947 after the Bretton Woods meetings (which created the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), GATT sets out the core principles of free trade. For almost fifty years these rules were voluntary until the creation of the WTO, with enforcement powers over Member Nations.

The following are some of the GATT's core principles:

Article I - "Most Favored Nation" and Article III - "National Treatment": both these articles have similar intentions.

The first requires that all member governments treat goods imported from one WTO Member Nation "no less favorably" than goods imported from any other Member Nation. This effectively makes it impossible for governments to restrict imports from countries on moral or ethical grounds such as horrendous human rights or labor standards, or environmental records, or environmental records, or that are dealing in illicit trade....

Article III requires governments to treat all imported goods "no less favorably" than locally produced goods. Free trade advocates claim this article prevents "discrimination," which is a lofty-sounding ideal, but that is definitely not the point. The real purpose of Article III is to prevent any government from favoring or protecting its own local industries, or farmers or cultures that might be otherwise overwhelmed by globe-spanning corporations bringing vast amounts of cheap imports that make local or indigenous economies non-viable.

Foreign businesses and banks may buy-up local producers or local banks and literally take-over the economy of smaller, weaker nations. These rules also prevent countries from protecting jobs or local natural resources from accelerated exploitation, or local communities from being absorbed in the global economic juggernaut as many agricultural communities already have been.

Article XX - General Exceptions: makes governments meet certain conditions and proofs if they are going to protect plant, animal, or human health. While free trade advocates says this provides "flexibility" for governments to exercise their sovereignty, it puts an onus on countries seeking to protect resources to "prove" that laws protecting clean air, endangered species, local culture, food...
Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization

This book originally was published to demonstrate the violent clash between indigenous peoples and the neoliberal global economy.

"...With the advent of the modern version of global economics, characterized by new technologies and, most importantly, new globalized rules of trade and investment - created and powerfully enforced by the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF among other institutions - resource lands are being opened to assault by giant global investors and developers at far greater speed, and with far fewer legal obstacles than ever before. This has left poor countries' indigenous peoples ever-more vulnerable, though they are strongly resisting."

excerpts from: Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization

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Where the WTO grants multinationals these powers in the global economy, corporate personhood allows big business to claim strikingly similar powers over US residents. To find out more about a local movement to end corporate personhood, call us (541) 255-2946 or visit us at weethepeopleeugene.org

safety, and other public goods should not be overturned by the WTO.

Together, these principles break down the barriers separating the global, national, and local economies, effectively forcing all producers large and small large and small and wherever on earth they are located, into the same hyper-competitive market. It also sets off a final frenzy to control and develop the last remnants of the earth's natural resources, suddenly opened up for global corporate access. The net result is that nearly all goods...are forced into a new commodification process, and a global market controlled by a few transnational corporations global bureaucracies.

The Agreement on Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures (SPS)

"SPS" restricts what governments can do to protect food safety and to prevent the entry of harmful and invasive species or diseases inside their borders-"bioinvasion."
The U.S. and other big food exporters use the SPS rules to prevent other nations from regulating (even by simply requesting consumer information labels) the import of genetically engineered organisms, which may threaten native biodiversity and ecosystem balance with genetic pollution.

The Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM)

"SCM" outlines what kind of subsidies governments are allowed to give to companies. WTO rules are supposed to be based on the theory of free trade, which includes the principle that governments may not subsidize private corporations. While the WTO has detailed rules banning subsidies, they are filled with loopholes that actually allow big subsidies for global corporations, but not for local or small producers.

The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)

"TRIPs" lays down explicit requirements for the kind of patent regiments nations must use to protect intellectual property, such as inventions and technological innovations. It also explicitly allows the patenting-illegal claim of ownership- of plants, animals, and microorganisms but does not require that patent applications declare the source of the genetic resources, which increasingly come from indigenous lands.

Under TRIPs rules, biotechnology companies, particularly seed and drug companies, can privatize genetic resources by obtaining patents which allow them to legally exercise exclusive control over marketing the claim to material; this has been a major blow to local usufruct rights - where communities, notably in India, have traditionally been recognized as collective owners of local resources and innovations-and of rights to the global commons.

Peoples' movements that have become increasingly effective at using local and national governments to regulate corporate behavior now must face the fact that corporations have created a powerful new global arena for rule making. Indigenous rights organizations and trade activist groups must now unite to change these rules and to subordinate trade considerations to the inherent rights of native peoples to sovereignty and self-determination.

For more info, visit IFG.org or pick up a copy of Paradigm Wars!!