

ALTERNATIVES *to* ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

[[*A Better World Is Possible*]]



A REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON GLOBALIZATION

REPORT DRAFTING COMMITTEE:

John Cavanagh, Co-Chair

Sarah Anderson

Debi Barker

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Jerry Mander, Co-Chair

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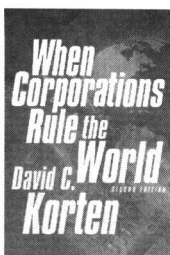
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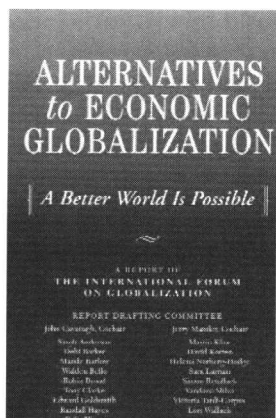
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Introduction

THIS BOOK, *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*, is an offshoot of an ongoing dialogue among associates of the International Forum on Globalization (IFG). IFG is best known for its contribution to building public awareness about the nature and consequences of corporate globalization, and for its resistance against the forces of global corporate rule. The authors of this volume believe that the ultimate success of citizen movements depends on their becoming more proactive in creating the world that can be.

The immediate priority is to frame the issues, recognizing that to arrive at a consensus among even a few people—let alone millions—is a far more complex and difficult task than building agreement on what we oppose. That which we oppose is immediate and concrete. Along with billions of our fellow humans, we live and breathe the consequences of corporate globalization and share the great pain it inflicts on humanity and the earth.

Any vision we may craft of an alternative future is less certain. It holds many possibilities and is always a work in progress. Citizen movements that are addressing globalization have no governing body, official ideology, or charismatic leader with a mandate to speak for the whole. We are brought together by our shared belief that there is a human capacity for cooperation, compassion, creativity, and responsible choice that will make a better world possible, even though it is all too often suppressed by the culture and institutions of corporate globalization. We are learning together as we join in common cause to turn possibility into reality.

In preparing this report, we have tried to remain true to what we sense to be the larger consensus unfolding within these movements. Yet we are aware that any effort to articulate positions for a movement so diverse is necessarily subject to discussion and debate. Therefore, we have sought patterns and points of convergence in the movement. But in the end the observations and conclusions we offer here represent mainly our personal views at this particular moment in history and in our own evolving understanding.

Global Resistance

Over the past decade, millions of people have taken to the streets in India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, Bolivia, the United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, France, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Kenya, South Africa, Thailand, Malaysia, and elsewhere, in massive demonstrations against the institutions and policies of corporate globalization. Often the mainstream media has done more to mislead than to inform the public on the issues behind the protests. Thomas Friedman, foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*, is typical of pundits who characterize the demonstrators as “ignorant protectionists” who offer no alternatives and do not merit serious attention. Many in the media have tried to reduce the complex issues involved to a simplistic contest between “protectionism” and “openness,” or between “anarchy” and “an orderly democratic process.” In North America and Europe, those involved in the protests are dismissed as spoiled children of privilege—selfish, ill-informed malcontents who would end trade and international cooperation.

Anyone who makes even the smallest effort to find out why millions of people from virtually every nation and walk of life have taken to the streets finds these simplistic characterizations to be untrue. As for the charge of being anti-poor, the largest protests are in low-income countries, and most of those involved are themselves poor. The charges of isolation and xenophobia are equally uninformed; the resistance against corporate globalization is global in scope and is dedicated to international cooperation to achieve economic justice for every person on the planet. As for the charge of being anti-trade, many of the movement’s leaders are actively involved in the promotion of *fair* trade—in contrast to the often exploitative *free*

trade they oppose—as a means of improving the economic conditions of poor people and their communities.

In fact, the resistance is grounded in a sophisticated, well-developed critique set forth in countless publications and public presentations, including, among many others, documents available from the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) and numerous books and articles by IFG associates. The critique is also available in the publications of a thriving independent media that tells the stories and communicates the opinions that the mainstream media so often ignores or dismisses. These independent information sources are gradually expanding public awareness and enlarging the constituency for transformational change, but they have not yet reached sufficient critical mass to force a reframing of the terms of the political debate still dominated by corporate media and interests.

The claim that the protestors offer no alternatives is as false as the other claims. In addition to the alternatives described in books, periodicals, conferences, and individual articles and presentations, numerous consensus statements have been carefully crafted by civil society groups over the past two decades that set forth a wealth of alternatives with a striking convergence in their beliefs about the underlying values human society should serve. In 2001 and 2002, tens of thousands gathered in Porto Alegre, Brazil, for the first and second annual World Social Forum, titled “Another World Is Possible,” to carry forward this process of popular consensus building toward a world that works for all.

Perhaps the most obvious and straightforward alternative advocated by civil society is simply to place a moratorium on the negotiation of new trade agreements. More ambitious proposals—such as those presented in this volume—center on redirecting global, national, and local priorities toward the task of creating healthy, sustainable human societies that work for all.

Although many of the protests have centered on opposition to trade agreements, global civil society does not oppose trade. Humans have engaged in trade since the beginning of time and as long as two or more members of the species survive will surely continue to do so. What the protesters reject is the use by corporate interests of international trade *agreements* to circumvent democracy in their global campaign to strip away social and environmental protections that ordinary people have struggled for decades—even centuries—to put in place.

The issue is governance. Will ordinary people have a democratic voice in deciding what rules are in the best interests of society? Or will a small ruling elite, meeting in secret and far from public view, be allowed to set the rules that shape the human future? If the concern of the decision makers is only for next quarter's corporate profits, who will care for the health and well-being of people and the planet?

These are increasingly serious questions for a great many people who live with the violence and insecurity that spreads through the world in tandem with growing inequality, an unraveling social fabric, and the collapse of critical environmental systems. It is this reality of social and environmental disintegration that has brought millions of people together in a loose global alliance that spans national borders to forge what may be considered the most truly global and inclusive social movement in human history.

Different Worlds

The corporate globalists who meet in posh gatherings to chart the course of corporate globalization in the name of private profits, and the citizen movements that organize to thwart them in the name of democracy, are separated by deep differences in values, worldview, and definitions of progress. At times it seems they must be living in wholly different worlds—which, in fact, in many respects they are. Understanding their differences is key to understanding the nature and implications of the profound choices humanity currently faces.

Corporate globalists inhabit a world of power and privilege. They see progress at hand everywhere, because from their vantage point the drive to privatize public assets and free the market from governmental interference spreads freedom and prosperity around the world, improving the lives of people everywhere and creating the financial and material wealth necessary to end poverty and protect the environment. They see themselves as champions of an inexorable and beneficial historical process toward erasing the economic and political borders that hinder corporate expansion, eliminating the tyranny of inefficient and meddlesome public bureaucracies, and unleashing the enormous innovation and wealth-creating power of competition and private enterprise.

Corporate globalists undertake to accelerate these trends as a great mis-

sion. They seek public policies and international agreements that provide greater safeguards for investors and private property while removing restraints to the free movement of goods, money, and corporations in search of economic opportunity wherever it may be found. They embrace global corporations as the greatest and most efficient human institutions, powerful engines of innovation and wealth creation that are peeling away the barriers to human progress and accomplishment everywhere. They celebrate the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization as essential and beneficial institutions for global governance engaged in the great work of rewriting the rules of commerce to free the market and create conditions essential to economic growth.

Corporate globalists subscribe to this worldview like a catechism. They differ among themselves mainly in their views of the extent to which it is appropriate for government to subsidize private corporations or provide safety nets to cushion the fall of the losers in the market's relentless competition.

Citizen movements see a very different reality. Focused on people and the environment, they see a world in a crisis of such magnitude that it threatens the fabric of civilization and the survival of the species—a world of rapidly growing inequality, erosion of relationships of trust and caring, and failing planetary life support systems. Where corporate globalists see the spread of democracy and vibrant market economies, citizen movements see the power to govern shifting away from people and communities to financial speculators and global corporations dedicated to the pursuit of short-term profit in disregard of all human and natural concerns. They see corporations replacing democracies of people with democracies of money, replacing self-organizing markets with centrally planned corporate economies, and replacing diverse cultures with cultures of greed and materialism.

In the eyes of citizen movements, these trends are not the result of some inexorable historical force but rather of the intentional actions of a corrupted political system awash in corporate money. They see the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization as leading instruments of this assault against people and the environment.

Ironically, the citizen movements seek many of the things the corporate globalists claim to offer but in fact fail to deliver: democratic participation, economies comprising enterprises that provide good jobs and respond to the

real needs and preferences of their customers, a healthy environment, an end to poverty. However, where the corporate globalists seek a competitive global economy ruled by megacorporations that owe no loyalty to place or person, citizen movements seek a planetary system of economies made up of locally owned enterprises accountable to all their stakeholders. Citizen movements work for economic justice for all, international cooperation, vibrant cultural diversity, and healthy, sustainable societies that value life more than money.

Citizen movements recognize that corporate globalists *cannot* deliver on their promises because the narrow and shortsighted financial imperatives that drive their institutions are antithetical to them. Many corporate globalists may act with the best intentions, but they are blinded by their own financial success to the costs of this success for those who have no place at the table, including future generations.

Corporate globalists generally measure progress by indicators of their own financial wealth, such as rising stock prices and indicators of the total output of goods and services available to those who have the money to pay. With the exception of occasional cyclical setbacks in Latin America and elsewhere and declining per capita incomes in the poorest African countries, these indicators generally perform well, confirming in the eyes of corporate globalists their premise that their program is enriching the world. (We do note that in July 2002, as this book was about to go to press, the main U.S. stock market indexes fell by over 5 percent in a week.)

In contrast, citizen movements measure progress by indicators of the well-being of people and nature, with particular concern for the lives of those most in need. With the exception of the highly visible pockets of privilege enjoyed by corporate globalists, these indicators are deteriorating at a frightening pace, suggesting that in terms of what really matters, the world is rapidly growing poorer.

The U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) reports that the number of chronically hungry people in the world declined steadily during the 1970s and 1980s but has been increasing since the early 1990s. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that by 2008 two-thirds of the people of sub-Saharan Africa will be undernourished, and 40 percent will be undernourished in Asia.