Chapitre 15/Chapter 15

Conférence plénière No. III : Une alternative positive à la mondialisation et à la domination des entreprises/ A Positive Alternative to 'Globalization' and Corporate Domination

par Michael Albert, (editeur de *Z Magazine* à Boston)

What are we for ?

Anti-globalization activists understand that sympathetic and mutually beneficial global ties are good. But we want social and global ties to advance universal equity, solidarity, diversity, and self-management, not to subjugate ever-wider populations to an elite minority. We want to globalize equity not poverty, solidarity not anti-sociality, diversity not conformity, democracy not subordination, and ecological balance not suicidal rapaciousness. Two questions arise. Why do these aspirations leave us critical of corporate globalization? And what new institutions do we propose for meeting these aspirations?

Rejecting Capitalist Globalization

Current international market trading benefits overwhelmingly those who enter today's exchanges already possessing the most assets. When trade occurs between a U.S. multinational and a local entity in Mexico, Guatemala, or Thailand, the benefits do not go more to the weaker party with fewer assets, nor are they divided equally, but they go disproportionately to the stronger traders who thereby increase their relative dominance. Opportunist rhetoric aside, capitalist globalizers try to disempower the poor and already weak and to further empower the rich and already strong. The result: of the 100 largest economies in the world, 52 aren't countries; they are corporations.

Similarly, market competition for resources, revenues, and audience is most often a zero sum game. To advance, each actor preys off the defeat of others so that capitalist globalization promotes a self-interested me-first attitude that generates hostility and destroys solidarity between individuals, industries, and states. Public and social goods are downplayed, private ones elevated. Businesses and nations augment their own profits while imposing losses on others. Human well being and development for everyone is not a guiding precept. Solidarity fights a rearguard battle against capitalist globalization.

Moreover, in current global exchange structures, whether they are McDonaldsesque or Disneyesque or instead derive from worthy indigenous roots, cultural communities and values disperse only as widely as their megaphone permits them too, and worse, are drowned out by other communities with larger megaphones who impinge on them. Capitalist globalization swamps quality with quantity and creates cultural homogenization not diversity. Not only does Starbucks proliferate, so do Hollywood images and Madison Avenue styles. What is indigenous and non-commercial struggles to even survive.

Diversity declines.

In the halls of the capitalist globalizers, only political and corporate elites are welcome. The idea that the broad public of working people, consumers, farmers, the poor and the disenfranchised should have proportionate say is actively opposed. Indeed, the point of capitalist globalization is precisely to reduce the influence of whole populations and even of state leaderships save for the most powerful elements of Western corporate and political rule. Capitalist globalization imposes corporatist hierarchy not only in economics, but also in politics. Authoritarian and even fascistic state structures proliferate. The numbers of voices with even marginal say declines.

As the financiers in corporate headquarters extend stockholders' influence, the earth beneath is dug, drowned, and paved without attention to species, by-products, ecology, or humanity. Only profit and power drive the calculations.

Anti-globalization activists oppose capitalist globalization because capitalist globalization violates the equity, diversity, solidarity, self- management, and ecological balance that activists pursue.

Supporting Global Justice.

What do anti-globalization activists propose to replace the institutions of capitalist globalization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization?

The International Monetary Fund or IMF and World Bank were established after World War II. The IMF was meant to provide means to combat financial disruptions adversely impacting countries and people around the world. It employed negotiations and pressures to stabilize currencies and to help countries avoid economy disrupting financial machinations and confusions. The World Bank was meant to facilitate long-term investment in underdeveloped countries, to expand and strengthen their economies. It was to lend major project investment money at low interest to correct for the lack of local capacity. Within existing market relations, these limited goals were positive. Over time, however, and accelerating dramatically in the 1980s, the agenda of these institutions changed. Instead of facilitating stable exchange rates and helping countries protect themselves against financial fluctuations, the IMF began bashing any and all obstacles to capital flow and unfettered profit seeking, virtually the opposite of its mandate. Instead of facilitating investment on behalf of the local poor economics, the World Bank became a tool of the IMF, providing and withholding loans as carrot or stick to compel open corporate access, and financing projects not with an eye to benefits for the recipient country, but with far more attention to benefits going to major multinationals.

In addition, the World Trade Organization or WTO that was desired in the early post war period actually came into being only decades later, in the mid 1990s. Its agenda became to regulate trade on behalf of the already rich and powerful. Instead of only imposing on third world countries low wages and high pollution due to being able to easily coerce their weak or bought-off governments, as IMF and World Bank policies accomplish, why not also weaken all governments and agencies that might defend workers, consumers, or the environment, not only in the third world, but everywhere? Why not remove any efforts to limit trade due to its labor implications, its ecology implications, its social or cultural implications, or its development implications, leaving as the only legal criteria whether there are immediate, short-term profits to be made?

If national or local laws impede trade—say an environmental, a health, or a labor law—the WTO adjudicates, and its entirely predictable pro-corporate verdict is binding.

The WTO trumps governments and populations on behalf of corporate profits. The full story about these three centrally important global institutions is longer, of course, but improvements are not hard to conceive. First, why not have, instead of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, an International Asset Agency, a Global Investment Assistance Agency, and a World Trade Agency. These three new (not merely reformed) institutions would work to attain equity, solidarity, diversity, self-management, and ecological balance in international financial exchange, investment and development, trade, and cultural exchange.

They would try to ensure that the benefits of trade and investment accrue disproportionately to the weaker and poorer parties involved, not to the already richer and more powerful.

They would not prioritize commercial considerations over all other values, but would prioritize national aims, cultural identity, and equitable development.

They would not require domestic laws, rules, and regulations designed to further worker, consumer, environmental, health, safety, human rights, animal protection, or other non-profit centered interests to be reduced or eliminated, but they would work to enhance all these, rewarding those who attain such aims most successfully.

They would not undermine democracy by shrinking the choices available to democratically controlled governments, but they would work to subordinate the desires of multinationals and large economies to the survival, growth, and diversification of smaller units.

They would not promote global trade at the expense of local economic development and policies, but vice versa.

They would not force Third World countries to open their markets to rich multinationals and to abandon efforts to protect infant domestic industries, but would facilitate the reverse.