Social Movements Challenging Neo-liberal Globalization[1]

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Look at it this way. We have the numbers on our side,
because there are far more losers than winners in the neo-liberal game.[2]

Introduction

According to the American sociologist Douglas Kellner, globalization is "*the* buzzword of our times" (Kellner 1998: 23). The British sociologist Anthony Giddens echoes this statement: "Every business guru talks about [globalization]. No political speech is complete without reference to it. Yet as little as 10 years ago the term was hardly used, either in the academic literature or in everyday language. It has come from nowhere to be almost everywhere." (Giddens 1999)

The term "globalization" has indeed spread at a breathtaking pace since the late 1980s (Gerhards and Rössel 1999).[3] Whether or not the actual process of globalization is occurring as rapidly as most observers assume, is less clear. Even in the realm of economics where such a process seems to be obvious, some scholars argue that, in a historical view, globalization started earlier and is advancing less quickly than we tend to assume (Hirst and Thompson 1999).[4] Leaving this debate aside, it is certainly true that globalization has become a highly contentious matter in the last ten years.

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[1] This contribution is based on two papers, the first presented at the conference in Santiago de Compostela from which this volume is derived, the second at a workshop of the European Commission, Research Directorate-General on "Global Trade and globalising society: Challenges to Governance and Sustainability. The role of the EU", Brussels, 14 -15 December 2000. I am grateful to Jackie Smith for her comments and to Amanda Dalessi for her editorial assistance. Address of the author: Rucht@medea.wz-berlin.de

[2] George (1999: 7).

[3] The findings of Gerhards and Rössel are supported by my own investigations. According to a key-word search in the German left-alternative newspaper *die tageszeitung* which is available on CD-ROM, the term 'globalis*' did not pop up before 1988 with two hits in this year. It was still relatively rare until 1994 (22 hits) but then became quite common with 350 to 400 hits in the late 1990s.

[4] The fact of globalization is already stated in the Communist Manifesto written in 1848: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections

In recent times, Seattle, Prague, Genoa and many other places have become signifiers for large-scale protest mobilizations which were directed, as most media portrayed it, "against globalization." Instead of providing a detailed account of these protests, I will take a more general perspective in trying to put these phenomena in context. First, I will sketch the major ideological positions towards globalization and draw some parallels to a similar debate centered on modernization. Second, the link between globalization or, more precisely, neo-liberalism[5] and civil society will be discussed with special emphasis on aspects of democracy. Third, some characteristics of the campaigns and movements against neo-liberal globalization will be highlighted before finally, I will speculate about the prospects of these protests.

1. Debates Around Modernization and Globalization

The debate surrounding globalization both benefits and suffers from the inclusiveness and vagueness of its key term.[6] It benefits from it insofar as the term provides a convenient denominator for a broad range of phenomena which are considered by many as extremely important for the present and future of humankind. Aspects that have been seen as more or

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everywhere. The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations." (Marx and Engels 1888; see http://csf.Colorado.EDU/psn/marx/Archive/1848-CM/)

[5] Broadly speaking, neo-liberalism is a new wave of a predominantly economically driven liberalism. It promotes free trade, a supply-side economy, deregulation, low taxes, privatization and self-reliance and self-responsibility of the citizenry. For a brief discussion, see Barry, Osborne and Rose (1993); for a critical assessment, see George (1999).

[6] Whatever positions are taken in this debate, it is clear that globalization is a multi-dimensional process, including economic, technological, ecological, political, social and cultural aspects and occurring at different levels (Held and McGrew 1993; Chase-Dunn 1999; Keohane and Nye 2000). Taking this into account, it usually makes little sense to label either camp simply as pro- or antiglobal. Even most of those who generally favor globalization would concede that it has some negative side effects for some people in some places. And even its harshest opponents would admit that globalization might have some advantages, for instance the facilitation of communication that allows the creation of a global anti-globalization movement.

less isolated are now perceived just as facets of one and the same trend of globalization. In its most abstract and formal versions, this trend can be circumscribed as the "growing interdependency of a world society" (Ian Marsh), the incorporation of peoples "into a single, global society" (Martin Albrow), "the increasing interconnectedness of societies" (John Macionis and Ken Plummer), or "the shrinking of distance on a large scale" (Keohane and Nye). Many people feel that these processes affect, or may soon affect, their lives and therefore can somehow relate to the debate on globalization. In addition, the theme of globalization has attracted wide attention because it has become so controversial, both in terms of political activities and as a matter of debate in media and science[7]. On the other hand, the theme of globalization suffers from the fuzziness of its key term so that parties in the conflict often tend to carry out a struggle on muddy terrain and in foggy air – a struggle characterized by mutual misrepresentations and misunderstandings, threatening gestures, besieging at the wrong place, and the like.

When considering the most extreme poles in this debate, it appears as if they are not referring to the same but to two totally different worlds. One side greets globalization enthusiastically. According to this view, globalization is not only inevitable, but also desirable. In many ways, it brings progress for humankind. It strengthens both the economies in the Western/Northern and the Southern hemisphere; it sets free forces of creativity and entrepreneurship that so far have been confined within political and cultural boundaries; it implies the free float not only of capital, goods, service and labor force but also of ideas such as democracy and human rights; it brings countries and cultures closer together and, by their growing interconnectedness, fosters a sense of interdependency, mutual support, understanding, and tolerance. This positive perspective is expressed in the official statement issued at the end of the G8 summit in Cologne in June 1999:

> "Globalization…has cast us together as never before. Greater openness and dynamism have contributed to the widespread improvement of living standards and a significant reduction in poverty. Integration has helped to create jobs by stimulating efficiency, opportunity and growth. The information revolution and greater exposure to others'

[7] Like the political world, the allegedly more neutral scientific world is also deeply divided over the effects of globalization. While one side praises it as beneficial also for the "developing" countries (e.g., Sachs and Warner 1995; Gwartney and Lawson 2000), the other side sees these countries as the main victims of globalization (e.g., Chomsky 1999; Gray 1999). Both sides try to substantiate their positions with statistics and empirical examples, sometimes even referring to the same country to make their point.

cultures and values have strengthened the democratic impulse and the fight for human rights and fundamental freedoms while spurring creativity and innovation."[8]

On the other end of the spectrum, people remain not only skeptical but hostile towards globalization by leveling two main arguments. First, globalization, whether intended or not, widens the gap between the rich and the poor, destroys indigenous cultures, and increases the exploitation of human and natural resources. Second, globalization escapes the control of (national) political institutions and, by this, also incapacitates the people as the democratic sovereign. According to McChesney (1999: 11), globalization or, more precisely, neo-liberalism "is the immediate and foremost enemy of genuine participatory democracy, not just in the United States but across the planet, and will be for the foreseeable future."

Whereas in the early phase of the debate the promoters of globalization were the dominant voice, it seems that we have now entered a stage in which the critics are gaining some ground. Regardless of which side is at the defense or offense, it is likely that this struggle will last for quite a while for a number of reasons. First, as mentioned above, it suffers from a lack of clarity about the meaning of globalization and what exactly one is referring to when using this generic label. This is more likely to prolong then shorten the debate. Second, even when the subject was clearly defined, there usually lacks solid and broad empirical information to causally attribute certain phenomena such as economic prosperity or disaster to globalization or any of its more specific dimensions. For a number of questions, we still have to wait and see what close empirical investigation will show. Third, and probably most important, this is not just a struggle about arguments and frames but also a clash of values and interests. Such a clash cannot easily be moderated, let a alone turned into compromise. One can probably learn more about the structure and implications of this struggle when comparing to the preceding debate about modernization.

As a scholarly concept, modernization took shape in the 1960s, in an era marked by impressive economic growth rates in the Western countries, the Cold War, and de-colonization in many Third World countries. In its truly naïve versions, modernization theory regarded the most advanced states, in particular the U.S., as *the* model that the rest of the

[8] G8 Communiqué of the Cologne G8 Summit, June 18-20, 1999. Cited according to May (1997: 4). On the other hand, the communiqué also mentions that "globalization has been accompanied by a greater risk of dislocation and financial uncertainty for some workers, families and communities across the world."

world, including the so-called underdeveloped countries, would adopt sooner or later.[9] It was assumed that in the end of this process the whole world, still conceived as a plethora of nation-states, would be "modern", that is economically developed, politically stable and democratic, and culturally secular and liberal. From this perspective, those who remained essentially skeptical or even hostile towards modernization were characterized as irrational (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1973, chpt. 8).

Some critics pointed to the arrogance, ethno-centrism and underlying neo-colonialist assumptions of this view and therefore rejected the concept of modernization altogether (Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1976). Others, for example Jürgen Habermas (1987) and Zygmunt Baumann (1992), have pointed to some negative consequences of the process of Western modernization with its emphasis on instrumentality, commodification, standardization, etc. Partly drawing on classical sociologists such as Marx, Weber and Simmel, these modern critics of modernization have pointed to its inherent ambivalence. Modernization, they argue, is a double-edged sword on both the level of individuals and societies. It offers choices and pressures, it brings along winners and losers. Even in the long run, it is not necessarily a positive sum game in which virtually everybody can profit.

In retrospect, it is obvious that modernization has not happened as its proponents had predicted. The economic gap between the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" world has remained and, on the aggregate, become even wider.[10] Fundamentalisms of all kinds are far from disappearing so that we may encounter a "clash of civilizations", as Huntington (1993) speculates. Even when only considering the Western world, not all countries are taking the same path to further modernization. In short: Modernization lost much of its appeal, particularly since well-respected intellectuals, who hardly fit the image of romantic backwoodsmen, have characterized modernization as implying both liberalization and estrangement, if not colonization.

Today, it appears that the concept of globalization has in many ways replaced that of modernization. Again, since we are still in a relatively early period of the debate about globalization, we find enthusiastic proponents as mentioned before. And again, very similar to earlier arguments leveled against modernization, critics have begun to raise their voices,

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[9] Lerner (1968: 386) defines modernization as "the process of social change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies".

[10] According to a report of the United Nations Development Programme, the GINI coefficient, which measures differences in income of poorests and wealthiest fifths of the population, was – at the global level - 1 to 30 in 1960, 1 to 60 in 1990 and 1 to 74 in 1997 (UNDP 1999: 3). 358 billionaires earned the same amount of money than the poorest 45 percent of world population, that is nearly 3 billion people (UNDP 1996: 2).

stressing the negative aspects of globalization. The spectrum of critics is wide even within the Western countries; it ranges from those who argue against globalization from a chauvinist and nationalist position (the extreme right) to those who essentially accept globalization but seek to control some of is negative side effects (social democrats and new labor) to those who frontally reject globalization as far as it consists of neo-liberal strategies of the Western elites to pursue their economic goals based on the exploitation of those who are weak (the extreme left). In addition, we also find critical groups that cannot easily be located on a right-left-scale. On the one hand, there exist, for example, religious and humanitarian groups in the West who, in taking an advocate's role, promote the rights of the victims of (economic) globalization. On the other hand, there are people in the Southern hemisphere - e.g. peasants and small shopkeepers - who desperately try to defend their vital interests in economic survival and cultural integrity in an era of unprecedented mobility of capital and other resources.

Like modernization, globalization is widely perceived as something that simply "happens." In this view, it can probably be accelerated or delayed to some degree but by no means halted or reversed. Globalization appears to follow an inherent evolutionary logic that leads to ever more interconnectedness and conformity. Even among those who reject the idea of globalization as being a positive sum game from which everybody will, at least in long run, take advantage, probably the vast majority perceives it as a quasi-natural process. It occurs like rain fall. Those who happen to be outdoors get wet; others sitting in a house are protected. And like rain, which is greeted by farmers on dry land but cursed by tourists on the beach, globalization can be perceived from quite different angles. It privileges some but deprives others. However, as long the perception of globalization as a quasi-natural process prevails, globalization cannot be politicized. At best, people may seek some protection from the downside of globalization in appealing to the mercy of the more or less remnant welfare state or of private charity.

There is also a minority that does not share this view of globalization as "natural" or "inevitable." Similar to the earlier critics of modernization processes, these new critics characterize globalization as a deliberate political, economic, and ideological project put forward by those who will profit most from it, that is, in Leslie Sklair's (1997) words, the "transnational capitalist class". These critics argue that globalization does not occur as a uniform process but is molded, mediated and filtered by specific structural and cultural contexts, which cannot be simply characterized as playgrounds but rather as fields of power struggles. Globalization, if unraveled, is then perceived as a hegemonic project that serves the

needs of those groups and states that are already in an advantageous position. Seen in this perspective, globalization is essentially an extension of the earlier project of modernization. However, while modernization was perceived as a process stretching over a long period, with every state being more or less advanced according to a developmental scale, globalization is a kind of modernization in one stroke.

And again, we find a similar pattern on the side of the proponents that try to discredit their critics as romantic, idealistic and uninformed, if not simply ill-minded. For example, regarding the fierce protests against the G8 summit in Geneva in July 2001, a German journalist stated that the whole spectacle with its "moral ardor" would resemble a "children's crusade."[11]

A closer look, however, would reveal that the protesters of Seattle or Genoa could not be adequately characterized as a bunch of noisy children nor as being simply "anti-globalists." This becomes obvious when considering their concerns that, as said above, are not only driven by a call for global solidarity and global justice, but are also related to the question of democracy in a globalizing world. This aspect will be discussed in the following section.

2. Globalization, Civil Society, and Democracy

For centuries, civil society was conceived of as the ensemble of civil, that is non-state, groups and associations in a given country. Following the liberal thinking from John Locke to Adam Smith, the modern nation-state, with its monopoly of formal power and its tendency to assume more and more responsibilities, was widely perceived as a potential threat to civil society. Strengthening civil society was synonymous with reducing the role of the state.

Today, in the era of globalization or "de-nationalization", as Michael Zürn (1998) puts it, the states are seen as loosing power and competencies particularly in economic matters, while business, especially multi-national companies, are gaining more and more influence. In a strictly formal sense, this process could be interpreted as empowering the civil society relative to the state. In this perspective, the shrinking role of states is not only advantageous for the economy at large, as many neo-liberals argue, but could be also interpreted as an improvement of democracy.

This line of reasoning, however, suffers from a number of deficiencies. First, it is based on a simplistic assumption about the distribution of virtues (associated with civil society) and

[11] Thomas E. Schmidt, in: Die Zeit 2. August 2001, p. 4.

evils (associated with the state). This belief, which is not only held by neo-liberals but also by radical libertarians in the tradition of David Thoreau, grossly idealizes civil society. The latter is understood as a pluralistic entity with little concentration of power. Moreover, it is perceived as promoting basic common goods and having a very high capacity for self-regulation.[12] In addition, this picture ignores the fact that the state is not simply a mechanism of dominance, intrusion and control. At least as far as democratic welfare states based on the rule of law are concerned, the state, instead of being a tool in the hands of repressive elites, is a means to secure internal peace, elementary human and civil rights, and material security for those who are economically weak or deprived. Historically speaking, monopolizing power was instrumental (a) to eliminate or reduce civil war; (b) to establish the rule of law and democratic rights, thereby self-limiting its power; and (c) to redistribute societal wealth in order to reduce, at least to some extent, the gap between the rich and the poor and to guarantee some minimal standards of social security.

The second flaw of the neo-liberal perspective is that it conceives the relationship between state and society in a mechanical fashion as if it was a simple zero-sum game. The assumption is that weakening the state necessarily strengthens civil society. In many regards, however, this does not hold. A lack of state control, for example, could also undermine the functioning of a proper civil society insofar as some groups, usually those who are already more powerful or wealthy than others, impose their will on the rest of the society. Also, the state may be instrumental to empower deprived social groups to organize themselves and raise their voices in order to improve their situation.

Third, it is also important to unravel the notion of civil society and, accordingly, to investigate the understanding and interests of its respective advocates. Some of those who want to reduce the role of the state for the alleged sake of civil society do so primarily to satisfy their own particularistic interests. Similar to the slogan "What is good for General Motors is also good for America," they suggest, at least implicitly, that an identity exists between civil society and private interests and, in particular, business interests. This, of course, is easier to proclaim when civil society remains a vague generic label. However, business should not be equated with civil society. Therefore, many authors promote a more restrictive concept of civil society. They perceive the non-state groups caring about public goods – e.g., certain kinds of voluntary associations and social movements – as the centerpiece of civil society. These groups do not act "for the sake of any particular formation […] but for the sake of sociability itself" (Walzer 1991: 298). Civil society is then not the

[12] For a more realistic view on civil society, see, for example, Carothers (1999/2000).

ensemble of all non-state actor but a "public ethical-political community" based on a common ethos (Cohen and Arato 1992: 84). In that perspective, profit-oriented business is marginal to, if not beyond, the idea of civil society.

In sum, if certain normative connotations of the idea of civil society promoted by philosophical "pragmatists" (e.g., John Dewey) or "communitarians" (e.g., Amitai Etzioni and Charles Taylor) are evoked, the global reach of neo-liberalism appears highly problematic, being a potential evil rather than an asset. If neo-liberalism implies ruthless economic competition, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the survival of the fittest, then society is loosing its "civility" in the sense of mutual respect, bonds of solidarity, and its moral obligation to protect those who are marginalized and deprived. Neo-liberalism, understood in this way, results in the hegemony of some parts of civil society over other parts, both within and across nations (Chomsky 1999). Globalization is then only a euphemism for "Turbo-Capitalism" (Luttwak 1999), the both domestic and transnational pursuit of the maximization of profit and market shares.

Whereas welfare states have been created to overcome or prevent Manchester capitalism, today, in the name of economic progress and global competition, the wheel of history seems to roll back towards an unleashed market liberalism with a minimal state. Ironically, many states tend to support neo-liberalism, since they perceive each other - either as individual entities or as parts of a larger block of countries such as the EU - as competitors whose political strength is heavily dependent on a flourishing economy. Such an economy, neo-liberals argue, is only feasible to the extent that it is "liberated" from high taxes, restrictions on import and export, restrictions on the flow of capital and labor force, from rules concerning minimum wages, limits on working hours, etc.[13]

Critics of the globalizing neo-liberalism not only point to negative aspects such as growing inequality, erosion of social security standards and the like, but also worry about the state of democracy in several regards. First, to the extent that states and, more specifically, national governments are loosing control over, or deliberately withdraw from, major economic decisions, the latter are left to either "the market" as an abstract system (see Self

[13] As Chomsky (1999) and many others have shown, the major proponents of free trade policies did not apply the latter necessarily to themselves. Great Britain and the U.S. have tended to protect and subsidise their own industries as long as there were powerful foreign competitors. By contrast, free trade policy is promoted when it comes to conquer new markets abroad. Also, the neo-liberal call to reduce the state is not necessarily implemented. For example, contrary to what most people would assume, Britain under Margaret Thatcher has not reduced the share of state expenses out of the gross national product.

1993) or to major private players, in particular big multinational corporations[14]. However, neither the market nor major economic actors can claim to represent the people and to operate on the basis of democratic principles. As a consequence, those who are negatively affected by economic developments no longer have an addressee for their demands and somebody to hold responsible (Mander and Goldsmith 1997).

Second, even when national and international governments are included in economic decision-making processes, there exists an extreme asymmetry in the respective weight and influence of individual states and institutions. More than ever before in history, the U.S. have become a dominant player in world politics. Formally or informally, they are the key actor in institutions such as the NATO, UNO and its sub-organizations, World Bank, IMF, G7 and G8 summits, WTO, OECD, NAFTA, etc. The role of the U.S. in these institutions reflects its military and economic power but certainly does not correspond to its population size which, from a democratic viewpoint, would be a more adequate measure for granting influence according the principle of "one person, one vote."

Third, a more general problem arises in international politics because of the dominance of executive powers relative to legislative bodies. While in domestic politics the parliament usually controls and limits the government, there exists hardly a functional equivalent to parliaments[15] at the international level, let alone directly elected decision-makers in international bodies. Related to this is the spatial and functional distance between ordinary citizens and decision-makers in international policies who hardly know each others' situations and, unlike at the national and sub-national levels, are not, or only in a very obscure way, mediated by parties, interests groups, and social movements.

Because of the obvious democratic deficit at the international level, scholars have begun to promote various remedies. McGrew (1997: 241-254) for instance, has identified three "models of global democracy" which he coined "liberal-internationalist, "cosmopolitan," and "radical communitarian." Besides the academic discussion, a number of transnationally operating NGOs and social movements are pressurizing for more democracy by challenging not only the established ways of international policy-making but, in a more general sense, the given global power structure. If it is true that social movements have been often "the central

[14] For early critical discussions of the role of multinational companies see Tugendhat (1972) and Vernon (1977).

[15] This even holds when taking into account the existence of the UN General Assembly and the European Parliament. The first is a body of representatives of national governments and is, compared to the Security Council, relatively weak; the second, though having directly elected members, still lacks many of the competencies that characterize most national parliaments.

bearers of democratizing pressures within Western Societies" (Foley and Edwards 1996: 47), then one could also expect them to play a role when it comes to democratize international policy-making.

3. Campaigns and Movements Against Neo-liberal Globalization

To be sure, most ordinary people, even when seriously affected, either do not relate their fate to globalization or simply consider it to be a quasi-natural process. A minority, however, assumes a different stance. In part, they actively intervene in matters of globalization, as demonstrated by the protests against the policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO)[16] in Seattle in December 1999. [17] Many observers perceive the 'The Battle of Seattle' as the start of a new protest movement, as indicated, for example in questions such as: "Why the protests are expressed only now after many years of trade liberalization?…What will be the stance of the EU on the "post-Seattle" world?"[18] A closer look, however, reveals that the assumptions underlying such questions are highly debatable. Neither is Seattle the beginning of such a wave of protest, nor is there a new quality to justify the label of a "post-Seattle world". Nevertheless, Seattle is of importance, as it will be argued below.

Activism before Seattle

In at least two senses, the protest in Seattle was not a sudden eruption in a hitherto quiet terrain. First, as many other large protests, it was the result of an orchestrated campaign. "The demonstrators of Seattle were far from being a disorganized rabble. For months, a dozen or more groups, …, had been planning the protests, working under the umbrella of the Direct Action Network, united by a commitment that the demonstrations remain non-violent." (Brown 2000: 32f.; see also Lori´s War 2000: 47-50) Second, and more importantly, Seattle was not the first campaign against neo-liberalism in general and institutions such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, G7 summits, NAFTA, and EU council in particular (see O'Brien 2000). It may have taken many journalists by surprise, but certainly not close observers of such activities in the past and present. Let us consider just a few examples.

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[16] For a critical assessment of the WTO policies, see Wallach and Sforza (1999), and Smith and Moran (2000).
[17] On the Seattle events, see Bayne (2000), Epstein (2000), Gill (2000), Scholte (2000), and Smith (2000).
[18] Announcement to the Brussels conference mentioned in footnote 1.

A relatively early and powerful mobilization occurred when the representatives of the IMF and the World Bank held their meetings in Berlin in 1988. After nearly two years of planning and dozens of preparatory meetings, teach-ins, etc., the mobilization against these institutions culminated during the time of the official conference with many protest activities, including a rally with 80,000 people. Although the protesters were mainly, but not exclusively, from Germany, the range of groups was similar to that in Seattle, including trade unions, leftist parties, feminists, ecologists, civil rights groups, and Third World groups. (Gerhards 1993; Gerhards and Rucht 1992). In the following years, most IMF and World Bank meetings continued to attract protest, though at a much smaller scale than in Berlin.

Similarly, international summits, gatherings of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and other institutions have become the foci of protest mobilization that, in part, was directed against neo-liberal free trade policies. For example, sizeable protests accompanied the WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva in 1998, the Birmingham G7 summit[19] in the same year, and the EU summit and the G7/8 summit in Cologne in June 1999. Among those protesting in Cologne were the participants of the *Intercontinental Caravan 99*, some 370 activists from Mexico, Brazil, Bangladesh, India and Nepal who toured through Europe and North America. Their aim was to inform the public about the problems of farmers and fishermen in their home countries threatened by the liberalization of the economy, the aggressive marketing of genetically modified seeds, pesticides, and similar activities. These activists, in turn, overlap with the network *Peoples Global Action,*[20] which was founded in February 1998 in Geneva to bring together such diverse movements *Sem Terra*, an organization of landless peasants from Brazil, the *Frente Zapatista* from Mexico, and Ogoni people from Nigeria who all fight the free trade policies promoted by WTO and similar institutions.[21] Other groups that participated in the Cologne protest were part of *Jubilee 2000*. This is a loose alliance of groups and networks from more than 50 states demanding a considerable debt release for the poor

[19] For an analysis of the protest against this summit, see Pettifor (1998). According to the author, more than 70,000 people participated in this protest.
[20] In 1999, more than 1,500 groups supported the German section of the campaign.
[21] In their Geneva manifesto, *Peoples Global Action* presents itself as "a wordwide coordination of resistance against the global market, an new alliance of struggle and mutual support" which the following hallmarks: "1. A very clear rejection of the WTO and other trade liberalization agreements (like APEC, the EU, NAFTA, etc.) as active promoters of a socially and environmentally destructive globalization, 2. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organizations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker, 3. A call to non-violent civil disobedience and the construction of local alternatives by local people, as answers to the action of governments and corporations, 4. An organizational philosophy based on decentralization and autonomy." (http://www.tao.ca/fire/gather/0049.html)

countries in the Southern hemisphere. All these groups and their claims were also present in the Seattle protests.

Likewise, various North American organizations and networks have mobilized against neo-liberal policies in the years prior to the "Battle of Seattle." Some of them, for example the US *Network for Global Economic Justice*, specifically targeted the IMF and the World Bank.[22] Others, among them many trade unions in North America, opposed the NAFTA (Shoch 2000). Even when focusing only on the North West in the U.S., we can identify a chain of labor protests of which the 1999 Seattle actions were just the most recent event (Levi and Olson 2000). Besides U.S. workers, there were also many young people who, in part, had been trained in tactics of direct action and civil disobedience by semi-professional groups such as the *Ruckus Society*.[23] In other words, the call for action in Seattle fell on fertile ground.

Seattle and beyond

In the light of all these activities preceding the Seattle events in 1999, we can hardly define this latter campaign as a watershed separating an era of calmness from a subsequent era of significant and unruly mobilization against the globalization of the economy and free trade policies. Most of the groups performing on stage in Seattle were already active in prior struggles. None of the arguments raised and probably none of the strategies applied in Seattle were new. Also, the alliance between official delegations from a number of Southern countries and many Northern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) outside the conference venue could be found in several earlier international conferences. Nevertheless, Seattle was in some respects special insofar as (a) the WTO was confronted with stronger internal and external opposition than ever before, (b) the link between labor unions and other groups, including those from Third World countries, was particularly strong, (c) the course of the conference was considerably disrupted by the massive protests, and (d) at least partly due to the close interaction between some NGOs and some official delegates, particularly those from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), no agreement in the official conference could be

[22] This network was partly inspired by the study of Danaker (1994) on the World Bank and the IMF.
[23] See the detailed report on the *Ruckus* training camp in Florida (Brown 2000). See also: www.ruckus.org

reached.[24] Given these factors, together with the tremendous media coverage of the Seattle event and some signs of sympathy by political leaders such as Bill Clinton for the ideals and aims of the protesters, it is no wonder that Seattle became an important reference point for subsequent debates and mobilizations.

The following two years were plastered with transnational protests, mainly at official meetings, such as the IMF and World Bank conference in Washington, D.C. in April 2000, the IMF and World Bank meeting in Prague in September, the G20 meeting in Montreal in October, the EU summit in Nice in December, the Quebec meeting in April 2001 to create a the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the EU-summit in Göteborg in June 2001, and the G8 summit in Genoa in July 2001. In most of the these cases, the protesters positively referred to Seattle as a kind of model, as indicated, for example, by the slogan "Turn Prague into Seattle". Their activities were flanked by other groups and networks that so far are hardly known in the wider public but gradually are gaining strength. For example, the German branch of *Jubilee 2000* is comprised of about 1,500 organizations and groups. One of them, the WEED (*World Economy, Ecology and Development*), has become very active in matters on free trade and debt relief since its creation in 1990. Another example is *Eurodad* (*European Network on Debt and Development*), a network with similar aims that is represented in 16 European countries. More recently, ATTAC (*Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens*[25]) has emerged as a significant speaker. It was established in France in 1998. By the summer of 2001, it had branches in 26 countries, ranging from Argentina to Switzerland to Tunisia, and claimed to have 50.000 members. In addition, there is a plethora of smaller groups which all are critical towards neo-liberal policies, for example, the French groups *Agir-ICI* and *Raison d'Agir*, the British network *Critical Mass*, which links aspects of globalization and ecology, and the *Halifax Initiative* that was created at the eve of the G7 summit in Halifax in 1995.[26]

In spite of the flourishing of such groups and their increasing networking, the relative success of the Seattle protests could not be repeated for various reasons. One general factor is

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[24] According to many close observers, another major factor for the failure to reach an agreement was the tactics of the US delegation. It locked out many other delegations that they perceived as potential trouble-makers from informal negotiations during the conference. This fact leaked to the "outsiders" who, also for this reason, were no longer inclined to compromise.

[25] Among other things, ATTAC is promoting the taxation of transactions on the stock markets (Tobin tax). See tttp://www.attac.org/indexen.htm.

[26] It mainly comprises Canadian groups "currently focused on the issues of multilateral debt relief, World Bank energy policy and practice and international currency speculation." See http://www.web.net/~halifax/index.htm

that in some subsequent events both the police and the conference organizers were better prepared to deal with the protesters. In Genoa, where the biggest transnational mobilization took place with some 200,000 protesters[27], the latter were physically kept out from the "red zone" that was reserved for the official conference. Another factor, which applies to the Mayday protests in London and Berlin, is the absence of a specific institution that represents a clearly identifiable target. Moreover, no coalition between the labor unions and other groups existed in the Mayday campaigns, and only small and fragile links could be seen in the Göteborg and Genoa protests. As a rule, the protesters received considerable attention but little sympathy in the media, as particularly the London event in 2000 shows (Rucht 2001). Thus, from the viewpoint of most organizers and activists, the post-Seattle protests were not overly successful and encouraging, probably with Genoa being more difficult to evaluate.[28]

4. Conclusions and Perspectives

During the 1990s, protests against "lobalization" have broadened and intensified. "Anti-globalization" is, as an official reports states, "a spreading phenomenon" (Canadian Security Intelligence Service 2000). However, labels such as "anti-globalization movement" are misleading.[29] Those who are associated with such labels do promote globalization in some ways, e.g. promoting solidarity, justice, and democracy at the global level (Smith 2000a). Not accidentally, these groups name themselves Peoples Global Action, Global Action Project, Earthwatch, EarthAction, and the like. They also profit from global communication structures to co-ordinate their activities. But they also challenge globalization in some other respects. It appears that at the heart of this is the attack on neo-liberalism or, to use another loaded term, the "Washington consensus." The ideological spectrum of the protesters is wide, ranging from Christian groups to social democrats to anarchists. Among these groups, the critique of

[27] Usually numbers on participants in mass protests are a matter of debate. While for Genoa initially lower numbers were given, in afterwards reports both journalists and representatives of the Italian administration referred to 200,000 participants.

[28] The sheer number and broad spectrum of protesters could be seen as an asset. However, the violent clashes in which the police, in some instances and some places, were the initiating force, can be seen as a burden insofar as the form of action overshadowed the reasons for protest and many commentators, and probably more so large parts of the populace, tended to equate the protesters with mindless vandals.

[29] Susan George, the vice president of ATTAC France, states: „Actually, I refuse the term 'anti-globalization' that the media have lumbered us with. This combat is really between those who want inclusive globalization based on cooperation and solidarity and those who want the market to make all decision." (George 2001: 1) As for the latter attempts, George uses labels such as "market-driven" or "corporate-led" globalization.

capitalism, or even an outspoken anti-capitalism, is gaining ground. This critique differs to some extent from its earlier forms in various respects. (1) The "real socialism" as practiced in the former Soviet bloc and a number of other countries is no longer a relevant reference point. (2) Hopes for a revolutionary change are mainly absent. (3) The key concern of the protesters are the peoples in the Southern hemisphere and, more generally, global social, political and ecological problems instead of the fate of workers in the industrialized world. (4) The main targets are multinational corporations and international governmental bodies. Because globalization is geographically unlimited and has so many thematic implications and repercussions, it can become the focus of a broad variety of groups, which sometimes are able to form broad coalitions that overarch specific issues and territories. In other words, the critique of globalization is increasingly becoming global.

The Seattle protests of December 1999 are neither the starting point of such a wave of protest nor are they fundamentally new in their character. There has been a considerable number of earlier but similar protests since the late 1980s, usually focusing on G7 and EU summits, UN world conferences, IMF and World Bank meetings, and conferences of the WTO and its forerunner GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). However, Seattle plays a great symbolic role insofar as it has shown the broad range of protest groups that may come together in a single, orchestrated campaign. It has also exhibited the disruptive potential of these groups, and the large media coverage they are able to get. At least for the moment, Seattle has weakened the self-confidence of some politicians who want to push forward a truly global free trade economy.

Seattle has inspired subsequent campaigns of the critics of the neo-liberal strategy, although to date none of these campaigns could match the events in Seattle in terms of its immediate impact on the official event and its relatively positive media coverage. For example, it was not possible to "Turn Prague into Seattle."

Taken together, the various campaigns before and after Seattle have resulted in mainly symbolic rather than substantial gains (Roth 2000). In relative terms, probably the UN institutions became most supportive to the demands of protest movements and NGOs (see Otto 1996; Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Willets 1996). By contrast, those international institutions seeking to steer the global economy have done little more than pay lip service to their challengers. In the last few years, the World Bank and the IMF have been re-assessing their strategies and have indicated to pay more attention to social aspects, including poverty in Third World countries (Fox and Brown 2000; Udall 2000). This is reflected by their emphasis on concepts of *ownership*, *participation*, and the like, within the context of a new set of

initiatives such as the *Comprehensive Development Framework* (CDF), the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (PRSP) and the *Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility* (PRGF). Whether this is more than rhetoric, still remains to be seen (Goldberg 2000). As far as the opposition to the WTO is concerned, Scholte (2000: 116) draws a sobering conclusion:

> "These long efforts have booked only modest gains to date. Thanks in good part to pressure from certain civic groups, the WTO has since 1996 added competition issues, development concerns, environmental problems, and labour standards to its agenda. However, little has happened on these matters beyond occasional meetings of committees and working groups. The core mission of the WTO has remained that of the widest and fastest possible liberalization of cross-border flows of goods and services."

Similar assessments could be found regarding the World Bank (Nelson 1995) and other international governmental bodies. Although it is unlikely that the campaigns against neo-liberalism will have an immediate impact in the near future, I doubt that the protests will soon fade away. I would expect, rather, their further intensification and broadening, given the scope of the problems they address, the dissatisfaction of many young activists with the "new world order," the democratic deficit of international policy-making, and the growing easiness to co-ordinate movements across issues and space (Keck and Sikkink 1998; della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht 1999; Rucht 1999; Florini 2000). But we can also assume that the targeted institutions will react to this challenge, for instance by applying a strategy of the stick and the carrot. The stick are not only tear gas, batons, bullets, arrests (including various forms of abuse of arrested protesters particularly in Genoa) and criminal proceedings, but also the refusal to debt relief, aid, and/or credits. The carrot implies a symbolic embrace of the needs of civil society, to co-opt those critics who appear to be "reasonable", and, at best, to grant some limited concessions that, I would speculate, will not pacify the large majority of the challengers. Calls for more solidarity and democracy have characterized many movements in the past within national boundaries. Now, in an era of globalization, these calls refer to a "cosmopolitical democracy" (Archibugi and Held 1995). Currently this idea may be an utopian dream, but so was "national democracy" in most countries in the 18th century.

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