

INTRODUCTION: THE WEB

I'M SITTING IN A COLORFUL collective flat in Montreal, on a cold January night, surrounded by women helping to plan a women's action for the protests next April against the Summit of the Americas. "I'm tired of talking," one woman complains. "Can't we do something different?"

I pull out my drum and begin a simple beat, and a soft, wordless chant above it. We all begin to sing. Over the harmonies and the rhythm, we speak of our visions for the action:

"I see webs ... webs of power ..."

"Globalization is a web that traps us ..."

"I see us weaving new webs, webs of connection ..."

"I see us weaving a movement ..."

The two years that followed the successful Seattle blockade of the World Trade Organization summit in November of 1999 saw the explosive growth of a powerful movement to contest the institutions of global corporate capitalism. The movement is often called the "anti-globalization" movement, but I prefer the more positive phrasing of the "global justice" movement.

Before Seattle, large, urban street actions involving direct action were simply not happening. Or if they were, the media were paying no attention to them. Suddenly, around the world every major meeting or summit of the global corporate capitalists was being met with countersummits, protests, blockades, and sometimes out-and-out street battles. A whole new generation was being radicalized and drawn into activism. New coalitions were being formed, and new ideologies and tactics were being forged. Alternative institutions sprang up, from collectives of street medics to IndyMedia centers that pioneered a whole new approach to journalism.

The movement has had a tremendous impact. Before Seattle, the agenda of transnational corporations was being imposed on a world largely unaware of the implications of the trade agreements and

institutions that override laws passed by citizens and undermine environmental and labor standards. The virtues of free trade and a type of development that furthers corporate profits were challenged by a few dedicated organizations, but barely debated publicly. The process of globalization was considered to be both desirable and unstoppable.

After two years of protests, however, the major institutions of globalization were on the defensive. The WTO was unwelcome to meet in any democratic country in the world. The less developed countries were in revolt against its “green room” meetings where industrialized nations set the policies poorer countries were expected to follow. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank had cut short their annual meeting in Washington, D.C., because the city couldn’t afford to police it for an entire week. Moreover, their policies were being publicly scrutinized and their track records questioned.

Throughout the summer of 2001, police violence against the movement escalated. Live ammunition was used against demonstrators in Goteburg, Sweden. Four students in Papua New Guinea were shot dead. One young protester was shot in Genoa, and hundreds were subjected to brutal beatings and torture in jail. Nevertheless, the movement was gaining momentum. The next large protest was scheduled for the end of September, when the IMF and the World Bank were due to meet in Washington, D.C.

On September 11, 2001, hijacked planes crashed into the Pentagon and destroyed the World Trade Towers in New York, killing about thirty-five hundred people. Shock, grief, horror, and panic gripped the country. The political climate changed — overnight.

The IMF and the World Bank cancelled their meeting, and major groups pulled out of the protest against them. Others decided to transform the event into a protest against the war of revenge Bush was in the process of launching. The movement suddenly faced its greatest challenge: how to continue gaining momentum in a climate of public fear and increased repression, how to focus attention on the ongoing violence and everyday terror caused by the global corporate system, how to challenge global economic policies when “capitalism” and “freedom” were being identified with each other by the media and seen by the public as the innocent victims of terrorists.

The attacks could spell the end of the global justice movement. But their shattering impact, tragic as it is, could also spur us to deepen and broaden the movement. If we respond out of fear and constrict our efforts, the movement will wither. If we respond with compassion, imagination, and vision, the movement will grow and regain its momentum.

I am writing this introduction in October 2001, when the challenge still lies ahead of us. The stakes could not be higher: at a time when every life support system on the planet is under assault, they may well include our own survival. I write in faith that we will marshal the creativity needed to move forward, and that a chronicle of the movement's first two years will be of value.

This is, of course, far from a complete chronicle. It's focused on the events I've taken part in myself and/or the global justice movement. Other major issues that I've been deeply involved in — old growth forest campaigns, justice for Palestine, Central American Solidarity, local land use issues — are not much represented here. Several major actions are missing, including those at the Democratic and Republican conventions of 2000. It is shaped by the emotional and political events in the immediate aftermath of the attacks of September 11th. And it's the chronicle of a participant, not of an objective observer, if such a thing can exist. I draw my inspiration from involvement, not from detachment. I can't just write about a movement — I need to be part of it, to sweep out the Convergence Center, wrestle with the agenda of the meeting, hand out postcards inviting people to the action, train new activists in street tactics and in how not to panic when the police attack. My writing is fed by the wisdom and the commitment of all the people I've met in this work, from the brilliant theorists and strategists who head up NGOs to the tattooed, spiky anarcho-punks eager to be in the front lines of any confrontation.

“It didn't start in Seattle ...” is one of the slogans of the global justice movement. This collection of writings, however, did start in Seattle, with a post I sent out shortly after I returned home from five days in jail following the blockade of the World Trade Organization summit in November of 1999.

Disgusted by the media misrepresentation of the action, I dashed off a quick description of how I understood the blockade had been organized. I sent it to friends, a few listserves, and some of my contacts in other countries who I thought would be interested. Much to my surprise, the post got forwarded around the world. I began receiving requests for translation into French, Spanish, and Portuguese as well as reprint requests from many, many places. At that time, I was new to the Internet, but my experience with that article showed me its potential power.

When I went to Seattle, I had been writing and working both politically and spiritually for decades. I began my involvement in activism during the Vietnam War, when I was still in high school. Through the feminist movement of the early seventies, I became interested in looking at the impact patriarchal religions had on women's development and self-esteem. From there, it was a natural step to explore alternatives, both rediscovering the ancient, pre-Christian Goddess religions and exploring new forms in ritual and collective practice.

A deepening earth-based spirituality led me into environmental and antinuclear activism, out of the sense that if the earth is sacred, we should prevent idiots from destroying her and us. Throughout the eighties and nineties I engaged in many nonviolent direct actions on the issues of nuclear power and weapons, and later on militarism, intervention in Central America, the clearcutting of redwood forests, AIDS, and other issues. I was part of a collective of nonviolence trainers and also helped to organize many of the actions. At the same time, I was writing about earth-based spirituality, teaching, creating ritual, and helping our community grow and transition from a small, local collective to an international network.

I went to Seattle reluctantly. I had more than enough commitments at home, both political and personal, to keep me busy. I went with somewhat the same attitude with which I used to go to synagogue as a child — thinking I would fulfill a somewhat unpleasant duty, feel absolved of my guilt for a little while, come home, and resume my life.

Instead, I found myself galvanized into a new level of political activity. The next big action planned was for April in Washington, D.C., at

the meeting of the IMF and the World Bank. I began mobilizing people to go and volunteered to come early and help with trainings. By then, I was hooked. My partner and I devoted our vacation in Europe to doing trainings for the Prague action, although we couldn't stay for the action itself. I came home, threw over most of my paying work, and began to help mobilize for Quebec and to travel all over doing trainings for actions rather than workshops on ritual. I spent a month in South America, weeks in Canada, and in the summer made a last-minute decision to go to Genoa to the protest against the G8, the summit of the eight most powerful industrialized countries in the world.

For all of these actions, I wrote descriptions, reports, articles, and exhortations and sent them out over the Internet. Throwing a writer onto the Internet is like throwing a fish into water. I found myself in my natural element. For over two decades, I'd been writing books. While being an author is in many ways a highly satisfying occupation, it is also an exercise in delayed gratification. For years, you sit alone, writing, rewriting (before computers, children, that meant retyping!) draft after draft. When the book is done, anywhere from eight to eighteen months may elapse before it comes out. Reviews are often few and far between, and few readers bother to sit down and write a letter commenting on your ideas.

But putting a post out onto the Internet was instant gratification. Within days, sometimes hours, I might get a thank-you from someone in Thailand or a critique from a friend in Quebec. What I wrote could become part of a living dialogue, an ongoing discussion that might be reflected in the next call to action.

The articles in the first section of this book were mostly written with a sense of immediacy and urgency. They were what I felt people needed to hear in the moment. They were written on airplanes, in spare moments of time between other events, late at night or early in the morning. I have left them virtually unedited, so that they stand as a record of the events and changes of two years of powerful movement building.

Of all the posts, the most urgent was the one I sent from Genoa on the Saturday of the action. I was trapped in the IndyMedia Center while the police brutally beat sleeping people in the school across the

street. I watched in anguish as they carried out stretcher after stretcher, thinking, “What can I do? What can I do?” Finally, I looked around and realized that I was surrounded by computers and phone lines. I dashed off a message describing what was happening and sent it to three people whose e-mail addresses I happened to remember: two of my closest friends, and Michael Albert of *Z Magazine*. By the next afternoon, my friends in San Francisco were hearing it read on the radio, and it had literally gone around the world, alerting the movement to the truth of what was happening.

The last posts in this section were those written in response to the attacks of 9-11. They close off this two-year phase of the movement, and I hope open directions for the next phase.

The chapters in the second section of the book are my attempts to do deeper thinking about some of the key questions confronting the global justice movement. As satisfying as the immediacy of the Internet can be, posts sent out by e-mail have their limitations. For one thing, they need to be relatively short. And the urgency with which most are written doesn’t always allow for broader reflection. When I realized I was writing an actual book, I eagerly took the opportunity to expand and stretch out a bit.

In this section, I examine our relationship to nature and place, which for me is the beginning point for creating any truly alternative culture. I share some of my own experiences in directly democratic organizing and explore some of the issues in building a more diverse movement. I reexamine nonviolence and some of the pressing questions around how best to wage our struggles. Finally, I propose an economic vision based on an understanding of ecology, and some ideas about how we might get there.

All of my writing and activism comes from an alternative vision of power. Power-over, or domination, is the power we’re all familiar with, the power of a small group to control the resources or to limit the choices of others. Ultimately, it stems from violence and force and is generally backed by the police and military power of the state.

But the word “power” itself comes from a root that means “ability.” We each have a different kind of power: the power that comes from within; our ability to dare, to do, and to dream; our creativity.

Power from within is unlimited. If I have the power to write, it doesn't diminish your power: in fact, my writing might inspire you or illuminate your thinking.

Power-over seems invincible, but ultimately it rests upon the compliance of those it controls. No system of power can afford to use force to enforce its every decree. Instead, the fear of that force causes us to repress and police ourselves. If we refuse to comply, if we call the legitimacy of the system itself into question, ultimately the system cannot stand.

Power from within is akin to what many cultures call "spirit." The global justice movement challenges the greatest amassing of police, military, political, and economic power the world has ever seen. To do so requires great courage, and the faith that ultimately creativity must triumph over violence.

Throughout the book, I use a few terms that may seem provocative or even inflammatory and need explanation. "Pagan" as a term generally refers to earth-based traditions from Europe and the Middle East that predate Christianity. The end of the 20th century saw a great revival of interest in spirituality rooted in nature and embracing sexuality and liberatory values.

The feminist spirituality movement is especially concerned with the empowerment of women and the undermining of patriarchal values in religion as well as in other walks of life. It includes women and men who identify as Pagans, but also many who work for gender equality within mainstream religions.

"Witch," as I use the term, refers to a woman or man who honors the cycles of birth, growth, death, and regeneration as the Goddess, who makes a deep personal commitment to serve that force, and who often takes on a role of responsibility in their spiritual community, as healer, ritual maker, teacher, priestess.

"Anarchist" means someone who contests all forms of hierarchy, coercion, and control rooted in domination. Some anarchists reject the state entirely, others make some accommodation with it. Anarchism envisions a world of greater freedom, where people are governed not through fear and force but through direct democracy and voluntary agreements.

Identifying as a Pagan, feminist, Witch, and anarchist is possibly a way to alarm great segments of the general public, but at least it keeps me from sinking into a boring and respectable middle age.

From our vision of the web at the women's potluck, we dreamed up an action in which we asked women all over the world to send us weavings, which we then placed on the fence erected to keep protesters away from the Summit, transforming it into a gallery of art. It is my hope that this book will continue weaving connections that can be useful both to those who are involved in the global justice and peace movements and to those who are seeking some way to comprehend and have an impact on the political and economic forces that surround us. "Another world is possible!" is the slogan created at the World Social Forum in Brazil in 2001. Another world is also necessary, for this one is unjust, unsustainable, and unsafe. It's up to us to envision, fight for, and create that world, a world of freedom, real justice, balance, and shared abundance, a world woven in a new design.

ALPHABET SOUP: THE INSTITUTIONS OF GLOBALIZATION

FOLLOWING, OR CONTESTING, the progress of global corporate capitalism can be like wading through a thick soup of acronyms and code words. Here's a short explanation of a few of the most important ones:

NAFTA: The North American Free Trade Agreement, linking the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. The U.S. has lost over three quarters of a million manufacturing jobs since its passage in 1994, Canada more than a quarter of a million. Its impact on the indigenous communities of Mexico has been devastating as it allows the U.S. to dump cheap products on the market that undercut the traditional agriculture of rural communities. Displaced farm workers migrate to the border, which became militarized even before 9-11. *Maquiladoras*, the factories that crowd the border, are exempted from environmental and labor regulations. NAFTA, under its Chapter 11, also allows corporations to sue governments for loss of projected profits if governments pass labor or environmental laws. Under NAFTA, a Canadian corporation has sued the State of California for banning an additive in gasoline that pollutes groundwater. A U.S. corporation has sued Canada for banning another gasoline additive that causes cancer and birth defects.

FTAA: The Free Trade Area of the Americas would extend NAFTA throughout the hemisphere, excluding only Cuba. Containing all the provisions that make NAFTA problematic, it would also remove countries' rights to control foreign investment.

G8: The G8 are the eight most powerful, industrialized nations: the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Japan, and Russia. At their summits, they create policies and set agendas that affect everything from the WTO to the U.N.

WTO: The World Trade Organization (It has nothing to do with the World Trade Towers that were destroyed in New York. They were not its headquarters, nor did the WTO have any offices there. Nor does the WTO have anything to do with the United Nations.) The World Trade Organization is an international body set up in 1995 under the Uruguay Round of GATT — the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Under its auspices, member countries can sue other countries for “restricting trade” if they pass laws and regulations that impose environmental or labor standards. Disputes are settled by a tribunal presided over by three judges who come from the world of business and finance and who are not elected, named, or accountable to the public. Proceedings are secret, and their judgments can override laws passed by citizens of the countries involved. For example, the WTO has disallowed laws that would have protected endangered sea turtles from being killed in shrimping nets and laws that would have banned products made with child labor.

World Bank/IMF: The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are sister institutions. Set up after World War II, originally to loan money for Europe’s reconstruction, the World Bank found its loans weren’t necessary because the Marshall Plan provided interest-free money. It turned to the Third World, where it has become notorious for making loans for huge, environmentally destructive projects that primarily benefit large transnational corporations. The Narmada Dam project in India, which would displace hundreds of thousands of traditional farming families, is a current example.

The International Monetary Fund is primarily known for its imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on Third World countries. By the eighties, the less developed countries were finding that World Bank loans had not, in fact, stimulated their economies and that they were unable to pay the interest on their large international loans. The IMF stepped in, offering to loan more money to service the debts on outstanding loans, but imposing policies on the countries in question that required them to orient their economies to earning foreign exchange rather than providing for the needs of their people. They were to open their resources to foreign investment and to cut programs in education, health care, or social welfare. The U.N.

estimates that six million children a year die because of policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank.

World Economic Forum: A yearly gathering of economic and political power holders. In its educational forums and informal socializing much of the agenda of corporate globalization is set.



This section includes my writings from the last two years of activism and organizing. Most of the articles were originally written for the Internet or for small publications; they tend to be short, urgent expressions of whatever I felt the movement most needed to know at the time. I have left them relatively unedited to serve as a record both of my development and of the movement's progress.

SEATTLE



In November of 1999, the WTO met in Seattle for its high level Ministerial to attempt to launch a new Millennial Round of trade negotiations. Upwards of sixty thousand people gathered to stop the meeting in the first of the large summit demonstrations. I helped do trainings for the action and took part in the blockade on November 30, which succeeded in shutting down the conference for the first day of meetings. Demonstrators were met with an unprecedented level of police violence: tear gas, beatings, pepper spray, and rubber bullets. A small number of demonstrators, organized into a black bloc, broke the windows of targeted global corporations, setting off a great deal of controversy within the movement about violence, nonviolence, and tactics. (The “black bloc” is not an organization, but a tactic adopted in street protests where groups of demonstrators wear black and cover their faces for protection against surveillance and to demonstrate solidarity. The black bloc sometimes, but not always, engages in principled destruction of corporate property.) The Mayor of Seattle declared downtown Seattle a no-protest zone. On November 31, thousands challenged what we saw as an unconstitutional abridgment of our freedom of speech, and went downtown to protest. I was arrested and spent five days in jail.

Seattle was a once-in-a-lifetime, world-changing event. It energized a whole new movement, radicalized thousands of new activists, and opened a whole new chapter in the history of resistance to corporate globalization.



How We Really Shut down the WTO

IT'S BEEN TWO WEEKS NOW SINCE the morning when I awoke before dawn to join the blockade that shut down the opening meeting of the WTO. Since getting out of jail, I've been reading the media coverage and trying to make sense out of the divergence between what I know happened and what has been reported.

For once in a political protest, when we chanted "The whole world is watching!" we were telling the truth. I've never seen so much media attention on a political action. However, most of what has been written is so inaccurate that I can't decide if the reporters in question should be charged with conspiracy or simply incompetence. The reports have pontificated endlessly about a few broken windows and mostly ignored the Direct Action Network (DAN), the group that successfully organized the nonviolent direct action that ultimately involved thousands of people. The true story of what made the action a success is not being told.

The police, in defending their brutal and stupid mishandling of the situation, have said they were "not prepared for the violence." In reality, they were unprepared for the nonviolence and the numbers and commitment of the nonviolent activists — even though the blockade was organized in open, public meetings and there was nothing secret about our strategy. My suspicion is that our model of organization and decision-making was so foreign to their picture of what constitutes leadership that they literally could not see what was going on in front of them.

When authoritarians think about leadership, the picture in their minds is of one person, usually a guy, or a small group standing up and telling other people what to do. Power is centralized and requires obedience.

In contrast, our model of power was decentralized, and leadership was invested in the group as a whole. People were empowered to make their own decisions, and the centralized structures were for co-ordination, not control. As a result, we had great flexibility and resilience,

and many people were inspired to acts of courage they could never have been ordered to do.

Here are some of the key aspects of our model of organizing:

TRAINING AND PREPARATION

In the weeks and days before the blockade, thousands of people were given nonviolence training — a three-hour course that combined the history and philosophy of nonviolence with real life practice through role-plays in staying calm in tense situations, using nonviolent tactics, responding to brutality, and making decisions together. Thousand also went through a second-level training in jail preparation, solidarity strategies, and tactics and legal aspects. As well, there were trainings in first aid, blockade tactics, street theater, meeting facilitation, and other skills. While many more thousands of people took part in the blockade who had not attended any of these trainings, a nucleus of groups existed who were prepared to face police brutality and who could provide a core of resistance and strength. And in jail, I saw many situations that played out just like the role-plays. Activists were able to protect members of their group from being singled out or removed by using tactics introduced in the trainings. The solidarity tactics we had prepared became a real block to the functioning of the system.

COMMON AGREEMENTS

Each participant in the action was asked to agree to the nonviolence guidelines: to refrain from violence (physical or verbal), not to carry weapons, not to bring or use illegal drugs or alcohol, and not to destroy property. We were asked to agree only for the purpose of the 11/30 action — not to sign on to any of these as a life philosophy. The group acknowledged that there is much diversity of opinion around some of these guidelines.

AFFINITY GROUPS, CLUSTERS, AND SPOKESCOUNCILS

The participants in the action were organized into small groups called “affinity groups.” Each group was empowered to make its own decisions around how it would participate in the blockade. There were

groups doing street theater, others preparing to lock themselves to structures, groups with banners and giant puppets, others simply prepared to link arms and to nonviolently block delegates. Within each group, there were generally some people prepared to risk arrest and others who would be their support people in jail, as well as a first aid person.

Affinity groups were organized into clusters. The area around the Convention Center was broken down into thirteen sections, and affinity groups and clusters committed to hold particular sections. As well, some groups were “flying squads” — free to move to wherever they were most needed. All of this was co-ordinated at spokescouncil meetings, where affinity groups each sent a representative who was empowered to speak for the group.

In practice, this form of organization meant that groups could move and react with great flexibility during the blockade. If a call went out for more people at a certain location, an affinity group could assess the numbers holding the line where they were and choose whether or not to move. When faced with tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and horses, groups and individuals could assess their own ability to withstand the brutality. As a result, blockade lines held in the face of incredible police violence. When one group of people was finally swept away by gas and clubs, another would move in to take their place. Yet there was also room for those of us in the middle-aged, bad lungs/bad backs affinity group to hold lines in areas that were relatively peaceful, to interact and dialogue with the delegates we turned back, and to support the labor march that brought tens of thousands through the area at midday. No centralized leader could have co-ordinated the scene in the midst of the chaos, and none was needed — the organic, autonomous organization we had proved far more powerful and effective. No authoritarian figure could have compelled people to hold a blockade line while being tear gassed — but empowered people free to make their own decisions did choose to do that.

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

The affinity groups, clusters, spokescouncils, and working groups involved with DAN made decisions by consensus — a process that allows every voice to be heard and that stresses respect for minority opinions. Consensus was part of the nonviolence and jail trainings, and

we made a small attempt to also offer some special training in meeting facilitation. We did not interpret consensus to mean unanimity. The only mandatory agreement was to act within the nonviolent guidelines. Beyond that, the DAN organizers set a tone that valued autonomy and freedom over conformity and stressed co-ordination rather than pressure to conform. So, for example, our jail solidarity strategy involved staying in jail where we could use the pressure of our numbers to protect individuals from being singled out for heavier charges or more brutal treatment. But no one was pressured to stay in jail or made to feel guilty for bailing out before the others. We recognized that each person has his or her own needs and life situation, and that what was important was to have taken action at whatever level we each could. Had we pressured people to stay in jail, many would have resisted and felt resentful and misused. Because we didn't, because people felt empowered, not manipulated, the vast majority decided for themselves to remain in, and many people pushed themselves far beyond the boundaries of what they had expected to do.

VISION AND SPIRIT

The action included art, dance, celebration, song, ritual, and magic. It was more than a protest; it was an uprising of a vision of true abundance, a celebration of life and creativity and connection that remained joyful in the face of brutality and brought alive the creative forces that can truly counter those of injustice and control. Many people brought the strength of their personal spiritual practice to the action. I saw Buddhists turn away angry delegates with loving kindness. We Witches led rituals before the action and in jail and called on the elements of nature to sustain us. In jail, I was given Reiki when sick and we celebrated Hanukah with no candles, but only the blessings and the story of the struggle for religious freedom. We found the spirit to sing in our cells, to dance a spiral dance in the holding cell, to laugh at the hundred petty humiliations the jail inflicts, to comfort each other and listen to each other in tense moments, to use our time together to continue teaching and organizing and envisioning the flourishing of this movement. For me, it was one of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life.

I'm writing this for two reasons. First, I want to give credit to the DAN organizers who did a brilliant and difficult job, who learned and applied the lessons of the last twenty years of nonviolent direct action, and who created a powerful, successful, and life-changing action in the face of enormous odds, an action that has changed the global political landscape and radicalized a new generation. And secondly, because the true story of how this action was organized provides a powerful model that activists can learn from. Seattle was only a beginning. We have before us the task of building a global movement to overthrow corporate control and to create a new economy based on fairness and justice, on a sound ecology and a healthy environment, one that protects human rights and serves freedom. We have many campaigns ahead of us, and we deserve to learn the true lessons of our successes.



What's Wrong with the WTO

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE RECENT protests in Seattle, when tear gas filled the streets and many of us filled the jails, California State Senator Tom Hayden was quoted as saying, “A week ago, nobody knew what the WTO was. Now — they still don’t know what it is, but they know it’s bad.”

Aside from its association with tear gas, police brutality, and incarceration, what is so bad about the WTO?

The World Trade Organization was set up by the Uruguay round of GATT — the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the international body that is negotiating so-called “free trade” agreements worldwide. The WTO, in a sense, is the executive and judicial arm of GATT: it judges a country’s compliance with the rules, enforces the rules by way of trade sanctions and monetary judgments, and expands the rules.

All of this sounds somewhat innocuous and boring. Personally, when I hear the word “tariff” I go back to half-forgotten history lessons about the War of 1812 and start to snooze. But what it means is something much more sinister. In effect, the WTO has become an agency of global corporate rule with the power to override our laws.

Huh? How? It seems inconceivable. Where does a trade organization get that kind of power? It stems from a clause in the agreement signed by our government that states: “Each member shall ensure the conformity of its laws, regulations, and administrative procedures with its obligations as provided in the annexed agreement.” By joining the WTO and signing GATT, our legislators agreed for us, without a public vote or a debate, that we would make our laws conform to the rulings of the WTO tribunals.

Those rulings are made by an unelected group of bureaucrats who meet in closed-door proceedings in Geneva and who are not accountable to any citizens’ organization. Their procedures are required to be secret, and their documents are confidential. Unlike at a U.S. Court proceeding, there are no public records of the arguments or evidence

submitted. No citizens and no media can observe the proceedings, and there is no appeal or outside review process. Nor is there any mechanism for labor, environmental, health, or human rights considerations to have a voice in the proceedings.

All this would be frightening enough if the issues under consideration were simply arcane financial matters. But WTO rulings affect major labor, human rights, and environmental considerations. The WTO has prevented the U.S. from banning gas that contains unsafe additives and from stopping the import of shrimp caught with nets that kill endangered sea turtles. It has prevented the European Union from banning hormones in beef and stopped African governments from procuring less expensive AIDS drugs to supply to their people. Under its “intellectual property” protections, corporations can patent life forms, including seeds, plants, and even human cell lines. Corporations can prevent farmers from saving or trading seeds and can charge a “royalty” on resources that traditional cultures have used for thousands of years.

These are just some of the abuses that inspired me to go to Seattle. I don’t have room or time in this forum to outline all the wrongs, but I suggest you check out the websites and books (those old-fashioned things) in the endnotes and the bibliography.¹

Of course, if you go to the WTO website, they will tell you that all of these problems are just misunderstandings and misinformation. Their opening preamble is full of nice phrases about sustainable development and protecting and preserving the environment. One of their websites attempts to counter what they call “Ten Misunderstandings” that are actually the “Ten Reasons to Hate the WTO” taken from the Global Exchange Website.

But if you read their excuses carefully and with some background knowledge, it becomes clear that they are deliberately putting out disinformation. I only have room here for one example. The WTO tries to counter the charge that it is anti-environmental by stating: “A recent ruling on a dispute brought to the WTO (an appeals report in a case about shrimp imports and the protection of sea turtles) has reinforced these principles. WTO members can, should, and do take measures to protect endangered species and to protect the environment in other ways, the report says.”

The statement doesn't make clear that the WTO essentially banned the protections that our legislators deemed to be the most effective, indeed the only way we as a nation could have an impact on this issue. In theory, we can, should, and do protect the environment — but in reality, whenever we try to actually do it, the WTO rules against the protections and for the interests of profit-making corporations.

But the WTO is only one aspect of a larger issue. Free trade is part of the process of globalization, which has freed corporations to move money and production facilities around the globe, relocating to places where labor is cheap and environmental and safety restrictions are minimal. The current economic and political dogma is that this will somehow make everybody richer and better off. The reality, however, is quite different. Globalization has meant a tremendous concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich. Lori Wallach, in her testimony opposing the WTO, cites a prominent economist at the pro-WTO, pro-free trade Institute for International Economics, who determined that 39% of the increase in income inequality in U.S. from 1973 to 1993 can be attributed to trade. And she states that according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), most of the gains in national income during the current U.S. recovery have been captured by profits, not wages.²

We all understand intuitively how this works. A textile factory in Tennessee that has sustained a community for decades closes because it can pay workers in Thailand 25 cents an hour instead of paying workers in this country even minimum wage. Perhaps in the next town over, a family-run factory with a strong commitment to the community and the well-being of its workers refuses to leave. Their products must compete in the marketplace with the cheaper goods produced abroad. Most likely, they will go bankrupt or be taken over by corporate raiders who will liquidize their assets, downsize them, or simply close them down.

We've all seen this happen again and again over the last decades. No matter how much our politicians and economists try to convince us that this process is somehow better for us all, the reality of inequality stares us in the face every time we walk out on the street and are accosted by the homeless. Already by the mid-nineties, the top 1% of U.S. households received as much combined annual income as the

bottom 40%. 358 billionaires in the world owned as much as the world's poorest two and a half billion people. One man, Bill Gates, has an annual income equal to that of the entire nation of Pakistan.³

As someone who believes the earth is a living being and all of us are part of her life, I say this is wrong. Something is wrong with a system in which ten-year-olds in India work sixty-hour weeks making carpets and corporate executives make millions. It's not justifiable under any theory of economic growth or comparative advantage, it's just wrong. And if we truly believe that the Goddess is every human being on the planet (and a lot of other things besides), then we owe the billions of Her who are hungry and hopeless and see no future some help, fast. We owe the sea turtles and the dolphins and the redwoods a shift in our values. We need to educate ourselves on these issues, to read David Korten's *When Corporations Rule the World* or Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith's *The Case Against the Global Economy* as well as our e-mail. We need to think about what we buy, to consider the karma that comes with a pair of Nikes or a purchase from Wal-Mart. And we need to be willing to speak for our values and take action.

We have the power and the responsibility to be part of the reshaping of our world to reflect our values of life, love, diversity, justice, and true abundance for all.