

Acting for Justice

This section offers a selection of possible actions readers may take. No one can do all of them. It is best to select one (or maybe two) issues that really touch our hearts, and then stick to them over the long haul through study and contact with legislators, administrative officials, or corporations. Individual actions joined in solidarity with others and can make a big difference.

WTO

- ◇ Read the *Memorandum on the Need to Improve Internal Transparency and Participation in the WTO*, www.tebtebba.org/tebtebba_files/finance/memo.html. Tebtebba is the Indigenous Peoples International Center for Policy Research and Education.
- ◇ Check regularly on the website www.twinside.org.sg for excellent analysis from developing countries' perspective. Note the contrasts with the U.S. Trade Representative website www.ustr.gov especially www.ustrade-wto.gov/trzoellick0914.html. A note to the Rep. Robert Zoellick might help the cause.
- ◇ Occasionally contact your congresspersons to let them know of your concern. By calling regularly, you establish a relationship with their offices and let them know that you are informed and really serious about the issue...and that you vote.

WATER. Global is Local and Local is Global

- ◇ Privatization in the US is occurring at the municipal level. You might check out what is happening in your local community, look up information on any company that has already been hired, and keep in contact with the department in charge.
- ◇ To be up-dated regularly on US and global happenings in water privatization, visit the website www.waterobservatory.org of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and subscribe to its free ListServe right-to-water.

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"Believing that the earth is home to all, CREA facilitates analysis of human, social and economic policies from the perspective of their effects on human lives, beginning with the lives of those who are poor."

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Starting Points

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World Trade Organization Cancún Meeting: A Turning Point

Poor and developing countries stood together in a new show of strength at the fifth Ministerial Conference of the WTO held in Cancún, Mexico September 10-14, 2003.

Mindful of their impoverished farmers, who constitute the majority of their populations, they repeatedly called for the reduction and elimination of wealthy countries' agricultural subsidies. The subsidies allow wealthy agribusinesses to undercut the prices of farmers in poor countries. The pleas have so far been met with empty promises and even with increased US subsidies.

At Cancún, the industrialized countries gave the appearance of being ready to take some steps with regard to subsidies — if the developing countries first agreed to authorize negotiations in the areas of investment, government procurement, competition and trade facilitation, thus extending WTO's reach.

The developing countries insisted that no explicit consensus existed to begin these negotiations. Such extensions would further strain their limited resources. Faced with this stalemate and to the surprise of many, the Conference Chairman abruptly ended the meeting. The subsidies remain. The extensions are not authorized. Talks will continue at the WTO General Council.

It is important to note that continuance of the agricultural subsidies enables the US government to avoid a show-down with subsidized agribusinesses prior to the US elections.

Third World analysts point out that the fundamental problem of the WTO has been the domination in rule-setting by the wealthy industrialized countries, whose trade representatives pursue the interests of the major businesses within their countries. Control has been exercised through exclusion and lack of openness.

At Cancún this power was challenged by the solidarity of developing countries. While the meeting produced no apparent winner, it is clear that the present structure and processes of the WTO cannot continue to function solely for the benefit of the



In the present global economic system, what chance do small-scale farmers and vendors have against subsidized agribusiness? photo © CREA Inc.

Developing countries are finding strength in new solidarity. Brazil is working toward a South American trade agreement. The African Union is developing.

The wealthy countries may focus on bilateral and regional agreements rather than the WTO to get their way. This is the US stance.

Why should we care? Because trade agreements affect our lives, our children's lives and our environment long into the future. Our educational, professional, health, labor, and environmental standards are vulnerable to challenge as "non-tariff barriers to trade."

It is crucial that we be informed, vigilant, and active. As ordinary citizens we have more in common with citizens in developing countries than we think. See *Acting for Justice*.

IRAQ WAR ECONOMIC REPERCUSSIONS INCREASINGLY CLEAR

US citizens now struggle to absorb the impact of the huge cost of occupying Iraq. Long-term consequences include reductions in public services such as health and education and another drastic increase in the US public debt.

At the same time, US military personnel risk their lives trying to maintain order in a country whose language and culture they do not know.

Iraqi citizens face increased economic problems. In addition to the devastation caused by wars, sanctions, and looting, they face serious long-term consequences from a recent decision of the coalition occupying power.

Approved by the unelected Iraqi Governing Council, the decision opens all sectors of Iraq's economy to foreign investors (except oil.)

Powerful corporations now have unimpeded access to Iraq's economy and can take their profits out of the country. Those in power in Iraq can also enrich themselves.

While oil is exempt now, unofficial negotiations and positioning by transnational oil companies are already happening.

It is not difficult to guess who the losers and the winners of are, in Iraq and in the US.

It is crucial for us to make use of our own democratic processes to rectify this tragic situation.

WATER AND SANITATION ISSUES: MANY LEVELS AND STARTING POINTS

The looming world water crisis with its attendant effects on all forms of life has spurred efforts to address it ...and to make money from it.

The starting point for many is the sustainability of the Earth and its inhabitants. Individuals and families make efforts to conserve, while local, national and international governments and organizations try to develop effective methods of integrated water resources management.

For some others, the crisis offers an unprecedented opportunity to make huge profits and to gain control over a crucial resource. For them, water is a commodity to be bought and sold on a privatized basis on a "free market" protected by world or regional trade agreements.

The transnational water corporations, and increasingly the international finance corporations, see the free market as the most practical response to the water crisis, with full cost recovery for water services and infrastructure maintenance as a kind of tough love that would lead to conservation. Their rationale does not include the fact that those able to pay would be able to use as much as they wish, while those unable to pay would be cut off. This has happened with tragic results for poor families in some countries who have been denied access to water.

Each approach is reflected in published reports that provide supporting studies and interpretations of statistics. The task of decision-makers at every level is to be open-minded enough to pursue ways that will be beneficial for the remediation and conservation of water resources, the provision of water services equitably and fairly to all, with the resources remaining under the control of the local civic community.



Local efforts to bring water into communities continue world-wide. This project is in El Salvador.

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Some helpful references:

<http://thomas.loc.gov>.

H.R. 135 The "Twenty-First Century Water Commission Act of 2003" creates a commission to develop a comprehensive US water strategy. Favorably reported out of committee.

H.R. 1560 *The Water Quality Financing Act of 2003*. Federal financing for up-dating water infrastructure requires review of cost-savings through "public-private partnerships." Approved by House committee.

H.R. 2557 *Water Resources Development Act of 2003*. Includes cost-sharing provision for "non-Federal interests." Approved by the full House and referred to the Senate.

www.blueplanetproject.net The short book *Blue Gold*, by Maude Barlow and Tony Clark can be printed from this web-site. It provides insights into the operations of the major transnational water corporations.

PROCTER & GAMBLE TO OFFER LINE OF FAIR TRADE COFFEE

Following months of negotiations led by CREA and Domini Social Investments as the primary shareholder resolution filers, a group of faith based shareholders and investments managers withdrew their resolution when Procter & Gamble announced that they would offer a Fair Trade Coffee product as of September 15th, 2003. The work of the shareholders along with the Fair Trade Coffee campaign of Oxfam America, Co-op America, and the Interfaith Fair Trade Initiative clearly demonstrates the beneficial effects of collaborative work among organizations to bring about positive change.

P&G's Millstone line is now offering Mountain Moonlight Fair Trade Certified™ coffee to wholesale accounts (universities, restaurants, etc.) and to consumers through its website www.millstone.com. In the fall of 2004, Millstone will begin retailing at least one Fair Trade Certified™ coffee product in supermarkets nationwide. Within two years, P&G will increase the volume of Fair Trade Certified™ coffee purchased by Millstone to 5% of the brand's volume. P&G is responsible for 45% of global coffee purchasing.

CREA encourages readers to support both P&G's efforts *and* the ground-breaking efforts of organizations like Equal Exchange, which sells only Fair Trade products. Our choices as consumers will show companies that consumers are willing to pay an honest price so that poor farmers receive just payment for their products.

CREA will continue to make available for purchase Equal Exchange Fair Trade Coffee, Tea and Cocoa personal use as well as holiday gifts.

See the enclosed flyer for details.

Right: Fair Trade Coffee from the El Pinal coffee cooperative merited entrance into the "Cup of Excellence" international coffee competition. Photo © 2003 CREA Inc. El Salvador



CARTAGENA BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL ENTERS INTO EFFECT

The Biosafety Protocol created through the UN Environmental Program entered into effect on September 11, 2003. According to the website, (www.biodiv.org/biosafety/ratification.asp) the protocol:

- ◇ *Seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology*
- ◇ *Establishes an advanced informed agreement (AIA) procedure for ensuring that countries are provided with the information necessary to make informed decisions before agreeing to the impact of such organisms into their territory.*
- ◇ *Reaffirms the precaution language of Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.*
(*"When there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."*)

Nations that ratify the protocol agree to be bound by its provisions and to comply with its obligations. The US, which has not ratified the protocol, has registered a complaint with the WTO against the European Union over its ban on genetically modified foods.

THE UNITED NATIONS AT A CRUCIAL POINT

Created out of the ashes and heartache of World War II, the UN has been the focus of the hopes, vision and efforts of poor and prosperous nations.

It has been the world's voice for universal human rights, justice and peace.

Its humanitarian and peace-keeping operations, educational, social and economic programs have assisted millions.

However, the UN is now facing serious challenges to its role, structure and functioning:

- ◇ The power of transnational corporations whose financial worth is equal to or greater than many nations
- ◇ The rise of the WTO
- ◇ The US as the sole major military power
- ◇ The UN's dependence on funding from the very nations that are challenging it.
- ◇ The increased occurrence of retaliation by organized groups of people who have suffered from the economic and military policies of the major world powers

The task for all world citizens is to distinguish constructive from destructive proposals for change and to support them.