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What is the WTO?

adapted by joeri from
<http://www.stelling.nl>

The EU summit in Bruges will bring together the Foreign Trade Ministers to prepare the WTO summit in Qatar (November 2001). What exactly is WTO? Why were there protests in Seattle? Why will people protest in Qatar?

WTO is an abbreviation for the World Trade Organisation that was founded in 1995 and has its headquarters in Geneva. WTO is the safe-keeper of the new world-trade treaties. Those treaties brought along a huge step forward for the liberalisation of world trade, because they were the consequence of 40 years of negotiations about the removal of import taxes and other trade regulations (that were known as GATT – General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs). Freedom of Trade was now more important than any human or ecological value.

WTO strives for the removal of all existing state monopolies that depend on governmental decisions (e.g. Telecom, National Rail, ...) and a full liberalisation of investment.

WTO's power is visible in the decisions made by the Dispute Settlement Panels that are created when affiliated states have trade conflicts. Those decisions are binding and involve fines of billions of dollars. A famous example is the dispute around the European banana policy. Furthermore, the commissioners

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What's wrong with the EU?

Adapted from D14 (<http://d14.be>)

Needs and demands

The people are entitled to decent incomes, but the low wages were lowered to meet the Maastricht norms, and the big capital used globalisation to pay lower taxes.

The people have the right to decide about their own destiny. Internet could make this possible, but the European institutions lack transparency and accessibility, unless for the large industrial lobbyists...

The people need rights – equal rights for all – but nationalism is increasingly present in our society, Fort-Europe is expanding and illegal immigrants are used to press down the low wages. Highly qualified people are still welcome, ...

The population is entitled to privacy, but Europe is further expanding her repression tools: personal details are being exchanged, a database containing the names of protesters has been set up, poor areas are put under constant control, ...

The people are entitled to a healthier life; people eat more biological food. But little is done for the environment; food production is still largely industrial; healthcare is in hands of powerful pharma-



logical groups...

The population is entitled to culture, but culture seems reserved to an elite. Media is owned by a few mega-concerns. How can people participate when the means are not available?

Aggression and resistance

Resistance against Europe is growing. Yesterday, the people from Clabecq (a Belgian steel factory that was closed a few years ago) were fighting for their jobs. They were defending the rights of the unions that Europe is now trying to break down. Today they are depicted as criminals in a "show" process. At Danone, Renault and Electrabel the situation is now the same. Sabena and Cockerill-Sambre employees stand up restructuring and fusion, because they always bring along redundancy. In state companies like the Belgian Post, British Rail, ... people are fighting privatisation and deregulation.

In Nice, 100,000 people were protesting against the European politics and the so-called "social charter". We want to express our solidarity with all those movements by going on with their fight.

Myths and reality

EU is conflicting with the people's wishes: the people do not want underpaid jobs and growing poverty and exclusion rates. But the European Industrialists Round Table, a powerful lobby group, is pushing the European construction. They want Europe to become

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Wanted: Violence for the Media

By Han & joeri (edit)

"Could you give us contacts for Black Block, or other groups planning to use violence during the protests in Ghent, Liège or Brussels?" This is a kind of question Indymedia is constantly asked, and we seem not to be the only ones to be addressed this kind of request... The anti-globalisation movement has received lots of media attention since the events in Göteborg; and we sometimes even get to explain our ideas into some more detail.

The Monday after Göteborg, a reporter from De Standaard (Belgian newspaper) who was visiting us had to admit that he had been asked to write about violence. The man obviously did not feel too comfortable having to do that, so he ended up writing an article about the movement. At the end of June a number of activists from Forum voor Vredesactie, Indymedia and Euromarsen were invited in the television program "De Zevende Dag" (VRT); they were introduced as "political hooligans": a peace activist, a media activist and a young unemployed... Hooligans, yeah right!

What seems obvious to us now is that the media have a problem. On the one hand images of burning cars, fighting people, etc., illustrate all articles about anti-globalisation... And governments and police force keep telling that they are prepared for the worst. But on the other hand, they don't seem able to find activists that call for violence.

Militant Links, that sent a delegation to Göteborg, was asked by the news program "Ter Zake" (VRT) to appear masked in front of the cameras. But the activists refused, because they never wear masks during

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sitting in those panels are often people who are deeply involved in the free trade.

Even though theoretically each member state has a vote, the reality shows that 3 large power blocks dominate WTO decision-making: US/Canada, Europe and Japan. Many of the poor countries do not have enough money to attend the meetings, making it even more easy for the 3 power blocks to take initiatives and prepare the resolutions behind closed doors, making deals to safeguard their own interests. The large summits then are the scene where a consensus is reached, often backed with the necessary pressure. This is how resolutions are made, and why countries that still have doubt and reservations end up standing on their own.

It is hard to figure out what happens behind the scenes, not only for the official representatives at the summits, but also for the MPs, NGOs, etc. The European Commission represents the EU countries in the discussions preceding the summits and is delegated a lot of power without having to justify the decisions that are made. On the other hand, the experts who are preparing resolutions have lots of contacts with trade representatives. This explains why it is mainly the multinationals that benefit from the WTO resolutions.

Since WTO was founded the inequalities between countries have grown, and we have witnessed a multiplication of conflicts about environmental matters, labour regulations, human rights, malnutrition, etc. Further negotiations about even more liberalisation were planned in 1999, but they had to be cancelled due to the massive

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like the USA – sacrificing social welfare in favour of profitability – to be more competitive against the American and Japanese holdings. Myths are created to make Europe acceptable:

The European countries are too small to compete with the bigger nations – but there are 30 million poor people in the US, number 1 in the world (economy), and the lowest wages keep getting lower.

The creation of a European space will bring peace – but the market economy is crushing down the local economies. NATO and the future European Army do not stimulate peace...

Democracy saw the light in Europe we have the best social system in the world – but fascism and colonialism appeared in Europe...

In favour of a different Europe

The citizens themselves know best what rights and demands they have; not the industrialists! We have to build a different and more lawful, social and democratic Europe – a Europe stands up for the world wide social struggle.

Let's globalise our struggle!

What is the WTO ?

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protests against the WTO conference in Seattle and because of resistance in many developing countries that caused the conference to be cancelled.

Between 9 and 13 November 2001 a new WTO Minister conference is planned in Doha (in Qatar, a small, remote, Arabic state, governed by a repressive monarch). It appears rather symbolic that WTO chooses to hold its summit in a country where people who think differently are not welcome. We will go for a global action day against WTO on Friday, the 9th of November.

Wanted: violence f/t media

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protests. The reported then told them he would contact them later, but that never occurred.

Another TV crew, from VTM, followed a group of teenagers, amongst which a number of MLB members, in Antwerp. They were asked on a number of occasions to talk about violence, and tried to make clear to the reporter that they never approve of violence and would even less call for violence. The reporter's answer was: "You'd better discuss this matter internally, because according to us, you all fall into that violent profile"

If you witnessed this type of media abuse and disinformation techniques, or if your words in an interview were twisted, or if an interview was published under a misleading title, notify Indymedia: we are trying to gather as many witness stories as we can.

Protests Agenda

***14-16 September:** EU Summit on Transportation and Environment – Leuven. // Protests against privatising of public transportation, too soft ecological measures, etc. are organised on Friday, September 14 at 19.30 on Ladeuzeplein. The 15th of September a "Reclaim the Top"-action will be organised in the afternoon (further details will be posted on the Indymedia site).

***21-23 September:** EU Summit Ecofin – Liège. // Union protest on September 21 at 10.00. Attac organises a contra-summit at the University of Liège (starts at 9.00; inscription required before start of congress) with workshops on taxation, the social dimension of Europe and the public services, trade and the North-South relations + several other activities and actions.

***19 October:** Informal EU Summit in Ghent // Several actions are planned for that day: a student strike and protest, building a dike against military Europe, a city walk against globalisation, etc. During the evening there will be a "manifest" (protest-party).

***13-15 December:** actions against the formal summit in Laken.

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What is Indymedia ?

The Independent Media Center (IMC) is a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage of events and issues around the world. The IMC started in the fall of 1999, during the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, and has since grown into a global network of fifty regional centers. Anyone can post text, photos, audio and video to most IMC websites. "Every Reader is a Reporter." Visit our web site at www.indymedia.be to learn more about participating.

This document contains only a small fraction of the content that appeared on IMC sites during the last week. The articles here were gathered and edited by the IMC Print Team, which does not claim to represent the IMC Belgium network as a whole. For questions and comments, or to join, visit us at www.indymedia.be, or write to imc-belgium-print@lists.indymedia.org.

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