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Another World IS

Global cooperation instead of corporate globalization. That's the message of a growing worldwide movement. We highlight eight of this movement's leading thinkers (with some profiles drawn from *Utne Reader's* new book *Visionaries*) and offer a field guide to key activist groups.

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he world is filled with fear. Thoughts of further terrorism and ever-widening warfare unsettle our nights and days. We worry about the fate of humanity at a time when hatred and mistrust burn so fiercely across the planet. We worry about financial security in an era when whole industries are turned upside down on a moment's

notice. We worry about health in a world that increasingly resembles a massive test lab measuring the dangers of countless new chemicals turned loose in the environment every year. We worry about the future of society in an age when giant corporations are gaining control over nearly every aspect of modern life, from the lessons taught in our schools to the candidates listed on our election ballots.

All this uneasiness has given rise to the anti-globalization movement, which gained the world's attention at protests in Seattle, Prague, Quebec City, and Genoa. Although television cameras focus on black-clad anarchists roaring through the streets, the movement encompasses millions of citizens on six continents—union members, students, peasants, environmentalists, tribal peoples, community activists, and veterans of peace marches and liberation struggles. The protests occurring in Europe and North America pale in comparison to those in India, Thai-



Possible

By Jay Walljasper

land, the Philippines, and Japan, where hundreds of thousands of people have filled the streets to show opposition to political and economic policies that undercut the livelihoods of poor people.

All the diverse constituents of this movement have come together in the belief that the growing poverty, increasing environmental destruction, mounting social breakdown, and continuing bloodshed seen around the planet today are not inevitable side effects of modern progress; they are the direct result of an international system that places most of the world's wealth and power in the hands of just a few corporations. To these activists, a new era of global peace and justice can be achieved by reinvigorating local communities and creating a new international system that promotes cooperation over competition.

Globalization, according to the movement, is a political ideology zealously promoted by transnational corporations and their followers in governments, the media, and universities, who have elevated self-serving theories about market economics, free trade, economic "efficiency," and consumerism to the level of a religion.

Anti-globalization activists—who might more accurately be called pro-democracy, pro-peace, pro-environment, and pro-local community advocates—are firm in their belief that there is another way for human society to proceed. This vision was loudly proclaimed in the slogan of a summit meeting of 10,000 anti-globalization activists earlier this year in Porto Alegre, Brazil: "Another World Is Possible."

No one in this emerging movement—absolutely no one—predicts that it will be simple to challenge the immense power of transnational corporations. Their clout far exceeds that of any government. Even the United States has been forced to weaken the Clean Air Act and protections on endangered species like dolphins under pressure from the corporate-dominated World Trade Organization (WTO). Jerry Mander, founder and president of the International Forum on Globalization (see our field guide to the movement in the following pages), predicts that pressure from the WTO will also force us to scale back pesticide protection laws and auto fuel efficiency standards.

Mander, one of the foremost analysts of globalization, outlines in *Tikkun* magazine (Sept./Oct. 2001) how corporations flex their muscles thanks to a series of little understood international trade deals. The World Trade Organization, created in 1995 as part of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) treaty, has the power to impose stiff economic penalties on nations that it believes are imposing unfair restrictions on the flow of international commerce. But in reality, the WTO is a friendly forum for corporations wanting to stifle national laws (usually health, environment, or labor standards) that dampen their profits. Guatemala, Mander notes, enacted a law preventing infant formula and baby food ads from making the medically dubious claim that their products were healthier than breast milk. The United States, on behalf of the giant Gerber Corporation, chal-

lenged this law at the WTO as a restraint of trade. Guatemala, fearing that WTO trade sanctions would devastate its economy, rescinded the law even before a verdict was handed down. Thus, the Gerber Corporation, working through intermediaries in the WTO, squashed a promising public health measure enacted by the Guatemalan people's democratically elected representatives. The same thing happened with a Canadian ban on MMT, a gasoline additive known to cause Parkinson's Disease-like symptoms.

Vandana Shiva, a physicist and environmental activist from India (one of eight key figures in the movement profiled on the following pages), points out, "Globalization isn't new; we in the Third World are very familiar with it. We used to call it colonization." What's new in the current debate is that traditional patterns of life and livelihood are now being disrupted in places like Indiana and Austria along with Indonesia and the Ivory Coast.

Pro-local activists are often dismissed as isolationists, not only by corporate defenders but even by many liberals who presume that globalization is the best way for everyone to experience the cultural richness of the world: Eastern wisdom, Italian food, African music, Latin American literature. But, in truth, the continuing march of globalization will leave us with a world stripped of diversity and wonder. Corporations working in 140 countries do not want to accommodate themselves to the customs and culture of each place. They want to impose standards so that doing business in the Congo will be much

like doing business in Canada. (And, of course, corporations would like to see wages, worker protections, and environmental regulations in the industrialized world closer to the level of poor nations.)

Ever more powerful corporations will dictate not only the terms of business across the planet, but also the flow of information, culture, and basic ideas about what constitutes the good life. We are witnessing the dawn of a global monoculture in which most people on earth will watch the same television shows, dwell in the same sort of houses, and gobble the same brands of breakfast cereal. This not only makes the world smaller, but also dull and soulless. Why bother to travel when Sri Lanka begins to look like suburban Atlanta?

Helena Norberg-Hodge, founder of the International Society for Ecology and Culture (see profile), who has charted the advance of Western culture over two decades in the once remote Ladakh region of India, notes that cultural uniformity is only the beginning. Traditional cultures come to believe that everything they know and create is inadequate compared to shiny new imports from the industrialized world. "Small kids living in the high plains of northern India now feel bad about themselves if their sneakers are not the most fashionable brand," she says.

David Morris, vice president of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (see profile), articulates a vision that embraces *global cooperation* rather than *globalization*: "Information should travel around the planet, but not goods or raw materials," he says. A breakthrough in solar power pioneered in Argentina, for instance, or a new beer-making technique perfected in Belgium should by all

The Ultimate Peace Movement

Almost everyone's response to this fall's terrorist attacks has been a sense that nothing in the world will ever be the same. And that's true of the emerging movement to promote global cooperation as an alternative to corporate globalization.

"We need to recast our movement as the ultimate peace movement," says Andrew Kimbrell, president of the International Center for Technology Assessment and one of the leaders in the International Forum on Globalization (IFG). "We need to reconnect with the mission of Gandhi and Martin

Luther King, looking at the deep underlying causes of violence and opposing it in all forms. How do you create peace? Certainly not through international commerce as it is currently practiced."

"The ethic of corporate globalization is essentially violent," he adds. "In practice, globalization in developing nations means massive cuts in social services, people being forced off the land, mega-projects that dislocate millions. This is violence to poor people, violence to the environment, violence to cherished traditions of how people have lived for centuries."

Mark Ritchie, president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and another IFG leader, notes the global economy, "is designed to create winners and losers. It is precisely this situation—the mega-rich and the totally desperate—that creates the conditions for war. We know this now—that peace and justice are inseparable."

—Jay Walljasper

For commentary on the war on terrorism, see the *View from Loring Park* on page 4 and *Letter from the Heartland* on page 13.

means be exported to the world, but not in the form of hardware or six-packs. We can all benefit by new ideas from abroad—and our local community and environment can also benefit when these ideas are implemented using local resources and workers.

This gets to the heart of the anti-globalization cause: protecting the vitality of local communities, which have provided humans, for all of our history, with food, shelter, companionship, security, and the simple satisfaction of a life that makes sense. This is not a fundamentalist movement, preaching isolationism and fear. Its internationalist outlook is obvious in the deep concern activists express about worldwide poverty, injustice, and environmental damage.

Despite the marvels of kiwi fruit on our breakfast table and fresh seafood in Chicago, the globalizing economy shows few signs of being able to improve life for the vast majority of people sharing our planet. Indeed, with its single-minded mission of expanding corporate profits no matter what, it poses an unparalleled threat to the local cultures and economies that sustain people's lives. A business shutdown, a pollution disaster, or the general decline of neighborliness in your town means very little to the captains of the global economy, but everything to you. That's the rock-bottom problem with globalization: The decisions that affect your life are made by people who live thousands of miles away and who ultimately don't care what happens in your community, or any community anywhere. To fulfill modern civilization's oft-repeated promise of creating a better world, we need to shift our energies from expanding the volume of global trade to boosting the vitality of local communities.

This is the other side of the anti-globalization movement. While demonstrations at international meetings have brought thousands of activists into the streets, millions more people are addressing similar concerns in their communities. They may not even think of themselves as part of any movement, but they are helping reverse the damage of globalization by restoring local landscapes, challenging economic injustice, patronizing small businesses, organizing community projects, planting neighborhood gardens, lending a hand to those in need, and doing hundreds of other things that strengthen the fabric of the place they call home. And in working to revitalize their own community, these citizens often feel a new sense of solidarity with people doing the same thing in communities around the world.

This is the real strength of the anti-globalization movement, the reason why it can dare to challenge corporate powerbrokers who are backed by billions of dollars, oodles of new technology, and pocketsful of politicians. By encouraging us to celebrate local pleasures, helping us to revitalize our hometowns, inspiring us to make a difference in the world, this movement may have hit upon a winning strategy. The 21st Century, no matter how it looks right now, could turn out to be the Age of Global Cooperation, not Corporate Globalization.

Jay Walljasper is editor of Utne Reader.

**The movement
embraces a vision
of local revitalization
around the world—
restoring landscapes,
reviving small
businesses, rejoicing
in regional foods, and
reinvigorating the
sense of community.**



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