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From: helen jagoe [SMTP:hjagoe@lisp.com.au]
Sent: Wednesday, September 13, 2000 8:13 PM
To: jsct@aph.gov.au
Subject: inquiry into WTO

The Bathurst Justice Group wishes to make the following submission to the inquiry into the nature and scope of Australia's relationship with the WTO.

1. As it stands at present, the WTO is not a democratic institution and yet its policies impact on all aspects of society and the planet. Citizen input by consumer, environmental, human rights and labor organizations is consistently ignored, and difficult to get tabled. Even the proceedings are held in secret.
2. The WTO's dispute panels, which rule on whether domestic laws are "barriers to trade" and should therefore be abolished, consist of trade bureaucrats. For example, every environmental or public health law challenged at the WTO has been ruled illegal. Recall Tasmania's struggle to maintain and defend its fishing industry.
3. The WTO has refused to address the impact of free trade on labor rights, despite the fact that countries that actively enforce labor rights are disadvantaged by countries that consistently violate international labor conventions. This indirectly supports the use of child labor, as well as products coming from dictatorships such as Burma.
4. The WTO is being used by corporations to dismantle hard-won environmental protections, under the guise of barriers to trade. The WTO was recently negotiating an agreement that would eliminate tariffs on wood products, which would increase the demand for timber and escalate deforestation.
5. The WTO's fierce defense of intellectual property rights, patents, copyrights and trademarks comes at the expense of health and human rights. In Seattle transnational chemical giants tried to table legislation to make compulsory doctor's prescriptions for vitamins and other health care products now available over the counter.
6. There was no public debate in Australia regarding its entry into the WTO in 1994, nor the consequences of such membership. The public is still left ignorant of ways in which WTO laws override national laws.
7. The WTO's "most favoured nation" provisions requires all WTO member countries to treat each other equally and to treat all corporations from these countries equally regardless of their policies and practices. This puts developing countries at a distinct disadvantage, and favours first world corporations.

8. WTO's policy of free trade is not helping the majority of the world's people, according to the UN Development Program report which shows that the richest 20 per cent of the world's population consume 86 per cent of the world's resources while the poorest 80 per cent consume just 14 per cent. WTO rules have encouraged this trend by opening up countries to foreign investment and thereby making it easier for production to go where labor is cheapest and environmental costs low.

9. The WTO undermines national sovereignty. It has essentially replaced national governments with an unelected, unaccountable corporate-backed government. Under the WTO our Government can no longer act in the public interest.

In summary, the WTO system as it operates at present has rules and procedures which are undemocratic, untransparent and non-accountable, and have operated to marginalise the majority of the world's people.

Why would Australia wish to be a member of such a body?

Helen Jagoe
for the Bathurst Justice Group
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