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From: Gerd Herrmann [SMTP:gherrmann@uq.net.au]
Sent: Thursday, August 24, 2000 7:39 AM
To: jsct@aph.gov.au
Subject: WTO submission

Hi there,

here are my thoughts on Australia involvement in the WTO :-

- * the WTO is not a democratically elected body and has extraordinary powers of trade sanctions and fines to enforce its rulings
- * the WTO is secretive as its proceedings are not open to the public
- * the charter of the WTO basically promotes free trade i.e. promotes corporate interests
- * People elect Governments (not always unfortunately)
- * Governments make laws on behalf of, and hopefully for the benefit of the people.
- * the WTO can overturn democratic laws of a sovereign state if the WTO deems that these laws limit trade "unfairly".
- * corporations do not elect governments but often exert undue influence on governments, and their biggest coup is the WTO that has replaced the failed MAI.

Supposedly the WTO now has some guidelines concerning the environment, labour relations, ethics, and human rights. I doubt that these guidelines really mean very much in practice.

For example on environmental grounds: Why should Australia have to allow live salmon be imported from Canada if there is a risk of introducing exotic diseases into Australia? Why should Europe accept American beef from hormone treated cattle? Why should the USA import high level sulphur oil from Venezuela when the States are trying to reduce vehicle emissions? Why should we have to open up our public hospitals and education system to American style free market forces where the cost of medical care is sky high and out of reach of many people who simply don't have the money. Health and education is a right for all. Do we have to lower wage standards to try and compete against third world countries where many corporations and their contractors pay very low wages? I can't see the WTO addressing any of these issues adequately, most governments are finding it difficult to struggle with these issues. The WTO would have to take on a very strong social justice and environmental stance to do these issues justice. Would the WTO openly favour renewable energy in contrast to fossil fuels in its decisions? Would it adhere to ILO guidelines on workers rights and conditions?

If the WTO could fulfil its obligations to all people and the environment, be accountable, transparent and open, and democratically constituted then,

maybe, the WTO could be allowed to continue. Considering its powers and the clients it serves the WTO ought to be abolished or at least have its powers considerably curtailed. Trade will continue regardless of the existence of the WTO and there are no doubt many other mechanisms of controlling trading relations.

Furthermore, last year I attended a meeting asking for public input into Australia's role in the WTO in Brisbane. This was organized by some bureaucrats from the Department of trade and pushed the line of important trade was to Australia. Many people at the meeting felt insulted and were very angry about the way the meeting was conducted in particular that the public input from the meeting was not being recorded properly. That incident sums up the WTO, MAI etc in a nutshell.

Fair trade - not free trade
and introduce the Tobin tax
it is fairer to all

Cheers...
Gerd