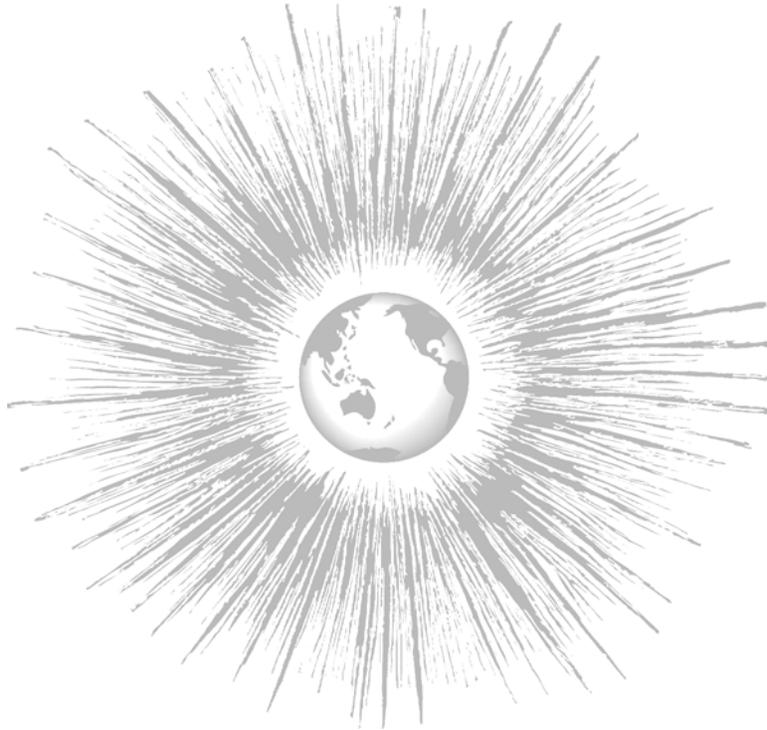


# SOLIDARITY IN A GLOBAL AGE—SEATTLE AND BEYOND

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## INTRODUCTION: WHOSE WTO IS IT ANYWAY?

'In human social systems, the most complex systems in the universe, therefore the hardest to analyse, the struggle for the good society is a continuing one. Furthermore, it is precisely in periods of transition from one historical system to another one (whose nature we cannot know in advance) that human struggle takes on the most meaning. Or to put it another way, it is only in such times of transition that what we call free will outweighs equilibria. Thus, fundamental change is possible, albeit never certain and this fact makes moral claims on our responsibility to act rationally, in good faith, and with strength to seek a better historical system.'

—Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Uncertainty and Creativity' (1998:3)

There are good grounds for taking seriously Wallerstein's dictum that the world system has entered what he describes as an interregnum. By this he means two important things: First, that the world is moving between two forms of world system, from a capitalist world system to something new; Second, that in such an interregnum questions of structure become less significant than those of agency. The world system is one that has been produced, reproduced and will ultimately be transformed by human actors. The direction that it takes will be the result of the political struggles that ensue in the interregnum. In this paper I examine some of these claims in the context of a series of events that have taken place over the past decade and in the run up to the protests that occurred in December 1999 at the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle. In so doing I hope to put some empirical flesh on the bones of the idea that Wallerstein has suggestively offered us. While I am critical of important aspects of Wallerstein's work and that of his cohorts at the Fernand Braudel Center I would equally argue that they have presented us with the most powerful and coherent framework for making sense of, I hesitate to use the term given Waller-

stein's ontological assumptions, international relations. Thus, this paper is informed by sympathy with Wallerstein's ideas and an acknowledgement that they offer us a rich source of insight into the emergence of the modern world order.<sup>1</sup>

The aims of any critical social science are four-fold:

- first and foremost to aspire to provide us with an accurate description of the events at hand.
- second, to provide us with a plausible explanation for the events.
- third, to offer us a counter-factual analysis where appropriate, setting out what alternatives might be possible given existing conditions.
- finally, to offer a normative analysis of the events and to defend a normative position in a reasoned manner.

An explanation of events is a causal analysis and interpretation that must focus upon a range of factors. In this sense events are the product of the (often complex) relationship between different social structures, causal mechanisms and actors in the world order. These can take the form of the relations between systemic features such as capitalism and the inter-state system as well as such complex interacting causal mechanisms and agents as political parties, financial speculators, scientists, the structure of ideas and so on.<sup>2</sup> This should not, however, be mistaken for a chronic indeterminism.

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<sup>1</sup> At the risk of being accused of conceptual slippage by more sophisticated theorists I am quite happy to use the terms world system and world order to signify the same thing, a totality of global social relations structured through the organising principles of the inter-state system and of global capitalism.

<sup>2</sup> It seems that whenever I begin to write something for an international relations journal I am condemned to repeat a familiar list of mantra's about causality and systems that should really be common sense by now. However, as they are not I will discuss them later in the article. For those of an empiricist bent (not the worst sin that one can commit) it is the Humean model of causality that has dominated the international relations literature, as set out most famously by Waltz's work in neo-realism. The barrenness and inapplicability of such a mechanistic and idealised conception of causality for not only the social sciences but much of the natural sciences is something that is largely ignored in the literature. Even, err, enlightened writers within international relations such as Steve Smith still cannot get away from the idea that an interest in causality means that you are somehow a 'positivist', or Satanist, whichever is worse. Again, I shall clarify what I mean

The current world order is patterned in a number of important ways which suggest that some causal factors outweigh others: global poverty; the continuing 'interventionism' of the imperialist powers under U.S. hegemony; the erosion of the rights and interests of working people. These are all, in important senses, outcomes of the interaction of the system, structures, agents and causal mechanisms of world order. They are certainly not simply contingent or chance occurrences. In a world awash with resources, wealth and technology, global poverty is certainly not the product of bad luck. In order to make sense of these problems there remains no alternative, as Ernest Gellner somewhat ruefully noted, to a rational analysis of these issues (Gellner: 1992). We need to understand the causes of these problems in order to change them.

The paper will proceed as follows. In the remainder of this introductory section I will discuss a little of what Wallerstein, Arrighi and others mean by the idea of anti-systemic movements and why, despite their limitations thus far, they remain the only potentially viable source of a new form of global solidarity that might seek to challenge the existing world order on progressive lines.<sup>3</sup> I will elaborate on and defend this claim in more depth shortly.

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by causality when I turn to the section on systemic analysis. For an example of these debates in international relations see David Dessler (1999).

<sup>3</sup> Clearly, I am tying my colours to the mast here when I say that anti-systemic movements are potentially part of a progressive agenda in global politics. I am not sure that Wallerstein would use such a loaded term as 'progressive', he is suspiciously soft on postmodernism of late for my liking. Given that a critical social science has to render explicit its normative assumptions then these are mine. While the descriptive/empirical part of a critical social science is a question of facts, inherently fallible, liable to empirical challenge and open to revision, the positive/normative aspect of critical social science is a concern with the plausibility and coherence of arguments that are explicitly evaluative. The relationship between the two is not entirely divorced, as empiricism would have us believe. All social theory is underpinned, for example, by a conception of human nature. Nor is the gap between facts about human nature and the values that we should adhere to simply open to the logical leaps beloved of Western analytic philosophers such as Anthony Quinton (1973). As a consequence this means that most such philosophers have nothing of practical utility to say about such matters. For those of us living in the real world we are faced with this conundrum on a daily basis and we have to find ways of making those leaps between what we think the world is like (facts of the matter) and how we think it both could be (counter-factual hypotheses) and how it should be

I will then turn to the question of systemic analysis that encourages us to think in terms of world order as a totality of global social relations. Now, this really is an unpopular idea in contemporary social theory. I can understand the reasons for this, and many of the criticisms made by postmodernists of what they call Grand Narratives are worthy of consideration.<sup>4</sup> However, there is simply no alternative for anti-systemic movements other than to have a coherent account of the totalising structure of world order: both global capitalism and the inter-state system are totalising forces! They cannot be wished away by their critics and so they must be understood if they are to be transformed. This does not mean that we should mistake our analysis for some kind of infallible truth about how the world is, which I think is what such critics of totality are trying to get at. On the contrary, our knowledge about systems is always partial, liable to correction and so on. I will comment more on this subsequently. Following this I will place the events at Seattle in historical context. I interpret the interregnum that Wallerstein talks of as arising with the end of the bi-polar aspect of the Cold War and the move towards a system of so-called 'global governance', organised under U. S. hegemony and the international institutional structure that

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(normative hypotheses). These leaps may rest on intuition, accounts of human nature, communitarianism, and so on. This is a vast area of debate in the relatively arid environs of academic philosophy, most of which is *practically* useless (*pace* Nietzsche, 1973) and only ever comes to life when it is transformed into something meaningful by those writers actually concerned with the world as it is and its problems. I am thinking here of people like Richard Falk, Wallerstein, Amartya Sen, and so on.

<sup>4</sup> Sokal and Jean Bricmont (1998). Interestingly, Wallerstein has argued that Sokal and Bricmont's response was a poor one because they should have been prepared to debate and discuss with the various postmodern writers who had sought to appropriate physics, maths and the like in their work. Wallerstein says, '*To take a simple example, would it not really have been more useful for someone like Alan Sokal to enter into co-operative discussion with those who have been asking real questions about the structures of knowledge, instead of deflating foolish excesses, and thereby making the discussion of the underlying issues more, rather than less, difficult?*', in his '*Liberalism and Democracy*', (1998: 101). Again, I think that Wallerstein has gotten things the wrong way around here, it is the writers that Sokal and Bricmont have criticised who have sought to needlessly (and pretentiously) render analysis of the social world obscure. Given the completely inappropriate and incoherent use of the natural sciences by these writers one has to wonder exactly what kind of discussion would be possible or fruitful. As ever, social theory can either clarify or obscure the nature of social relations, that, among others, is the point that Sokal and Bricmont make.

conforms to the political-economic interests of, broadly speaking, the G7 core capitalist states and their corporations. The events at Seattle need to be situated in both a long-term and short-term historical context that reflects this movement from Cold War bi-polarity to global governance. I will follow this by drawing out the key aspects of continuity and change in world order in this period of transition from Cold War to global governance. In conclusion I will comment briefly on the normative implications of these developments and how they have called into question a number of the key concepts that have grounded Western political theory since the Enlightenment. Just to clarify this point, my intention here is to examine these tendencies as part of a possible continuation of Enlightenment thought which sought to provide reasoned grounds for political practices and institutions. Concepts such as solidarity, citizenship, political identity and obligation remain central to any anti-systemic challenge to the existing world order. I want to turn now to brief synopsis of Seattle and the events surrounding it to explain why it is of significance to developments in world order.

### Background

'It is hard to know which was worse—watching the militants dress parade their ignorance through the streets of Seattle, or listening to their lame-brained governments respond to the 'arguments'. No, take that back, the second was worse. Let them explain that trade is first and foremost a matter of freedom—that if a government forbids its citizens to buy goods from another country it has infringed their liberty. (Why were there no 'anarchists' among all those anarchists by the way?). Let them explain that trade makes people better off, especially the poorest people in the poorest countries. Let them explain that trade improves the environment, because it raises incomes. And the richer people are, the more willing people are to devote resources to clean up their living space. Let them explain that the WTO is not a global government, but merely a place where governments make agreements, and then subject themselves to arbitration in the event of a dispute.'

—*The Economist* editorial, 'Clueless in Seattle', 6-12-99

According to the myth, the 'ultra-secretive' WTO has become a sort of super-governmental body that forces nations to bow to the wishes of MNCs. It destroys local cultures,..., it rides roughshod over democracy, forcing governments to remove laws that conflict with its sinister purposes...The raw fact is that every successful example of economic development this past century—every case of a poor nation that worked its way up to a more or less decent, or at least dramatically better standard of living—has taken place via globalisation; that is

by producing for the world market rather than trying for self-sufficiency.'

–Paul Krugman, 'Enemies of the WTO', *Slate*, 23-11-99

'Second, remember universal brotherhood? You know—concern for the world's poor and downtrodden? As Paul Krugman recently noted in *Slate*, free trade gives millions of people a step up the ladder. Yes, that may mean working in a sweatshop. But these people manifestly prefer that to their prior condition.'

–Robin Wright, 'We're all one-worlder's now', *Slate*, 23-12-99

To understand the importance of the events at Seattle it is instructive to turn one's attention to the world's business press.<sup>5</sup> The above quotes are not unrepresentative of the kind of response that the protests at Seattle elicited, spanning the spectrum from hysteria (Wright, who I will turn to at the end of this piece) to righteous indignation (just about everyone else!). Krugman's somewhat misleading claim that the only successful developing states have been trading states working in accord with free market principles is but one snapshot of the way in which intelligent people can deny history with barely a shrug of the shoulders. Needless to say he does not mention which states are the examples of 'successful' development, and for good reasons. There aren't any. Outside of city-states (i. e. not real states) such as Hong Kong and Singapore, there are no examples that appear to offer much by way of empirical support to neo-liberal theory. I appreciate that with the kind of idealisations beloved of econometrics that empirical reality has a nasty habit of getting in the way of parsimonious theory and abstract hypotheses but there you are, the world does have a way of forcing us to face up to facts (Lawson, 1997; Fleetwood, 1999). It is conceivable that Krugman means trading states like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea (I am trying to be generous here) but a cursory glance at the historical record shows that they are nothing like models of free market principles. On the contrary, they

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<sup>5</sup> The Business press tends to be staffed by what we might reasonably call, trying to keep in the spirit of Wallerstein, ideological system managers, those who have to propose ways to either make the system work (only in theory, of course!) or explain why it has temporarily broken down. The underlying theme is either an optimistic one (normal service will be resumed as soon as possible), which is always bad news for those on the receiving end; or apocalyptic (the end of capitalism is the end of civilisation, when in fact if we are lucky it might just be the beginning).

represent state-led and directed models of development! (Amsden, 1989; Harris, 1986). The question remains then, as to why the business press responded with such vehemence to the Seattle protests? After all, isn't it just another little protest of a kind we have seen on countless occasions before? Perhaps, and yet as I will argue there may well be more to Seattle as part of a wider series of anti-systemic protests than might initially be suspected.

In order to understand this and as I will subsequently show, Seattle is part of a longer series of protests and the development of anti-systemic movements since their emergence in the late 1960s, largely in response to what Wallerstein describes as the failures of older statist political ideologies: conservatism, liberalism and socialism. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) as the successor institution to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) is both a symbolic and practical manifestation of the way in which power has shifted in the era of global governance, or the 'New World Order' as it is often described. As the world's foremost institution concerned with the rules and regulations of international trade the WTO is the crucial site of global trade policy formation and decision-making in the new millennium. Established in 1995, the WTO is an effective international organisation, unusually so. Its procedures for settling trade disputes are binding on all parties and it is in the process of dealing with over 100 cases. The disciplinary mechanisms that the WTO possesses to use against those members guilty of breaking its rules are geared towards protecting the interests of the most powerful members, the group of Japan, the EU, Canada and the USA. In truth it is the USA that benefits most from these rules and this has been illustrated in some of its trade disputes with the EU in the past few years. The rules of the WTO enable the injured party to retaliate against the guilty member by imposing punitive sanctions of their own, even in an area of trade unrelated to the specific case brought before the WTO. Thus, the USA can retaliate against the EU's banana agreement with the ACP countries by imposing tariffs on Scottish cashmere! Such a system is fine if you are a powerful member of the WTO, with plenty of potential weapons at your disposal. It is less helpful if your economy is less diverse.

In theory, then, the WTO is an institution which as Clare Short, the UK minister for Trade and Overseas Development noted, '*provides the first forum for trade negotiations where developing countries are in a majority. This gives them a chance to negotiate fairer trading arrangements. Those who want to tear down*

the WTO diminish that chance.' (Short, 1999). In practice, it is an institution that is unsurprisingly dominated by the USA, the EU, Japan and Canada. It is not that Clare Short's comment is wilfully misleading. Alright, perhaps it is a little, but what is most significant is that it fails to recognise the way in which social power is exercised in these institutions. This is itself a familiar failure of the kind of pluralist view of power that links the analysis of both Paul Krugman and Clare Short. In practice, trade negotiation, like global capitalism itself, is akin to a form of warfare (Kanth, 1999: 194). The consensus that emerges is a product of the exercise of various forms of power by the dominant parties. As Vandana Shiva has written, '*trade ministers from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean were responding politically when they refused to join hands to provide support to a 'contrived' consensus since they had been excluded from the negotiations being undertaken in the 'green room' process behind closed doors*' (Shiva, 2000). This does not mean that the WTO is a 'secret government', as Krugman seems to think that its critics are saying. (Some might be, he doesn't name anyone, so it is hard to tell). On the contrary, what it does reveal is something familiar to any undergraduate student of politics, that international negotiations tend to favour the powerful states and their representatives who have the most resources and greatest levers to bring to bear on potential opponents. The 'Green Door' facility of the WTO exists so that 'key' actors can meet to resolve trade disputes, sometimes as few as two or three states' representatives. Krugman and other commentators have to face up to the reality of politics in the current world order and have some account of the fact that political processes are invariably struggles about power and ideas between groups opposed on diverse social faultlines: class, gender, ethnicity, and so on. In the power-free world of neo-liberal ideology such issues are expunged from analysis where they only serve to muddy the picture of how best to reach a technical agreement on making sure that capitalism works as smoothly as a well-oiled machine.<sup>6</sup> The fact that anti-systemic groups do not share this vision of the good society, that they don't

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<sup>6</sup> To be fair to Paul Krugman he is a Keynesian although the extent to which this means he is outside of the framework of neo-liberalism is problematic. If he simply means that trade per se is a route to economic growth/development, then that is perfectly reasonable, so long as we remember that trade is never free and is about the power of states and corporations to construct and run the system in their interests. For an

necessarily think that global capitalism and the inter-state system are simply machines that need to be modified, is a form of analysis so far removed from the reified reality of the 'Washington Consensus' that it is safer for the latter to ignore rather than respond to such arguments. The reason that I am making these points is to illustrate that the disagreement between anti-systemic movements and the institutions that serve to structure world order takes place on four levels: descriptive, explanatory, counter-factual, and normative

The WTO is a crucial institution because it is both symbolically and practically representative of the ways in which global capitalism and the inter-state system have become intertwined. Thus, it is seen as perfectly 'normal' that private corporate interests should quite literally be able to buy

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account of Krugman's work as a 'gadfly' challenging the common-sense complacency of mainstream economic theory see Edward S. Herman (2000). As for Clare Short, she is part of a social-democratic government that have consistently espoused a commitment to key aspects of neo-liberal ideology for some time. Robin Ramsey (1998). I think that this argument is a little too deterministic (heh! heh!) and that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that important sections of the Labour government hierarchy actually believe in these ideas, which is probably an even worse admission. Just to show what an impartial social scientist I am I have to disagree with Wallerstein (1995; 'Social science and contemporary society', 1998) here and his claims that liberalism has had its day and that neo-liberalism has little conceptual clarity. Neo-liberalism is a series of ideas that has its roots in liberal thought but which deviates in crucial and important ways. See Kenneth Hoover and Raymond Plant (1985). Ian Gilmour (1992). Given the limits of space, neo-liberalism can be condensed (hard-boiled) to a few simple premises and policies: a mix of policies of privatisation, liberalisation, deregulation and protectionism that work to serve the interests of powerful states and companies wherever possible, although there is always the potential for contradictions and conflicts of interest here, which is where the anti-systemic movements have some leverage. The embedding of the principle of public subsidy for private profit is a central premise of the normal workings of actually existing capitalism. Actually existing capitalists do not want free trade, of course, what they want is a war that they can win. The core capitalist states support their major corporate actors in myriad ways and through various policy devices. Finally, neo-liberalism is quite simply class war on a global scale, an attempt by the dominant economic and political classes, though often for quite different reasons, to try to defend the interests of core state corporations against the demands of labour. So Wallerstein is wrong, liberalism is not on the way out just yet and nor is neo-liberalism a meaningless concept!

seats at the negotiating table with trade ministers and the like, presumably on the assumption that whatever is in the interest of these private companies is somehow akin to the public interest. How we have arrived at such a situation is another story that has been developed by a number of important writers such as Stephen Gill (1991) and Kees Van Der Pijl (1998). There is a welter of information on the WTO and how it works in theory and in practice and I would refer interested readers to the following sources (Khor, 1999).<sup>7</sup> In closing the introductory section we need to consider the question of who these so-called anti-systemic movements really are.

Wallerstein, Arrighi and Hopkins first coined the term anti-systemic movements in their eponymous work of 1989, an apposite moment to be writing about challenges to world order. Historically anti-systemic move-

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the nature of negotiating principles such as the 'necessary' use of the 'Green room' to secure consensus at the WTO see its unintentionally hilariously titled web-site article, 'Whose WTO is it anyway?', <http://www.wto.org/wto/about/organsm1.htm>. Some interesting facts that give some sense of the balance of power at the WTO:

- i. The USA has over 250 negotiators at the WTO in Geneva. 30 of the remaining 134 members of the WTO cant afford to base anyone at the WTO in Geneva, let alone afford the costs of expensive trade lawyers to help set out and defend their position on global trade.
- ii. The USA has filed 30% of all disputes with the WTO, winning 90% of them. 3/4 of the membership have filed 1/5 of the complaints.
- iii. Decision-making at the WTO is dominated by the quad countries: The USA, the European Union, Japan and Canada, all of whose trade representatives work closely with their respective corporate representatives.
- iv. Corporate sponsorship of the Seattle summit gained access to various ministers and meetings for private companies, with a sliding scale in accord with the size of your donations.

For more details see the World Development Movement, ( 1999); Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissmann (26-10-99) who note that corporations paid \$9-10 million (US) of the costs of funding the Seattle summit.

This does not mean that racism and sexism, for example, are simply created under the twin structures of the modern world order (global capitalism and the inter-state system). Merely that the modern world order has been built in part through the perpetuation and deepening of these forms of oppression.

Wallerstein has recently written that we should abandon the 'quest for universals'. See 'The heritage of sociology, the promise of social science', Wallerstein, (1998). On new ideas about solidarity see NACLA (March/April 1994/95).

ments are located in the world wide revolutionary movements of the late 1960s (1968 to be over precise) and the issues that they brought to the forefront of political concern. For Wallerstein, et al, these movements represent more than the arrival of new concerns onto the political agenda. More deeply, the issues of sexism and racism have been crucial ideological tools in the perpetuation of the world order, dividing potential opposition forces against each other: men/women, black/white, when in fact all have an interest in transforming existing global social relations.<sup>8</sup> Anti-systemic movements have sought to construct new forms of social and political organisation that would challenge both the existing order and previous forms of political organisation that were inherently statist and had proven unable to deal with the problems of what is a world system (to use Wallerstein's term). Thus, according to Wallerstein, social democracy and Bolshevism alike were flawed anti-systemic forces that could offer us no route to the good society, based as they were around either national consciousness (social democrats) or privileged consciousness (we know best! Bolshevism) (Arrighi, Hopkins, Wallerstein, 'Dilemmas of Anti-systemic movements', 1989). However fragmented and problematic for Wallerstein and his colleagues, an alternative world order remains dependent upon the outcomes of anti-systemic movements. These groups have clearly developed apace since the 1960s, in Europe through the peace movements and anti-nuclear protests, as well as through a variety of what are now called New Social Movements. Tentatively, these groups have sought to link up with others around the world and the development of these links can be seen in a number of events in the 1980s and 1990s that I will turn to later. In general terms I am in agreement with the claim of Wallerstein and World Systems analysis that anti-systemic movements represent challenges to the existing world order. However, they also raise a number of ethical and political problems that cannot easily be brushed aside and these issues too will need to be addressed later. Encouragingly, events at Seattle actually gave many practical examples of the ways in which protesters sought to overcome their varied differences.

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I am tempted to say eureka! here in the face of those who have argued that solidarity breaks down upon the unbridgeable boundaries of culture, civilisation, or some such thing. What Seattle tentatively suggests is that contrary to the claims of those who would decry Enlightenment ideas of universality and solidarity, in practise it is possible for people to communicate shared and differing concerns, perhaps even to discuss ways in which organisation might occur around them,<sup>9</sup> as in this quote from one of the topless Santa Cruz Lesbian Avengers at the Seattle protests: 'When we got here, the steelworkers weren't very queer-friendly. As the week wore on, they got more comfortable with us. My nipples stand in solidarity with the steelworkers and the Teamsters and all the labouring peoples (Henwood, 3-12-99). Interestingly, Wallerstein himself is more than a little sniffy about the Enlightenment (eurocentrism) and its legacy, something that he shares with postmodernists, poststructuralists and the like. I think that the reasons for these views are flawed and that it is entirely wrong to junk the Enlightenment and its commitment to progress, concepts of the good society and the like. Without them anti-systemic movements are depriving themselves of the intellectual and conceptual tools needed to understand the systemic properties of world order and are also denying themselves a rich and varied series of normative writings about the good society. The libertarian potential of the Enlightenment is a rich stream and one which anti-systemic movements have often illustrated a practical if not theoretical commitment to. This will suffice for the moment by way of introducing anti-systemic movements. What they share in common is a desire to challenge fundamental oppressive properties of the existing world order. What is needed now is clarification of what is meant by a systemic analysis of world order and what this means in practical terms. In so doing we can offer an explanation as to why the events at Seattle took place.

#### I. SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS AND WORLD ORDER

'I distrust all systematisers—they lack integrity!'  
—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

One of the legacies of the revolutions of 1968 has been the rise of what

<sup>9</sup> Wallerstein has recently written that we should abandon the 'quest for universals'. See 'The heritage of sociology, the promise of social science', Wallerstein, (1998). On new ideas about solidarity see *NACLA* (March/April 1994/95).

is often described as postmodernism or poststructuralism. Although those writers often associated with these approaches to social theory often deny that there is a coherent post-modern/structuralist approach, it is reasonable to note that one thing that such writers do share in common is a hostility to what are described as either 'Grand Narratives' or 'totalising theory' (Lawson and Appignanesi, 1989; Eagleton, 2-3-2000; Herman, 1-96). By this is meant hostility to social theories that provide us with a 'theory of everything'. Such hostility is based upon the track record of Marxism, Liberalism, Science, or any other of a number of theories that have helped to shape the rise of the modern world. More generally, such critical approaches hold varying levels of hostility to the Enlightenment and its aspiration to establish universal grounds for understanding both the natural and the social world which are based on reasoned analysis (Henwood, 1-96).<sup>10</sup> In practical terms the acceptance of such a critique presents major problems for those seeking to defend a systemic analysis of world order. The idea that social relations can be viewed in systemic terms is associated with the idea of a science of society and the kind of social engineering that postmodernists and the like are so hostile to.<sup>11</sup>

The problem with these developments in social theory and the impact that they are having on both international relations as a discipline and the practical problems that they present to anti-systemic movements is that in some sense systemic analysis is *unavoidable* for those wishing to gain an understanding of world order. If we accept that both capitalism and the inter-state system are the dominant forces that have shaped the modern world order then we have to study them as they manifest themselves, that is, as systems. Capitalism and the inter-state system are 'totalising' forces that have been central to the construction of the modern world order and any analysis that does not attempt to understand these systems will be lacking in explanatory power. So what does this mean in practical terms? Capitalism

<sup>10</sup> See Terry Eagleton on what he calls 'bad universalism' and 'bad particularism', 'Op. Cit.'

<sup>11</sup> The biggest problem for such critiques of totalising theory is that they tend in practice to move between a false dichotomy of either methodological individualism or a form of structuralism which reduces the subject to the effect of regimes of truth, language games, discourses, and the like.

and the inter-state system are just that, historical systems, with a beginning and subsequent development and presumably, at some point in time, as with all hitherto historical systems, an ending. As systems they possess organising principles and structures that have to be understood. It is the principles and practises that make capitalism the system that it is, the specific properties that distinguish it from other forms of social and economic organisation. Likewise for the inter-state system. Taken together they can be seen as the organising frameworks for the global social relations that compose world order. By social relations I mean the institutions and relations that serve to structure and pattern social life: from the family and the household through to the state and corporations. All of these institutions help to structure and organise the ways in which we live and the ideas that come to form the common sense understanding of how we should live. For example, the idea that markets are somehow a natural phenomena is a good illustration of the way in which common sense ideas form to underpin an existing set of social relations that connect peoples at a local, national, regional and global level. Thus, a systemic analysis is a qualitative analysis that attempts to understand the organising principles of particular historical systems, that is, the properties and practices that make them one thing rather than something else. Capitalism, for example, is not feudalism, precisely because it involves different forms of social and economic organisation, different rules, principles and practices. Without wishing to go into a lengthy treatise here on the history of capitalism, it is sufficient to note the following qualities that can be seen as being intrinsic to both capitalism and the inter-state system:

(a) *Capitalism*

A socio-economic system organised around the endless accumulation of capital/profit; the private ownership of the means of production; a global division of labour; and the establishment of social relations organised primarily but not exclusively around distinct classes (thus important divisions in a capitalist world order also includes those of gender and ethnicity).

(b) *The Inter-State System*

A system organised around state sovereignty; the state as the highest source of legally recognised political authority in a given territory and over a given population (the nation/s); the (nation)-state as the basis for politi-

cal identity; inter-state relations built around a hierarchy of power that we can realistically describe as imperialism; and the state as the legitimate user of force over a given territory. Taken together they provide the framework within which and against anti-systemic movements have developed.

While these are systems that can be described in an indeterminate number of ways, the same as any other aspect of empirical inquiry, it is also the case that not all descriptions are equally persuasive. The task is to establish the best description and explanation of what these systems are and how they work. An analysis of historical systems has to be able to move from abstract theorising about systemic properties to concrete analysis which illustrates the way in which these properties manifest themselves in practice. While there are, no doubt, endless stories to be told about capitalism and the inter-state-system, it would be a serious error to assume that all stories are equally plausible. They are not, simply, because they are checked by the objective quality of existing social relations. Facts about the social world do act as a check on the plausibility of theories. As I mentioned earlier, the persistence of global poverty in a world of material abundance is a fact that can be explained in terms of the relations between systemic properties, institutions and agents in concrete situations, or it could be explained as being an example of existential bad luck. Surely no one seeking to address such problems would want to deny the superiority of the former position?

Ultimately, then, these are historical systems with rules, regulations, institutions and mechanisms that attempt to impose some conception of both order and 'normality' upon the world. By order I am referring to the patterns of social, economic and political life. By normality I am referring to the values and beliefs that underpin such order.<sup>12</sup> To talk in terms of systems is to recognise, with Wallerstein, that we are talking about historical systems that have been produced, reproduced and transformed by people over time and space. This is a fluid and dynamic system that has evolved and which changes in response to the struggles between conflicting groups within it—e.g. From Keynesianism to Neo-Liberalism is an important shift in the post-war world order affecting political ideology, the functions and forma-

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<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that everyone shares those values, simply that the major structuring institutions in world order defend them.

tions of states, capital-labour relations, gender and race relations, and so on. As such these are real historical systems that have a partially enduring quality and stability over time. For example, the UK State has institutional and procedural qualities that date back over many decades and connect the past with the present. At the same time it also has properties and practices that are new and quite different from properties and practices of both decades ago and from more recent times. To illustrate, 100 years ago the UK State did not fund free higher education for those qualified to attend such institutions. Twenty years ago it did. Today it does not. It is still recognisable as the UK State but many of its specific practices have changed and continue to do so, often in a reactionary manner. There is both continuity and change in such social institutions. The point that I am making here is ultimately a simple one, historical systems such as capitalism and the inter-state system cannot simply be wished or described away any more than hunger, poverty or ill health can. Again, to illustrate, describing poverty as 'social exclusion' does little to alter the immediate material circumstances facing those on the receiving end of poverty. Those anti-systemic movements moved to organise the protests at Seattle have sought to address these systemic properties at both the macro and the micro level, which seems to be a wholly sensible and necessary manoeuvre given the nature of the systems they confront.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, there is always a danger of reifying systems, institutions and social relations as Marxists, feminists, postmodernist, critical theorists, and the like quite rightly observe. But in some respects it is almost impossible to avoid a degree of reification when analysing systems as it requires, in part, a commitment to some form of abstract analysis (Tilly, 'Cities and states in

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<sup>13</sup> One of the foremost advocates of what is often termed 'methodological individualism', the idea that all explanations of social phenomena can ultimately be explained by being reduced to the sum of individual actions, actually gives quite good grounds for a systemic analysis in a debate with the neuroscientist John Eccles. Karl Popper said, '... occur without any conspiracy's being responsible for them, and even when everyone involved does not want them to happen.' In Fons Elders (1974: 72). This is precisely the reason why anti-systemic movements need both a macro and micro level analysis - to focus on the systems that generate unwanted outcomes, overproduction and underconsumption in a capitalist world order, for example, as well as the specific institutions and agents who are responsible for particular decision, policies, problems, and so on. The macro-micro debate in social science is surely a dead issue if anything is. I would hope.

world history', 1997). The key is to attempt to locate these abstract systemic properties in their concrete manifestations, as events at Seattle illustrate so starkly. In dealing with historical systems we are dealing with systems that have evolved over time, been developed and changed by both human agency and the institutions that order social relations, and which ultimately transform the way we live.

For those anti-systemic movements concerned with the hierarchies of social power that shape world order the task is to attempt to understand the ways in which capitalism and the inter-state system have benefited from and helped to perpetuate the racist and sexist ideologies that have been instrumental to the rise of the modern world order. More fundamentally still, I would suggest, anti-systemic movements need to understand the ways in which class alliances among political, economic and military elites have evolved and transformed in the course of the C20. This has led to the current situation which sees an intra-class conflict among the world's elites, broadly separated into those with a more transnational outlook to global governance and those who root themselves more firmly in nationally based institutions. The latter groups can be viewed as being those interested in the politics of cultural nationalism and this can take many forms in response to changes in the global political economy. The success of the anti-systemic movements depends upon their ability to co-ordinate their activities at a number of levels: local, national, regional and global. Cultural nationalist groups can often be viewed as those political and cultural groups appealing to an idealised past of social harmony and certainty and are often hostile to the anti-systemic movements.<sup>14</sup> For example, the Women's movement and the Peace movement have both been vilified by reactionary institutions and social movements for being the progenitors of much of the ills of contemporary society (Franco, 1996: 6-9; Vargas, 1992). More broadly, for cultural nationalists the 1960s are often held up as a decade that pitched the world into a moral decline from which it has yet to recover. It is this issue that I want now to turn as I address the significance of the WTO protests at Seattle in an historical context. A failure to recognise the relationship between systemic properties and concrete outcomes can lead anti-systemic move-

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<sup>14</sup> In Britain the emergence in the past three years of 'The Countryside Alliance' reflects just this kind of cultural nationalist ideology.

ments to focus their critique upon the wrong targets. Thus, for example, since the Seattle protests the AFL-CIO has been arguing for the protection of 'American' jobs. At the same time in Europe there has been a recent upturn in hostility to some sections of the immigrant community. Neither protectionism nor anti-immigration racist legislation will do anything to alter the systems themselves and thus the deeper causes of the crises that have afflicted the global economy and the inter-state system will remain.

## II. SEATTLE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The question of historical understanding that I want to set out here draws upon ideas from both Braudel and subsequently Wallerstein on the nature of short-term and long-term historical change. In this respect there are two key events that are important in any understanding of Seattle and its significance. The first of these is the legacy of the revolutions of 1968; the second is the meaning of the end of the Cold War and the movement towards a system of 'global governance'. Braudel and Wallerstein present us with different understandings of social time, and I want to contrast here what can be called diachronic and synchronic understandings of historical change (Braudel, 1980, 1993; Smith, 1991). To be concerned with diachronic change is to focus upon long-term structural continuity and change and the evolution of particular historical systems while to focus upon the synchronic is to be concerned with the world of immediate events. A meaningful analysis of Seattle will attempt to situate it in both contexts: it is an immediate event but one tied to a series of developments in world order that can only be understood through a longer historical perspective. As with so many examples, the spontaneity of Seattle was a long time coming. I want to begin by turning to the diachronic context in which Seattle emerges.

### The Legacy of 1968

Understanding global social change in diachronic terms means an attempt to describe and trace the structures, practices, institutions and mechanisms of particular historical systems that, in turn, generate the social relations that persist over time and space. These connect local, national, regional and global social relations. There are two features of such an analysis that are of particular importance for an understanding of Seattle and its significance for global social change. The first of these is the legacy of

the 1968 revolutions that brought a range of previously underexamined or secondary forms of oppression to the forefront of politics. The second is the apparent 'end of the Cold War', or at least, certain aspects of the Cold War, and the movement in the 1990s towards what is described as an era of 'global governance.'

Dealing with the 1968 legacy first we can note that the anti-systemic movements that emerged in the wake of the 1968 revolutions brought direct challenges to the norms and institutions that have served to structure world order and sought to challenge the divisions that have shaped world order around both gender and race. These movements have developed over the subsequent decades, often in fragmented and diverse forms. As Wallerstein, Arrighi and Hopkins have noted, these movements have been central to the possibility of new forms of global solidarity in opposition to the workings of the current world order. In practice, their strengths have also been their weaknesses: in bringing previously excluded or marginal issues of oppression to the fore of political concerns they have widened the reach of oppositional movements and brought a dynamism to the anti-systemic movement. At the same time, the concentration on what are often single issues has narrowed the ambition and vision of many of these groups away from wider political concerns that focus upon questions of the good society. What Seattle has given glimpses of, as I shall turn to shortly, is the possibility of these groups being able to communicate and discuss issues that might potentially lead to a common agenda for social change. In short, for a new and meaningful form of solidarity around issues concerned with struggling for a better society. The impact of anti-systemic movements can only be evaluated over the whole period since they burst onto the scene. As the 1980s and 1990s have seen a political backlash against the 'decadence' of the 1960s by right-wing political coalitions so these anti-systemic movements have been forced to organise their activities in a range of extra-parliamentary forms. Seattle is part of a series of events that have been building up around the world as part of wider anti-systemic opposition to global capitalism and the current workings of the inter-state system: the 1980s Peace movements and dissident movements in Eastern Europe, South America, and elsewhere; opposition to the Uruguay Round of the GATT; opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); protests at successive UN conferences since UNCED in 1993; the Jubilee 2000 campaign; the July 4<sup>th</sup> anti capi-

talist protests of 1999; protests over the Multilateral Agreement on Investment; the World Bank 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign; the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary protests over the 'discovery of the America's'; all of these and others are part of a stream of events within which Seattle has to be situated. It is hard to imagine that the spontaneity of Seattle would have occurred without this lineage of previous activism. So how should we evaluate the 1968 legacy for anti-systemic movements? I think that it can be usefully summarised as follows:

The idea that no single group has a privileged access to the idea of how social change will occur and what it will lead to is one aspect of the 1968 legacy. At Seattle disparate groups who might initially be seen to have sharply contrasting agendas and norms managed over the course of a week to begin to draw out some common points of interest and cooperation (Henwood, 12-99).

Related to the first point is a rejection of what we might call political absolutism, the idea that any single political group can claim to speak with authority for and on behalf of society as a whole. In political terms such a thesis has been most commonly associated with Marxist political parties who claim to have the authority to speak on behalf of the working classes. In practice, as should be clear to all by now, such a position has tended historically to lead to perverse and terrible political outcomes.

The 1968 legacy brings to the fore an expanded notion of the meaning of oppression, drawing out the concerns and experiences of groups who historically have struggled to have their voices heard, most obviously women and non-white peoples. The challenges to patriarchy, sexism and racism have all been important and ongoing legacies of the 1968 revolutions.

An important issue that has arisen out of this period for anti-systemic movements is the need to promote social change through democratic means. Again, there are many historical examples of political movements who have been at the best suspicious of democracy as a bourgeois concept and which have sought to use a variety of tactical and organisational strategies to get around this. The well-known 'democratic centralism' of organised Marxist parties of various hues is a familiar example of this attempt to pay lip service to democracy and dissent. It seems inconceivable that global social change promoted through anti-systemic movements can be built on anything other than democratic principles if it is to be genuinely emancipatory.

However, the legacy of the 1968 revolutions is far from straightforward as many of its critics will note. It has also brought to the forefront of political organisation the following problems: a fractured opposition, a lack of humility, an overemphasis on the personal, and a tendency toward rejecting rationality.

The emergence of New Social Movements (NSM) as they are usually described has served to fracture anti-systemic forces that were once at least theoretically united in their criticism or opposition to much of the current inter-state system and global capitalism. One does not have to search too far to find fairly open hostility between many groups among the green, feminist, socialist, anarchist and anti-racist movements that have sprung up around the world. For the existing institutions and agents who benefit from the hierarchies of power under the current world order there is nothing more satisfying than a divided opposition, which in part is why Seattle is potentially of more than simply symbolic importance for anti-systemic movements. It provides a snapshot of the possibility of global solidarity and how it might be built by anti-systemic movements of apparently quite disparate interests.

Somewhat perversely the challenge to the authority of largely Marxist political parties to speak on behalf of the working class has also had its negative effects. So-called single-issue groups have developed their own forms of epistemological hierarchies that has seen new forms of political absolutism emerge. Within Greens, feminists, anti-racist and separatist movements, it is again not difficult to find examples of groups who claim epistemic privilege for their own interests.

The phrase 'the personal is the political' entered the political lexicon in the 1960s and it has brought many problems for those seeking to address the real nature of the systemic forces that structure world order and the appropriate level of political response required to challenge them. In practice the idea that the personal is the political can lead to an unhealthy form of political solipsism in which the political can be defined in terms of whatever it is that affects one's personal life. This kind of 'identity politics' is an inadequate basis for the kind of global solidarity that anti-systemic movements need in their struggles. Politics is a concern with common issues and principles underpinning our accounts of the good society, not simply with the idiosyncrasies of my own personal grief or anxiety. A successful anti-

systemic movement has to develop a political lexicon that seeks to overcome the differences that animate different anti-systemic movements, enabling them to work together in order to achieve their particular ends. There are examples at Seattle of the way in which this is at least a possible development in the anti-systemic movement. Seattle gave anti-systemic groups with specific objectives and concerns the opportunity to discuss and communicate their particular interests, with a growing sense of the possibility of solidarity emerging over the course of the week.

Equally, some groups within the anti-systemic movements that have emerged in the wake of the 1968 revolutions have adopted a hostility to rational inquiry, science, technology and any kind of systemic analysis of world order. Such a tendency is, in my view, a severely retrograde step. Science and technology are potentially tools that can be used to liberate human beings from a great deal of the drudgery of life and are central to any humane, ordered society. They are not, in themselves, inherently flawed products of Western culture, or some such thing. As for the issue of rational analysis, I would paraphrase Noam Chomsky here who has commented that 'I know of no good arguments for irrationality.' In part such tendencies have been influenced, I suspect, by some of the insights of postmodernist attempts to reverse the Enlightenment idea that knowledge is power, potentially a tool for liberation. The power/knowledge equation associated with Foucault presents a more Nietzschean and insidious view of knowledge as an endless power struggle with one 'regime of truth' ultimately replacing another in a circular process of domination (Wilkin, 1999). Suffice to say this seems a very narrow view of progress and social change which can only make sense if we ignore the very real forms of progress that have occurred in the world. Issues such as women's rights, human rights, anti-racism, anti-sexism, gay rights are all developments that represent a movement towards a better world order where meaningful rather than simply formal equality might yet emerge among all peoples. Knowledge may raise important issues of power but this is not to say that *all* knowledge is simply a form of domination. On the contrary, knowledge can give us the power to improve social relations, as the above examples suggest. The extent to which these ideas can be found in some sections of the anti-systemic movements reflects worrying tendencies that will ultimately do little to foster a world where solidarity is the bedrock for a good society, rather than power and hierarchy.

Wallerstein, et al, in their work on the anti-systemic movements and the 1968 revolutions can certainly be criticised for, if not romanticising, then underestimating the problems that emerge from this legacy. For a more critical account of 1968 from someone who wants to defend Enlightenment ideals from irrationalist critics it is worth reading Murray Bookchin's recent collection of interviews on the 1968 revolutions (Bookchin 1999). I want to turn now to the impact of the end of the Cold War and the rise of global governance.

The second major long-term development that needs to be considered here is the movement from the end of the Cold War through to the emergence of an era of what is increasingly referred to as global governance. The latter is more accurately referred to as one of 'neo-liberal global governance' and is an attempt to construct a form of world order based upon neo-liberal political economic premises. In practical terms the apparent end of the East-West aspect of the Cold War conflict has enabled the G7 core capitalist states to bring Russia and Eastern Europe firmly into line with their own political economic agendas for 'good governance'. This has resulted in the largely unopposed extension of market principles into ever-wider areas of social and economic life.<sup>15</sup> The idea of neo-liberal global governance is a complex array of policies and institutional developments that serve to defend and promote the interests of a coalition of political and economic elites against a worldwide series of protests and opposition movements. However, it is important to note here that the movement towards a neo-liberal global political economy begins with the breakdown of the post-war Bretton Woods consensus in the early 1970s and the subsequent downturn in the world economy. It is a significant development in the eventual emergence of events at Seattle as it is part of the attempt by powerful political and economic interests in the core capitalist states to reverse many of the gains made by working people around the world in the C20. These gains are most firmly embedded, perhaps, in the development of welfare states. As the 1980s and 1990s unfolded, so did the attempt to impose these neo-liberal principles on an ever-wider section of the world's population. This, in turn,

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<sup>15</sup> Yes, there is political opposition in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, but as yet they do not have the reigns of power. They are also, worryingly, cultural nationalists of an extreme type.

can be seen as being a major causal factor underpinning the range of anti-systemic protests that have occurred over the past twenty years, culminating in the protests at the WTO summit in Seattle. As mentioned before, the spontaneity of Seattle was a long time coming. The protests that ensued in the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as being generated in response to neo-liberal political economic changes that have sought to accomplish two main tasks: first, to restructure both states and capital; second, to establish 'new' norms of social and economic behaviour such as self-reliance and entrepreneurialism in order to help underpin and provide legitimacy to these changes.<sup>16</sup> These can be seen as manifesting themselves in all of the following, for example: the freeing of capital from labour through the liberalisation of finance and investment (Sivanandan, 1992); the extension of commodification into ever wider areas of life, including the human body itself; the robbing of the agricultural history of developing nations through the 'patenting' of seeds; the erosion of welfare states under the guise of 'reform'; the continued exploitation of environmental resources for private profit; the undermining of communal patterns of land-holding; the erosion of workers rights; the threat of nuclear conflict throughout the 1980s (Strange, 1997; Kobrin, 1997; Richards, 1997; Gill, 1995 and 1998; Chomsky, 1999). Taken together, these political-economic changes represent important diachronic development in world order that helps to provide the context in which Seattle as a concrete event emerges. As a number of writers are increasingly commenting, the anti-systemic movements can plausibly be viewed as part of what Polanyi saw as a 'double-movement' in which society seeks to defend itself against the power of markets to disrupt the very possibility of social life (Gill, in Hettne, 1995). The idea here is that the concept of a 'market society' is logically incoherent because markets and societies are organised along antithetical principles. Capitalist markets encourage acquisitiveness and the transcendence of private power, while the possibility of social order depends upon cooperation, friendship, sympathy, mutual aid and the like.

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The events at Seattle brought together a range of disparate social movements both in terms of the range of issues that animated distinct groups

<sup>16</sup> And so anti-systemic protest continues (*Corporate Watch*, 2-2000; *The Economist*).

and in terms of their geographical spread. As Elizabeth Martinez notes, there was a conscious effort to ensure representation and participation from as many parts of the world as possible. For that privileged stratum of the world's population hooked up to the Internet, virtually instant updates on information, meetings and events could be obtained. Although some of the writing on ideas of global consciousness is undoubtedly overstated, it is still the case that this protest had world-wide political and economic ramifications and which brought together a cross-section of the world's diverse issue groups and peoples. The importance of Seattle and the WTO in both symbolic and political-economic terms cannot be overstressed. For the first time, perhaps, protestors were able to organise meetings and debates not just amongst themselves but with participants at the WTO. WTO organisers had even arranged public forums to defend themselves from the criticism of the protestors, although as the Seattle press suggested, by and large the official spokespeople lost their case (Paulson, 24-9-99; Henwood, 12-99; George, 1-2000).<sup>17</sup> Whether this was because of the arguments, the audience or the weight of opposition is not noted! Equally, the protests enabled a range of disparate groups to discuss, organise and find grounds for solidarity that they might once have thought unlikely, if not impossible. The significance of Seattle, then, is that having happened once, it could happen again. The hostility of the business press can in part be reasonably interpreted as recognition of this fact. Again, though, we need to be careful not to overstate the events at Seattle as leading to a golden age of anti-systemic protests (Byers, 2000; Seabright, 2000). That is still to be determined and there were many weaknesses and limitations to Seattle, unsurprisingly given the relative resources at the disposal of the conference organisers as opposed to the protestors. As Elizabeth Martinez notes, the protestors were still overwhelmingly white, groups of colour being underrepresented (Martinez, December 2000). The support of the AFL-CIO was largely driven by the demands of activists as opposed to the leadership who sought concessions from the WTO rather than total opposition to it (Cockburn, 1999; Zinn, 2000; Luthens, December 1999; Henwood, 12-99; Industrial Worker, 1/2-2000). Already there have been some developments in the U. S. union community to turn this into a case for protection of U. S. jobs rather than

<sup>17</sup> WTO Watch; Seattle Daily Journal of commerce; Seattle Times.

an attempt to link with working people around the world (Bernstein, 2000). This development would represent a significant retreat from the possibilities of Seattle. Thus, the events at Seattle brought together a range of anti-systemic movements and revealed to them that they do indeed have the power to challenge the existing institutional framework that structures world order. The weakness of these anti-systemic movements remains the same as before, though. Capital and the state have vast resources and greater mobility and can continually shift their agendas, their timetables, their strategies, in order to outmanoeuvre their anti-systemic opponents. The price of success for anti-systemic movements will be eternal vigilance. As the MAI disappears from one agenda it reappears in another under the guise of WTO proposals. The key counter-factual question that emerges here for the anti-systemic movements is: *to what extent can the existing systems that structure world order accommodate their demands and still remain the same systems?* Any success that the anti-systemic movements achieve will emerge through some form of global solidarity, and in order to evaluate the potential for such a development we need to turn to an examination of the systemic properties and institutions that stand in the way of such a development.

### III. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN A GLOBAL AGE

The anti-systemic movements that have emerged since the late 1960s and which can be seen to be a central part of the protests at Seattle are responding to a range of political-economy changes in world order. These changes are encapsulated in the movement from the Cold War to a period of global governance, a transition that reflects both continuity and change in world order. The Cold War served to structure world order for a period of 50 years during which time a hierarchy of power among the world's states was institutionalised primarily along East-West lines. Those states that tried to stay outside of this framework invariably found themselves dragged into the proxy wars in the Third World that are still a lasting legacy of the post-war capitalist reconstruction. More generally, the Cold War also helped to solidify existing global social relations to a degree that those anti-systemic movements that were active in this period often found themselves to be on the receiving end of overt state brutality. Dissidents in Eastern Europe, nationalists and socialists in South America, Asia and Africa were subjected to a range of attacks, imprisonment, murder and subversive prac-

tices by the superpowers and their local elite clients (Chomsky and Herman 1979a, b). The effect of this was a continual challenge to the possibility of progressive social development. Examples of such struggles are many, from Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 to Guatemala in 1954, Iran in 1953, and so on. The Cold War offered both the US and its immediate allies and the Soviet Union the justification for subverting and destroying progressive social movements under the guise of protecting either the 'free world' or 'the working classes'. In reality the motivations of each side were more mundane. Both superpowers and their allied political, economic and military elites sought to retain and extend their own power wherever possible and for the USA to extend the power of its corporations as actors in the global economy. Thus, if we are to understand world order as being about global social relations embedded in the complexities of global capitalism and the inter-state system, the Cold War was a period where the major institutions and actors sought to solidify and hold back the possibility of progressive social change. The weapons for doing this were varied. Violence was a norm in much of the Third World while in times of social crisis such as the revolutionary upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s the core capitalist states used violence and subversion on sections of their domestic populations (Churchill, 1990).

Of course, the efforts of states to lock social relations into the structure of the Cold War was only a limited success. Around the world anti-systemic movements pushed progressive issues onto the mainstream political agenda and the rise of new forms of political consciousness around sexism, racism and the environment increasingly gained ground around the world. Thus, while the East-West aspect of the Cold War has moved into abeyance, the ideological threat of communism now largely defeated, there are still important continuities in world order. First, the hierarchy of states and the structure that this exerts over world order persists. If anything, that hierarchy has been sharpened even further. The Soviet Union (as was) and the former Eastern European states have been drawn back into a more traditional role in relation to the G7 core capitalist states, that of supplying raw materials and cheap labour, often highly skilled. Global governance has amounted in practice to a world order led by a hegemonic United States that is able to act, in the words of Madeline Albright, '*multilaterally wherever possible, unilaterally wherever necessary*' (Chomsky, 1997: 117). The interests of the United States

and its immediate allies continue to shape the exercise of massive military power in world order.<sup>18</sup> Second, the hierarchies of global social relations still persist. Although anti-sexism and anti-racism have come onto the agenda of global politics, progress remains massively uneven, hindered around the world by the persistence of cultural nationalist politics, deepening levels of inequality and poverty, the erosion of welfare provision, the latter being especially harsh in developing countries where it is often only minimal anyway. In this respect, world order remains structured by the hierarchies of power that shaped the Cold War period. The transition to an era of neo-liberal global governance has been a crucial feature of the past two decades, allowing political and economic elites to construct a global institutional framework that allows them to discuss and coordinate political and economic policies wherever possible. In practice these developments are both a response to what a number of writers in the mid-1970s saw as a 'crisis of democracy', the fact that anti-systemic groups were demanding more democratic control of political and economic decision-making (Crozier, Huntington, et al, 1979). The effect of these moves towards neo-liberal global governance has been to erode the democratic control that people have over the institutions that have greatest impact on their daily lives.

The movement from a post-WW2 world order that was largely shaped by what we can loosely call a Keynesian consensus to one of a revived commitment to neo-classical economic theory, what is often called neo-liberalism, is an important development in world order for a variety of reasons. First, it represents an important ideological shift in that whereas it was once considered normal and important for governments to intervene in at least some sectors of the economy and to provide welfare to those on the receiving ends of the cyclical crises of capitalism, we have now moved to an era where such ideas are considered to be heretical at best, foolish at worst (Thomas,

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, there has been the occasional glimmer of recognition in the mainstream U. S. academia and media that the rest of the world does not share the self-perception of the USA's role in world order as that set out by its political elites. See *Newsweek* on anti-Americanism, 31-1-2000. As *Newsweek's* coverage and subsequent letters page response reveal, critiques of U. S. State and corporate power are often taken to be anti-Americanism. The failure to recognise this distinction is the knee-jerk response of well meaning (and less well-meaning liberals) around the world! See Jonathon Freedland's (1999) recent paean to the USA and its institutions.

1999). The key here, perhaps, was the global economic crisis of the early 1970s that did so much to discredit the Bretton Woods System and the Keynesian ideology that helped to justify it. It is now considered normal to allow markets to be extended into ever-wider areas of social and economic life where they can effectively regulate themselves through competition and the discipline of consumers in the marketplace. Second, these changes are in practical terms a direct attack on working people and on democracy itself, if by democracy we mean a system in which people are able to exercise some degree of meaningful influence and control over the institutions and decision-making processes that shape their daily lives. The establishment of the so-called 'Washington Consensus', embedded in the workings of the major international financial institutions, serves as a new common-sense orthodoxy for any government wishing to attract inward investment in a liberalised global financial system. To fail to adhere to the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus is to invite a range of disciplinary mechanisms to be exercised against your currency, your economy and ultimately your government. This can affect governments of both weak and powerful states alike, as has been found throughout the past decade in a series of economic crises that have ripped through the world economy, from the world-wide depression of the late 1980s and early 1990s to the failure of the much lauded South-East Asian economies in the late 1990s.

Neo-liberal global governance has led to a number of important shifts in global political economy. First, the entrenching of a mixture of policies of privatisation, liberalisation, deregulation and protectionism which characterise international trade. Simply put, the core capitalist states have sought free trade agreements in areas where their companies might win out, such as financial services, intellectual property rights, and so on, whilst at the same time practising protectionism in areas where they are potentially vulnerable to competition, such as agriculture. In theory, neo-liberalism is a commitment to a 'pure' form of market economy and society. In practice, there is little to suggest that political and economic elites actually want such a universal prescription. On the contrary, what they have sought is a relationship with state institutions that enables them to enhance their profitability, usually through various forms of public subsidy. Ironically, the Seattle summit was primarily sponsored by the U. S. firms Microsoft and Boeing, recipients of major federal subsidies for research and development, and yet also

curiously regarded as standard bearers of the virtues of rigorous free enterprise.<sup>19</sup> Alas, only those figures that occupy the ideological institutions of the world's free-market think tanks really want free markets, it seems!

Second, state institutions have been under varying degrees of pressure to 'restructure' themselves and their workforces in order to make themselves more flexible in the global economy. This has usually meant pursuing such policies as attempting to cut back on those sections of public expenditure that do not benefit the rich and powerful, to undermine trade unions, and to subsidise the employment of the unemployed in the private sector. As Jacques Maison Rouge, former Chief Officer for European Operations of IBM and of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has commented, '*the world's political structures are completely obsolete...the critical issue of our time is the conceptual conflict between the global optimisation of resources and the independence of nation-states*' (Mulgan, 1991: 220). Translated this tells us that existing political structures stand in the way of economic efficiency. In practical terms this means that state institutions and governments, those bodies that are in varying degrees accountable to the general population, however flawed this might be in practice, are obsolete. This is a quite understandable premise if we recognise that in an era of neo-liberal global governance the criterion for measuring efficiency is the profit accruing to private firms. Recent eulogies to President Clinton are indicative of this premise, lauding the fact that 'Americans have never had it so good', whilst at the same time, according to the U. S. governments own figures, 34.5 million people in the USA now live in poverty (Kettle, 1999; Apple jnr, 2000). And this is in an era of heightened market efficiency. Of course, the consistent neo-liberal response to such apparent contradictions would be to say that the cause of poverty around the world and in the USA is due to not enough capitalism and too much government! What people are crying out for, or at least they should be if they are rational, is the disciplinary purgative of the free market to rid themselves of any latent inefficiencies. The fact that the world had had centuries of the expansion of capitalism already and that it is now scarred with record levels of poverty and deepening inequality is not sufficient evidence to deter neo-liberal theory. On the contrary, it is merely proof that capitalism has not gone far enough (*The Economist*, 12-10-99).

<sup>19</sup> For recent comment on the 'bad image' of MNCs see *The Economist*, (28-1-00).

Ironically, the latent totalitarianism of the history of post-war capitalism in the Western bloc of the developing world is largely overlooked by its defenders. In those countries where the general population foolishly picked the wrong kind of government (Guatemala, say, in 1954) that is, a government concerned with the needs of the local population rather than the needs of major capitalist investors, the population quite literally had to be forced to be free. The rational choice is, in practice, to have only one choice! The history of post-world war two interventions by the USA and its allies in the Third World is one of continual subversion of those governments that failed to adhere to pro-capitalist principles (Herman and Chomsky 1979a,b). No doubt such mistaken choices can be put down to the lack of education on the part of the general population who failed to appreciate the benefits that would accrue from the rigours of the market place. Rational choices are all very well but if people are not smart enough to make the correct ones, then it is in their interests to be led by the more enlightened. That is the lesson of the spread of liberal, capitalist, democracy around the world (Blum, 1986). It has not come about through a global consensus on the 'end of history'. It is nice to be able to reassure Francis Fukuyama that his sadness at the end of history is somewhat misplaced.<sup>20</sup> Liberal, capitalist, democracy has spread because its core capitalist proponents have used a variety of undemocratic and illiberal tactics to promote it. That is the reality of the spread of liberal capitalist democracy, not the triumph of the 'absolute idea' or some such metaphysical nonsense, but the extension of the interests and power of the political, economic and military elites that dominate the core capitalist countries. This used to be called imperialism but is increasingly called globalisation (Wilkin, 1997: 227-228). It has come about because those peoples that sought a different path were vigorously forced into line by a variety of disciplinary mechanisms. It is difficult to find a Third World country in the Western bloc during the Cold War that did not endure such disciplines.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Francis Fukuyama, (1989: 18) had this to say ...*In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.*

<sup>21</sup> The disciplinary mechanisms take the following forms: Direct force/intervention by the USA and its allies; Direct force by the domestic state institutions against sections of their domestic population; Subversion of governments in the Third World by the USA and its allies; Financial attack on Third World States by

So to that end democratic institutions that might enable people to place a different value and meaning on efficiency, perhaps things such as a good society where people can live in dignity, with access to the things that are needed to live a decent life (health care, education, culture, and so on), are clearly a potential problem for the efficient working of an economy founded on quite different principles. Thus around the world democracy amounts to rational choices for electorates between mainstream political parties who deviate from the neo-liberal norm more in rhetoric than reality. A good example of this can be seen in one of the largest economies of the developing world, that of Brazil. The 1980s and 1990s saw a number of fiercely contested presidential contests between the Workers Party (PT) and the mainstream Party of the Liberal Front (PFL), Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) and the Social Democratic Party of Brazil (PSDB). The Workers Party have been led by Trade Unionist Luis 'lula' da Silva and have espoused policies that addressed issues of welfare, education, health care rights for the poor, and the like. In elections in 1989, 1994 and 1998 The Workers Party was attacked mercilessly by Brazil's independent TV Globo who invariably, in an independent and rational manner, sided with the parties of big business (Keck, 1992: 24-29 and 1995; Sader and Silverstein, 1991; NACLA, 1995).<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that the parties of big business have been exposed as being hideously corrupt, forcing the resignation of one president, they still remain the rational choice in an era of neo-liberal global governance.<sup>23</sup> Provided that you understand the first principles here, which are that profit and power for private companies are the ultimate public good, then you can make the right choices. If you fail to understand

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capitalists and core capitalist states; Sanctions against Third world states imposed by core capitalist states either unilaterally (US and Cuba) or multilaterally (Iraq/Libya); Ideological assault on a Third World state (Central America in the 1980s);

Clearly it is possible that at any given time a Third World State might suffer any combination of these.

<sup>22</sup> Even calling your party 'The Workers Party' is to invite unwanted attention and trouble! The names of political parties are, of course, significant in terms of political culture, as we have seen recently in the UK with the re-branding of 'New Labour' under the Blair administration. See Robin Ramsey (1998).

<sup>23</sup> Lest I be accused of latent eurocentrism here, I am happy to note that corruption would seem to be endemic to pretty much all political systems around the world.

this then there are a variety of mechanisms for bringing you around to the right way of thinking, as countries as far apart as Vietnam and Haiti have found in the 1980s and 1990s. So we can see that in practice the era of global governance has both continuities and changes from the period of the Cold War which, in geo-political terms, preceded it. These continuities and changes are in part driven by the challenge set ruling elites by anti-systemic movements in the Cold War period. This is a dynamic system in which ruling elites have sought to build transnational alliances wherever possible as a means to develop tactics to preserve the existing hierarchies and institutions that structure world order. As such they remain the major obstacles to the possibilities of a more just world order that the anti-systemic movements are struggling to bring about. These struggles are increasingly seen as taking place in what is invariably referred to as 'global civil society.'

There has been a great deal of talk and writing in the course of the past decade on the idea of global civil society (Cox, 1999; Agarwal, 2000). This has no doubt been generated by a number of developments in world order: the end of the Cold War; the rise of a number of issues of popular concern onto the political agenda, such as human rights and the environment; the development of communications technology enabling disparate groups to organise themselves in an unprecedented manner across time and space.

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Everywhere from the USA, Germany, Italy, the UK through to Indonesia, China and Brazil, corruption is part and parcel of political life. Before neo-liberals get too twitchy here, blaming it on those pesky politicians, it is worth noting that corruption takes two, invariably commercial *and* political interests, as the recent scandals affecting Germany reveal (*The Economist* 28-1-2000). What is more interesting in many respects is that the real scandal of politics in the era of neo-liberal global governance is one in which the interests of private companies are seen as being practically synonymous with the public interest. This extends into the formal process of elections (for example, see Julian Borger, 7-1-2000). The fact that companies can sponsor the WTO meeting at Seattle, buy access to ministers and so on, and that this is considered to be normal politics, is quite breathtaking. This is a process that we saw with NAFTA when the mainstream media and politicians saw nothing wrong with business 'lobbying' of congress to vote to approve the treaty, whereas the lobbying by trade unions to represent their members interests which they saw as being threatened by NAFTA was an affront to the democratic process. For an account of this see Noam Chomsky (1993); Joyce Nelson, (1995); NACLA (1991). This ethos says a great deal about the political culture generated by neo-liberal global governance.

What is often overlooked in such debates is that in its current form global civil society has largely been a part of the movement towards an era of neo-liberal global governance. As writers such as Lipschutz have noted, global civil society can be seen as a continual part of human history with the movement of people, ideas and resources around the world (Lipschutz, 1992: 389-420). However, its current form needs to be seen in the context of a century marked by increasing state control over the movement of peoples and control over the dissemination of information and ideas. The current form that global civil society takes can be seen as a new development in that it is a space for activity created by changes in the inter-state system and global capitalism. The latter is particularly important, as we have seen in the past 25 years the move towards a global entrepreneurial culture that is central to the neo-liberal vision of the good society (Heelas and Morris, 1991). For the neo-liberal, global civil society is the realm of the entrepreneur, freed of the cumbersome hand of state intervention, able to utilise their talents to take risks, innovate, speculate and fuel the economic growth of the 1980s and 1990s. The fact that the economic growth of the 1980s and 1990s in the core capitalist states from which this ideology has emerged has been no better, and probably a little worse, than it was in the 1950s, and even the much-despised 1960s and 1970s, is not relevant here.<sup>24</sup> Remember, we are dealing with faith in idealised models, not the empirical world.

Thus as Thomas Carruthers has noted in a recent article in *Foreign Policy*, 'a well developed civil society can be a natural partner for a successful market economy' (Carothers, 1999-2000). The modern global civil society has emerged in the wake of the declining East-West structure of the Cold War, and has reflected the renewed confidence of corporate actors in capitalism and their ability to exploit the world's resources. In order to do this states have had to

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<sup>24</sup> Global economic growth has slowed by roughly 1/2 since the mid-70s, roughly the period when the neo-liberal agenda was beginning to take-off. See Robin Hahnel, (1999: 6). As measured by the gini coefficient, global inequality has increased steadily between countries since the mid-1970s, see Walter Park and David Brat (1995). See 'labor today', by Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello and Brendan Smith, *Z Magazine* online, for an account of the changing patterns of global inequality and the slowing of global economic growth since the mid-1970s, at . For recent comment on the ways in which these pressure are being felt by sections of the US workforce see Michele Conlin (1999). On global poverty and inequality see Stephen Shalom (1999); and *The Economist* (7-1-00).

be persuaded, coerced or cajoled into accepting a series of reforms to their own activities and to the activities of private corporations who have sought to take advantage of technological innovations and the emergence of potential markets in the Third World. Thus, as we can see in examples such as the USA and the UK, in the core capitalist countries the relationship between government and business has been one of mutual support. Businesses tend to support those political parties that give them what they want. Surely an unsurprising fact of political economy. Similarly, governments seek to nurture and protect successful corporations as a means of bringing success to their national economies and ultimately as a means of preserving their political authority. In this respect global civil society has been the product of the power of political and economic elites to transform aspects of global social relations for their own ends. Of course, there is more to global civil society than this, as Seattle illustrates. The establishment of neo-liberalism as *the* global credo leaves it open to the concentrated criticisms of anti-systemic movements. Likewise, the proliferation of new forms of communication technology as consumer durables also offers a potential means of organisation for anti-systemic movements. This was illustrated dramatically in 1994 by the Zapatistas and the Internet propaganda announcing their resistance to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Although it must be recognised that global civil society has largely been constructed by changes in state policy that have allowed corporations to take advantages of new markets, technology and commodification, it is also the case that it creates space within which anti-systemic movements can manoeuvre. Nonetheless, in terms of the means and use of communication it is important to note that the world's communication infrastructure is dominated by a news gathering and disseminating hierarchy that is largely North American and European, pro-capitalist media conglomerates whose primary interests are profit not the ruthless criticism of all that exists, to coin a phrase.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the new information technology that has been developed since the mid-1970s has been utilised by states for surveillance

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Hitchens (1993: 220) has written, 'might it not make sense to regard the mass communications industry as an area of contestation, in which the ruling class naturally holds most of the cards, but no definitively predictable or universalisable result can be arranged?'

of populations, by the military for conducting 'scientific' warfare, and by private companies to gather information and build data bases on consumers. This does not mean that the development of global civil society is not important for the potential success of anti-systemic movements. I want merely to point out the reality of the obstacles that they face. What we see here are the complexities and contradictions in world order that allow anti-systemic movements the increased space that they need in the post-Cold War era to develop their agendas and activities.

In many respects the political agenda in this period remains unchanged. The possibility of progressive change in world order must still address concerns laid down by Enlightenment writers about the grounds for solidarity and the construction of a rational world order built around the satisfaction of human needs and the construction of a meaningfully free social orders. The alternative is a tendency that is worryingly prevalent in much of world order, a retreat into recidivism and cultural nationalism, erecting the boundaries between people based on the nation-state and the friend-enemy distinction that it bequeaths us.

#### CONCLUSIONS: ANTI-SYSTEMIC MOVEMENTS—DEFENDING DEMOCRACY AND RECONCILING DIFFERENCES

The possibility of progressive social change faces many fundamental problems that are both systemic and also specific to particular times and places. The systemic problems faced by anti-systemic movements are fairly clear. First global capitalism remains the contradictory system that was Marx's basic and profound insight. Whilst it has released historically unprecedented forces of production, producing goods and services in abundance, and has generated untold wealth, it remains a social and economic system which has shown itself to be unable to resolve certain fundamental social problems. The most obvious here is the overproduction and underconsumption of goods and services coupled with the uneven spread of development. If, as I think that they are, these are systemic problems generated by the nature of the social relations that pertain under global capitalism, then it is difficult to see how they could be resolved without a transformation in the organisation, production and distribution of resources. This, of course, has been the basic stuff of political ideology in modernity and I see no obvious reason to think that this is anything other than a more prescient problem than ever. The stark irrationalities of capitalist production for profit rather

**Table 1. The World's Priorities? (annual expenditure, \$USbn)**

Basic education for all	6*
Cosmetics in the USA	8
Water and sanitation for all	9*
Ice cream in Europe	11
Reproductive health for all women	12*
Perfumes in Europe and the USA	12
Basic health and nutrition	13*
Pet foods in Europe and the USA	17
Business entertainment in Japan	35
Cigarettes in Europe	50
Alcoholic drinks in Europe	105
Narcotic drugs in the world	400
Military spending in the world	780

Note: \*estimated additional annual cost to achieve universal access to basic social services in all developing countries (Thomas, 1999: 244)<sup>26</sup>

than the satisfaction of need can be seen in many ways (see Table 1).

The second systemic issue facing anti-systemic movements is the continuing legacy of Western political thought and the interstate system. Traditional conceptions of political solidarity and obligation have tended to be dominated by the relationship between the citizen and the nation-state (Hutchings, 1999). Internationalism, whether socialist or liberal, has historically floundered at crucial points when questions of 'national interest' are at stake. The power of nationalism as an ideology, an imagined community, to bind a group of people together, has proven to be one of the major obstacles to a lasting internationalism. This is an insight that classical Realists in international relations have taught us and it is a powerful claim. However, developments at Seattle and earlier anti-systemic protests that have occurred throughout the course of the past three decades are in response

<sup>26</sup> In a way these consumption patterns illustrate Popper's point about unintended outcomes. The key question for those wishing to challenge such irrational patterns of resource use and allocation is how to alter them without utilising the kind of centralised state apparatus that was the undoing of the Soviet system. Given that markets are neither efficient allocators nor users of resources, a point made by liberal economists like Paul Krugman, the key political economy issue for anti-systemic movements is to develop alternatives. Needless to say this is a huge point that raises questions about the process of social transformation, among many other things. I am inclined to agree with Howard Zinn here that lasting social transformation will take time and can only be lasting if it is built upon grounds that have substantive roots in popular organisations.

to a series of objective changes that have acted to polarise social relations around the question of national identity. On the one hand the restructuring of relations between global capitalism and the inter-state system has seen the emergence of a continuum between more transnationally minded political and economic elites and those that remain rooted in particular nation-states (cultural nationalists) (Carchedi, 1997). At the same time what Seattle and the anti-systemic movements generally indicate is the development of networks of global solidarity around a range of issues from human rights to the environment, women's rights, the peace movement and trade unions. These people in their everyday lives and practices are the potential basis for a transformed world order. At the same time it is glaringly clear that many among the grassroots population of the world that have suffered from the systemic outcomes of global capitalism and the inter-state system have lurched into varied forms of cultural nationalism, which can ultimately manifest itself in reactionary political movements. This is a tendency that can be seen around the world from the BJP in India to the newly powerful Freedom Party in Austria. The obstacles facing anti-systemic movements are immense and their success will depend upon a range of factors including ultimately the means by which they seek to carry out their political struggles. In this respect the battle over the meaning and practice of democracy would appear to be the real arena of ideological and political conflict in the years ahead. Is democracy to be increasingly a managed process in which meaningful choices are minimised in political and economic systems that offer electorates rational choices between parties that are only interested in managing an existing system rather than transforming it?<sup>27</sup> Is democracy to be extended into the realm of economic organisation so that people can free themselves from the role of wage-slaves in global capitalism? The possibility of these ideas emerging onto the political agenda is perhaps most liable to emerge from the anti-systemic movements as they develop in the years ahead.

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<sup>27</sup> Even *The Economist* (12-2-2000) concedes that Europe's currently dominant leftist political parties are either severely constrained by capital, are undergoing ideological transformations into what Wallerstein describes as liberal-socialist parties, or perhaps a combination of both of them. As the Economist notes, 'All governing centre-left parties in the euro-zone, constrained by the budgetary rigour imposed by the single currency, now follow conservative macro-economic policies.'

However, there is a problem here with the concern for democracy. As an editorial in *The Economist* asked of the protestors at Seattle, 'are they a dangerous shift of power to unelected and unaccountable special interest groups?' (*The Economist*, 10-12-99). The rise of anti-systemic movements, as Wallerstein et al, note, is in part a response to the perceived failures of parliamentary politics to generate lasting progressive social change. The danger here, as *The Economist* notes, is that these groups do not operate largely in the realm of representative democracy, which has tended to shape the institutions of the world's core capitalist states and is now an increasing phenomenon internationally (Doyle, 1999). This is a complex issue that I do not really have sufficient space to go into here, so two comments will have to suffice. First, anti-systemic movements are responding to the failures of representative democratic institutions, as they see them. Second, the legitimacy of anti-systemic movements will depend in part upon their commitment to democratic practices themselves and in the extent to which they want to render democracy more meaningful and substantive. This last point is a difficult issue to address in a world increasingly structured by political-economic institutions and decision-making processes that connect local, national, regional and global social relations. One of the great writers on democracy in U. S. social science, Robert Dahl, has noted that if societies become economically polarised, then democracy can suffer, as politics becomes subordinated to the interests of the rich and powerful (Dahl, 1985; Burchill, 12000). This seems to me to be a profoundly important and actually quite obvious point. It is worth mentioning here if only because in neo-liberal ideology it hardly registers as a problem for democracy at all! Returning to the fear expressed in *The Economist* editorial that the world is somehow at the mercy of anti-systemic movements, we can now present a slightly different reading of events at Seattle. As is often the case, what is most interesting here is what the business press doesn't see as a threat to democracy. For example, when compared with the power of the equally unelected and unaccountable corporate interests that paid \$9-10 million (US) in 'sponsorship' (a selfless and public-spirited act, no doubt) one might ask the question where the real threat to democracy comes from. That, of course, raises difficult questions for *The Economist* and its corporate audience. It is a little ironic that trade unions, for example, organisations that exist to defend and promote the interests of working people, the general population, are conceptualised as

'special interests'. This suggests that the interests that working people might have in such things as a decent wage, education, welfare, health care, and such, are *marginal to the real interests of the global economy*, which are synonymous with the interests of the corporations that dominate it: that is, profit for private institutions. Once that principle is understood then the other points raised by *The Economist*, *Business Week*, and the other ideological institutions tend to fall into place rather more clearly. As I said at the beginning of this section the battleground for anti-systemic movements is over the meaning and practice of democracy. Is democracy increasingly a process for fuelling power and profit to private corporations, or is it to be something that allows people to participate in the institutions and decision-making procedures, be they political or economic, that shape their daily lives? (Held, 1995). This is the important difference between formal and substantive democracy. The liberal concern with procedures lends itself towards a formal analysis of democracy where procedures and institutions exist in order to make democratic processes theoretically possible, while in practice inequalities of social power render them largely empty processes. As Dahl notes, societies split by huge inequalities of wealth tend to be vulnerable to the manipulation of the rich and powerful. Formally, democracy exists, substantively it is a process in which ordinary people have little opportunity to make a substantive difference unless they possess the institutions that enable them to organise collectively to do so. For anti-systemic movements the need is to make democracy substantive and to challenge the emptiness of formal liberal democratic procedures.<sup>28</sup> To return to the example of Brazil again, it is clear that much progress has been made in the country by political and social movements seeking to challenge the existing structure of political-economic power and *in part* this has come about through the success of the Workers Party (among others) in national elections. The formal procedures of democracy are not irrelevant to social change, far from it. Nor, however, is there a straightforward relationship between them. The movement towards progressive social change of the kind that animates anti-systemic move-

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<sup>28</sup> Mike Moore the Director-General of the WTO failed to address this distinction between formal and substantive democracy at the Seattle summit in his address to the legislators assembly when he said, 'I get deeply offended when people say the WTO is not democratic. Take the case of the Indian ambassador in Geneva. It takes about

ments will reflect the relationship between systemic properties of global capitalism and the interstate system as well as the particular and concrete circumstances of specific places. Indeed, given that formal democracy has only really been re-established in Brazil since the 1980s after nearly 20 years of brutal military dictatorship, the growth of social and political movements around human rights, peasants rights, gender equality, and other anti-systemic issues has been remarkable (Rodrigues, 1995; Tavares, 1995).

Finally, I want to return to the quote that I gave at the beginning of this paper from Robin Wright who would respond to the carping of anti-sys-

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300 million people to elect a government in India. That government survives at the pleasure of its elected MP's. The government through its Minister, who is accountable to cabinet, his Prime Minister, his party, his caucus and to the Parliament and then to his electors at home and to the wider vote to enable his government to function. That's accountability. That's how it should be. And that is how it is for most countries who are members of the WTO. The system changes from nation to nation, but the principles of accountability are the same. The WTO is member driven, thus driven by governments, congresses and parliaments.' WTO Press Release, 2-12-99. The problems with Moore's defence of the WTO are many but I would draw out three here:

1. All governments do not have equal influence in determining WTO policy. The WTO is member driven, but not all members were created equal!
2. The chain of accountability Moore outlines is part of what is often referred to as a 'democratic deficit'. Crucial political-economic decisions around global trade, environmental regulation, corporate regulation, labour rights, and so on, are increasingly made in institutions far-removed from popular control and scrutiny. There is a lack of what Held has referred to as transparency and openness in these procedures. To illustrate, the judicial powers of the WTO are a good example of just the kind of 'secretive' aspects of the WTO that Paul Krugman, among others, says do not exist. The WTO's dispute settlement mechanism allows member countries to act on behalf of their own corporations in order to challenge the laws, policies and programs of another country, claiming that they are violations of WTO rules. This process is settled by a panel of unelected experts who have the power to hand out economic sanctions in order to force member states to conform. These hearings all take place in secret (Paul Krugman take note) and the subsequent documents, hearings and briefs remain confidential. There is more but this will suffice for the moment.
3. The internal workings of the WTO in its relations with particular members is primarily shaped by the power and influence of its most powerful blocs, the so-called quad Group of Japan, Canada, the USA and the European Union. Formally, all members are equal, in practice this is palpably not the case.

temic movements at Seattle by asking, 'remember universal brotherhood? You know—concern for the world's poor and downtrodden? As Paul Krugman recently noted in *Slate*, free trade gives millions of people a step up the ladder. Yes, that may mean working in a sweatshop. But these people manifestly prefer that to their prior condition.' Wright's quote inadvertently goes to the heart of the issues that separate anti-systemic movements from defenders of the existing world order. The only options on offer for the poor of the world, according to Wright, are the opportunity to work in a Western TNC sweatshop or to remain in even worse poverty. If those are the only options then perhaps working in the sweatshop is the rational choice. Again, what is more interesting here is the question that is not asked by Robin Wright and those working in the business press and other ideological institutions: *perhaps the impoverished millions of the current world order would actually prefer something more than the opportunity to work in a sweatshop. Perhaps they would like the opportunity to discuss, participate and help determine the conditions that shape their daily lives? Perhaps, in fact, we all would!* Sadly, these would seem not to be the kind of rational choices open to us, presumably because the costs are too great for cash-strapped corporations to bear. The task of anti-systemic movements has and continues to be to ask different questions and to encourage people to act upon them questions that want to open up debates about the good society and social justice.

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