

Resistance and Alternatives: notes for presentation to conference in Cologne, Germany, May 9-11, 2003.

By Theresa Wolfwood, Barnard-Boecker Centre Foundation, Victoria, BC (British Columbia), CANADA and VIPIRG Coord member. www.islandnet.com/~bbcf

Herbert Marcuse said: the success of the dominant ideology is to make unthinkable the possibility of alternatives. We are here to disprove joyfully and creatively that terrible idea! This conference is only one of many gatherings the world over that will witness the growing resistance movement. And I do not mean PROTEST: Resistance is a positive force as we work against aggression and globalization, we work towards creating “another world is possible” as the World Social Forum says. Let us start by celebrating that another world already exists in all corners of the world.

As Maria Mies has written, there are many examples of successful subsistence communities to study. My friend, Karen Hamdon, says that people in Palestine are not waiting hopefully for peace, she says there are 1500 organizations of Palestinians and Israelis working together peacefully in all aspects of life. As we work together in social movements, our daily actions, the small ways in which we unite with commitment, compassion and civility, are the foundations of equality and cooperation which creates that other possible world.

The big events – Seattle, Genoa, Quebec etc. are all important. They show the globalizing war makers that we have both vast numbers and a large number of skilled organizers and workers. We really do scare them; they don't know how we organize or where we turn up next. We have made the private, public; we make them answerable to the world. These events would not be possible without the “grunt work”, as Walden Bello calls it, on the local level. It is the often unglamorous grass roots work, local, consistent and focussed that changes the hearts and minds of people and moves them to massive social action. Every forum like this one, like all the regional and special World Social forums, has an empowering ripple effect. We share our knowledge and inspiration and go home nourished and ready to work!

I would like to talk about boycotts – a highly successful way to influence markets and change policies. Since consumption is at the very heart of the corporate ideology, any move to challenge consumption is seen as dangerous and subversive, particularly as boycotts are often successful! Since January I have been involved in “Boycott USA”. We in BC have spread this concept around the world. We encourage people to not shop at USA chains or buy USA products or brands, not always easy for those of us who live next door. Equally important, we urge Canadians not to visit the USA, to boycott its entire mainstream media, TV, movies etc. This way we help rid ourselves of USA cultural domination and create space and time for Canadian and international culture – particularly independent media. We are heartened to see how this boycott spread throughout Europe and Asia. And in the USA activists are boycotting any products of companies that produce military supplies. Let's keep it up! A key part of boycotting is focussed on buying less and buying locally. For those of us addicted to tea and coffee, organic fair trade products of many kinds are gaining in minority world sales while majority world producers get fair prices and help in community development and self-sufficiency.

While individuals are acting in daily life on this personal scale, there is a major macro- level of boycotting USA. There is a major divestment by rich foreign investors as they pull their money out of the USA. It is very significant that oil producers – Iran, Venezuela, Russia, maybe Indonesia are trading for Euros. The dollar is losing its global pre-eminence. People are shocked when I say the war against Iraq was partly a war against the European Union. The EU is more dependent on Western Asia oil than the USA; it was vital for USA to gain control of Iraqi oil and trade it in dollars and teach the EU a lesson. So Europeans, watch your oil supply and your Euro – right now your combined GNP is greater than the USA – you are the only threat to USA hegemony. So I think you must be very careful what politicians you chose!

In another boycott - against World Bank bonds which raises 80% of its funding by bond sales, USA cities, universities, churches etc. are not buying these bonds as an act of resistance to WB policies in the majority world.

Brazil is full of wonderful acts of resistance – a country with 20,000 free radio stations, a landless movement of millions that has endured murder and violence from the ruling elite to gain land and settle hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers – and help elect a president. A country where a frail, sickly woman, an illiterate servant from the Amazon, who learned to read and write as an adult, is now the Minister of the Environment and is determined to save the biodiversity of her rich homeland – Marina Silva. I recently learned that slaves in Brazil used to disguise self-defense in music and dance – slavery has ended but the style and art of self-defense endures as *Capioera*.

Across the world in Kenya, the Green Belt Movement has been heralded for its work in planting millions of trees and working to save parks and ecosystems while empowering women on the community level – its founder has been jailed, beaten and tortured and never gave up – now she, Wangari Maathi, is Minister of the Environment in a new Kenyan government!

Art can be an act of resistance so important that the world watched in horror when Butras Butras Ghali announced the UN war on Iraq in 1992 in front of a tapestry of Picasso's Guernica; in 2003 and saw that it was covered when this year's war was announced by USA leaders. The connection between the horror of Guernica and that planned in Iraq was too obvious, even for the barbarian military leaders. Expressing resistance in art allows our creativity to bloom and take seed in our many projects of resistance. Poetry, music, theatre can all be integrated into a life where we no longer accept art as a commercial commodity to be passively consumed.

In much of our resistance we are not aware of the dangers of GATS lurking behind privatization, service cuts and government deals. But I come from the city where the MAI was first leaked and where resistance to the MAI began. When I get home I will work to increase awareness of GATS.

In the struggle against GATS and trade agreements, we see coalitions of teachers, students, parents and community groups working together to save schools in Canada. Teachers in Mexico who have publicly opposed the lack of government support for education have been attacked, jailed and 150 teachers have been murdered – but still they resist and now seek coalitions with Canadian and USA teachers who face the threats of GATS and privatization. USA parents have already organized commercial-free schools and have got rid of advertising in schools even though and they lose the “donated” equipment as well! While the USA government promotes a free video game about joining the Army in its schools, one school in Vancouver, BC encourages kids to turn in war toys and violent material and gives them books!

A young friend of mine used her last pay check when she was cut by Ministry of Health to buy 500 stickers with one word CAMPBELL (the name of the BC Premier) on it and spent one whole night in Victoria with her friends sticking them under the word STOP on stop signs!

Seniors, nurses, unions and citizens are joining together in BC to organize widespread “Days of Defiance” in many communities and use many creative ways to distribute information about the threat to our health care and all our social services. BC is bidding for the Olympics in 2010 – a fancy Davos-style resort out side Vancouver – Whistler – where incidentally the next DAVOS World Economic Forum is rumoured to be happening. The government has promises over \$60 million just to rebuild a highway and that is the tip of the iceberg of taxpayers' money being given to the corporate world. So a campaign called HEALTHCARE BEFORE OLYMPICS has been started by senior citizen groups! Like thousands of others, we have a sticker on our car proclaiming that slogan.

In Australia a No-Borders support group for refugees pulled down the barricades at a detention jail and many refugees were set free. Movement of peoples fleeing war, oppression, poverty and displacement are a little recognized result of globalization, but in every receiving country, solidarity groups of citizens and refugees are growing.

I could go on for hours with success stories and it is important that we share them – to inspire and encourage us in our own work. The work of democracy building is not one mass struggle – but a myriad of richly varied responses to different situations, but we all share the same commitment for justice in peace, and community in health.

Beside everything else- a recent study at UK University of Sussex says that social action is good for your health and happiness! The effect of activism makes one less prone to physical illness and more confident and empowered by acting in a supportive group with a common goal! My young friends say it is good for the love life too! That figures!

Resistance is the secret of joy as Alice Walker says! We knew it all along!

There are several issues I want to reflect on. As I said yesterday we have learned from our recent resistance to the USA-UK war on Iraq, that the work for peace and democracy are one. The role of social movements is to bring awareness, analysis, inspiration and organized action to our societies – to offer the opportunity to be agents of change in a community of like-minded and like-hearted people. We are growing in strength every where.

One of the most important roles we have is to nourish and expand our communication networks. The internet –which we still have- has been crucial to our exchange of information and strategies – list serves, messages, websites and on-line media like the Indymedia movement. Print magazines and papers must be supported – we have many in Canada, a small spread out population needs its on press, there are also independent radio stations – really important in the majority world too. Activist made videos, books, leaflets, meetings, music, poetry and art are all essential. Rosalie Bertell says “we can be our own media” and we are doing a good job of it! We have yet to have our own TV. A young Italian activist at WSF told me, we have to tax ourselves to afford TV networks and stations – most people get their news in our part of world and increasingly in majority world straight from TV – it has the appearance of authenticity and reality no other media has. He is right – and I am still trying to figure out how to do it!

In Canada we are faced with the situation – particularly in BC where a rightwing government says to us – you elected us with a large majority- in our system of parliamentary election, the person with most votes takes the seat. In BC we have 77 members from

the Liberals and only 2 in the opposition, Social Democratic Party, which is struggling in almost in oblivion. So we resist as an “irresponsible” social movement against an implacable duly elected government which is selling off and giving away our rights, our resources and our commons –this is democracy as they see it.

What is the relationship of social movements to political parties? In order to change these neoliberal policies we have to change the government. Do we want to continue to try to effect from the outside, by making a particular policy too expensive or unpopular for the government? Or are we willing to consider getting rid of the collaborators by creating our own creative political base – beyond reaction? I do not have any answers – I am not in a political party but I do support those I can, and I have felt let down by those governments of parties I supported. For Europe with representational voting – it is easier to get a voice in government for a small party. But you too have felt betrayed by parties you worked in.

So we need to think and talk about this. But if we really want change we have to think about bridging the gap between social activists and partisan political activists. In Brazil and Venezuela the two worked together on an agreed minimum platform of mutual support, and elected new governments. In Argentina, in spite of incredible grass roots reaction to economic crisis, an old style government stays in office. Can we consider working with or transforming a party or developing a new better political party, even joining and working in it, to see our dreams and goals become part of a legislated reality? I know we sometimes see politicians as opportunists and sell-outs; they see us as unaccountable or flakey. But how do we change policies without gaining power? Starting at the local level may be the best entry to the power of change. Local results of neoliberalism are easier to see and explain. In Canada, people often do not want to be bothered with local issues – like sewage and water- but these are some of the issues that need our attention today.

As my dear friend, the late Canadian activist, Kay Macpherson said: When in doubt, do both.
Maybe that is the answer and the solution to the existing dichotomy.

I want to talk about what is closest to my heart – building and maintaining social movements. That I feel deeply we have to change the values of our society at the local and personal level. Rosalie Bertell says we have changed many core values in our society – from values about homosexuality to animal rights. We have to change our core belief in the power and the glory of materialism and militarism, that are central to our acceptance of military pacts, trade agreements, and consumption based media that promote greed and aggression. And we need to be clear that life depends on it. At the same time we need to live a life of joy, solidarity and, dare I say it, love, and be the model for a new way of living with each other and the world around us.

That is why we need our own organizations, meetings and communication or media, but also we need to preserve our commons – our universal health care, schools, resources, utilities and to keep knowledge in the public realm and to retain our sense of human community as the poet, T.S. Eliot said: There is no life except that of community. We need to expose the deadly fallacies of material growth and military might, state terrorism and constant competition that are incorporated in government policies and agreements. While we do this we work in solidarity, side by side, creating the better possible world, together. This slow work – quietly away from the mass rallies and peace walks – I feel strongly is very important but I also feel the pressure of time.....running out as our world changes around us! So let's get to it!

WHO TAKES CHARGE? WOMEN TAKE CHARGE!

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GATS, privatization, health and education in Canada

Notes for presentation to Conference in Cologne, Germany, May 9-11, 2003.

By Theresa Wolfwood, Barnard-Boecker Centre Foundation, Victoria, BC, CANADA

I would like to thank you for inviting me here and I bring greetings from sisters and colleagues in Canada and in movements there. We are here today and we are not alone! Many thanks, Maria and all the workers, for made this important gathering possible. Ellen Dietrich's display is excellent; do take time to look at it. And some of these banners were made by my banner teacher, Thalia Campbell of Wales, and it is great to connect with her here.

Back in the 1980's when we suddenly told we could not afford a government that served society; we had to be "lean and competitive", there was a panel on the then being negotiated Free Trade Agreement of Canada-USA. The fashionable fallacy, "There is No Alternative" was posed to the panellists. A Nicaraguan said: For us, Canada is the Alternative. You have an equitable society with structures and services for your people that we seek to achieve.

Alas, Nicaraguans are struggling to just exist, now, after a USA backed war and economic disasters wrought by USA backed politicians and global institutions. And in Canada, we are also seeing the loss of our enviable achievements in social justice and services. Only now do we realize that a right gained, must be a right, constantly maintained. The latest assault on our society comes via GATS.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services is a further development of "free trade" as advanced by the World Trade Organization. In its 2000 version, it covers all transactions by governments, going well beyond the free movement of resources, goods and currency under WTO, NATFTA and the proposed FTAA.

It intrudes into the basic services that many of us, particularly Canadians, have believed are the responsibility of government to its electorate, the citizens. All government regulations re services and supply of services are subject to GATS scrutiny. Government services that are part of a range that includes private services are subject to GATS- particularly if they can be seen to be in competition. It is designed to grow and expand its scope.

Even our enthusiastic WTO ambassador admits that it includes many areas previously considered as national only. And it will be difficult for later governments to undo much of GATS commitment by a previous government. This really implies a drastic threat to democracy and citizens' ability to affect policy change through elections and laws at all levels. In Canada international agreements signed by the national government have profound and specific effects on the provincial and municipal levels. In Canada, provinces are responsible for health, education and much environmental legislation.

But the Canadian government is one of the major players in these agreements and is willing to sacrifice national and regional rights for the right of Canadian companies to get in anywhere in the world and let others into Canada – all to make a profit on what we have traditionally believed was the justification of our civil service – in other words to serve the people. I think that belief exists in many countries and we just beginning to realize that governments are willing accomplices in global corporate plunder of our commons – our very air, water, land, wisdom, our hard earned social services and fabric of life, and our freedom of association and community are all up for grabs in trade agreements.

I live in a mountainous land of clear streams and abundant rivers, Canadians are threatened by pressure from USA to make water into a sell out commodity, along with hydroelectricity, already a big export. We light up Seattle and New York. And once in place, these exports, commoditisation of our commons, are irreversible under trade agreements – we have known this since NAFTA, but the hose pipe is only now snaking across the border and corporate hands are on the tap.

Two years ago, my province, BC, elected a right wing neoliberal government that is happily embracing privatization, foreign buy-outs of resources etc. It has just sold off 1500 jobs in our public electricity to a multi-national corporation, Accenture, supposedly to cut costs as it eliminates union jobs and opens up other areas for privatization as BC now encourages private generation of power for the system. This mix will make the whole service vulnerable to total GATS rulings and privation for profit. Accenture operates around the world and claims in airport ADs that it has profitably "out sourced British Petroleum" as well as parts of the Government of France.

GATS opens up all our public services for corporate and foreign opportunism – what Fredric Clairmont (TWR Jan/Feb./03) calls "Casino Capitalism" and we know the house always wins! It certainly threatens health, education, utilities and other public services by ruling that governments may not protect public services or private services provided by local companies. Our forty year old universal one-tier health system is being eroded by the greed of corporations, added by governments that implement

GATS and other agreements for them. The results in Canada are similar to those described in Germany yesterday, poor service, closures of facilities and long patient waits, shorter hospital stays and privatization of support services.

Already under existing agreements accompanied by funding cuts that cause poor service to show that “public healthcare doesn’t work”, a favourite neoliberal government strategy, many aspects of health in a broad and public sense have been severely compromised: patenting laws and the protection of brand drugs curtails access to AIDs and other medications for many; the lack of control of, indeed government enthusiasm for, food irradiation; unregulated industrial toxins; and GM crops with little regard of the environmental health or the effects on life (in Europe you have the precautionary principle); the corporate pressure to use hormones in beef and dairy cattle; the problem of limiting tobacco and tobacco advertising; the use of additives in car gasoline; and recently in BC, a new law allowing the use of sewage on land with little or no testing or monitoring for health hazards. And more and more services and drugs for seniors are removed from healthcare funding – eye examinations, cyst removals, some hernias, and most alternate treatments – naturopathy, traditional Chinese medicine etc.

Canada has universal health care through a government administered insurance fund, with joint provincial-federal administration. It is broad in its coverage, but has never included dentists or home use drug, except for some senior citizens, or all forms of non-traditional medicine. We, along with the only other country in the hemisphere to have such an excellent system, Cuba, have some of the best health statistics in the world. Canada, (but not the USA) ratified the UN DHR of 1948, that health is human right and a public resource for community well being, a part of our precious commons. We have in our Health Act the recognition that many factors contribute to health, including prevention and public health as well as individual health care and work against diseases caused by social, environmental and occupational hazards, much of the substance of UN accords on health is supposed to take precedent over conflicting content in other agreements, but there is no monitoring or regulation of adherence to this accord. There is no reference to respecting Human Rights obligations in WTO, NAFTA, or GATS, and dispute settlement do not refer to Human Rights commitments in fact, rule against health considerations – as in Canada being forced to extend its patent protection for drug companies for 20 years, for an added cost of millions to Canadians in higher drug prices. Canada challenged and lost its case against French import ban on Asbestos – a singular and rare case of consideration for health. Let’s be clear, our Canadian government is the world’s biggest booster of these international agreements.

Canada is promoting the export of Canadian health services, yet this position opens Canada to foreign health corporations. Canadians have for many years said that the preservation of our health care is the most important issue of government and our rulers pretend to agree while cutting funding and complaining that we just cannot afford our “overburdened healthcare system. We can afford however to ruin the health of people in Afghanistan and subsidize military industries (the one acceptable form of subsidy under trade agreements). We already have private healthcare – dentistry, drugs, various forms of alternative medicine and some private for-profit services, and private/public care for the infirm elderly; some of this is covered by private insurance schemes by employers etc. Cost cuts have resulted in employee lay-off and cuts to hospitals beds and hospital closures in BC, and privatizing many services – from food to laundry to waste disposal; all these measures are possible threats to public health. Poorly paid non-union contract employees are less likely to have good training and on-the-job supervision. These are also areas that can be opened by GATS to foreign corporations; particularly administration services which are computerized can be done any where. Already there have been cases of betrayal of confidentiality of patient records in privatized services.

I want to note that not only Canadians feel strongly about accessible universal health care. Health workers in El Salvador have been on strike for eight months. They have successfully halted the privatization process of the public healthcare system. They have received the support of the Salvadoran people, who have come out in the hundreds of thousands for six mass marches against privatization. Over the course of the strike, dozens of doctors and healthcare workers have been fired for strike-related activities, and thousands have gone for seven months without a pay check. The Salvadoran government has used riot police to break up picket lines and raid striking hospitals, and some 60 strikers and supporters have been arrested over the course of the strike. The ARENA party President has vetoed a bill by the parliament, now dominated by FMLN, that would recognize the unions’ demands, protect healthcare and compensate the striking health workers, supported by 80% of citizens. The strike and action continues by a broad coalition of political and social movements until next year’s presidential election.

In Canada we also face threats to healthcare- but doctors aren’t on strike yet, they rarely show solidarity with other health workers. Ever since we signed free trade agreements with USA, its profiteering medical corporations have looked hungrily at Canada’s healthcare system – while at the same time a minority of USA citizens have looked longingly at it! And GATS officials are looking at rules that call public services unacceptable subsidies.

GATS has never attracted the profile or attention given by Canadian activists to FTA, NAFTA, FTAA, WTO or MAI. We defeated the MAI in 1988, but many of its planks are being nailed in GATS. Secrecy and obscurity are the friends of corporations and complicit governments and we in the civil society have to reveal and shine the spotlight on the implications of GATS – that is why this conference is such a good action, we need to take it back to our communities, we can stop anything if we inform, unite and act! There is much resistance to privatization and neoliberalism, even if it is not clear that these privilege power plays are backed by GATS, people know what is wrong! Or as we say in BC, (premier) Campbell’s Cuts hurt! We are too busy fighting back on many issues, yet an understanding of GATS is essential to our strategy and we have much work to do.

Many other concerns about public health – including our ability to handle epidemics and major environmental problems, like sewage disposal and water safety, are compromised by lack of support at all government levels. Many services are privatized and lack facilities, will and qualified personnel. Neoliberal governments sell off services and assets in order to have that sacred goal, a balanced budget that corporations demand, along with lower taxes for business.

To cut taxes for the rich means to cut services for all. The universality of our healthcare system, administered by provinces, is threatened. The workers do not get tax relief yet they face higher costs for basic services while social benefits for the poor, jobless, disabled and elderly are cut and cut again.

Sounds familiar? I am sure it does to Germans – did you not recently privatise your postal service? You have the highest postal rates in the world. 10 million South Africans lost their water because of privatization and its exorbitant price – and suffer epidemics of cholera and diarrhoea. They say they did not fight for liberation so that their services and resources could be sold off to highest bidder!

Canada's universal healthcare system is indeed in danger because we have governments that are little more than foot soldiers for the captains of industry. Once Canadian companies start selling health services abroad and we allow foreign companies to profit from Canadian privatized health, no trade agreement, including GATS, will protect the unarmed civilian population in this war on our commons.

Partnership with private companies in building health facilities has saved money for Canadian governments only in the short range. In the end debt payments have made these projects more expensive than if the governments borrowed the funds in the first place and owned the project from the beginning. After all, corporations want to make profits; the public service does not need profit to serve people with their own money. That is what taxes are for. When will we start selling our blood and body parts as others are forced to?

The Canadian government quietly support the biotech industry to push GM food abroad and to improve its image in Canada with no regard or independent research on long range health effects of GM. And there is a persistent lobby to introduce GM wheat to Canada, ruinous to our export markets and to the health of Canadian farms.

In BC the government has refused to negotiate with many unions, including health workers, and passed bill allowing legislated back to work, a policy that has been condemned by the International Labour Organization. Some health workers have taken cuts in ages and benefits to keep their jobs. In Alberta and Ontario, private for-profit hospitals being touted as the answer to healthcare problems and will open the door of healthcare to domestic and foreign profit makers under GATS and NAFTA to enter Canada and to claim Canadian health insurance payments for services to Canadians in the USA. In Canada our health care is 9.5% of our GNP while in privatized forever USA it is 14% says no less an authority than Canada's health minister, Allan Rock.

We know from experience of others, look at the results of privatized prisons in Australia, power and water from South Africa to Philippines, that costs will escalate and quality will deteriorate when services become a market commodity. Promoting individualism in the name of privatization and the destruction of universality will only weaken democracy and an equitable basis for all citizens in a cooperative community. If this is what our governments want, we have to stop them! Canada under NAFTA is becoming more and more a supplier for the American project of global domination at any cost, including domestic poverty, world domination of resources and the propagation of a mutant life style based on competition and consumption.

For women, the results of all these bureaucratic and international machinations are clear, personal and often devastating. Women are most dependent on health services, are the majority of health workers, and are the caregivers at home when public service fails. We are most vulnerable to commoditisation of health service, we will not only loss are health and income, but our independence and place in society.

Health and education both suffer from decreases in funding. At the university level, little independent research can be done on areas of health concern. We see more and more corporate research funding, including military money, and the results and their availability are owned by funders; a severe compromise of academic freedom.

The privatization of knowledge including the patenting of everything from life forms to public university research is a threat to the global commons of shared life, experience and wisdom. The cyber net, a commons of communication and knowledge for social movements and public education is under global scrutiny because it works too well. Canada is considering charging for Email because the postal corporation sees it as a threat to its profit-making ability.

We know that when we go to a university campus, one of the first things to note is: is it a Pepsi or Coke campus? Both the Cologne universities I have spoken at, including this one, are Coke campuses. Our universities have made monopoly deals with these companies, for a payment and a contract; the company gets exclusive sales of its drinks, including bottled water – Dasini or Aqua Fina – and soon Coke's new "milk drinks". That's how desperate for money universities are! The University of Victoria now sells advertising space – in the toilets, ending years of an AD-free environment. Rooms and whole buildings in some universities are being named after corporate donors, who usually get an honorary degree thrown in for the CEO, free of charge! The sudden and

steep increase in student fees, (30% at UVIC in 2003) another source of replacing cuts in government funding, will soon mean that only students of privilege can go to university or others who accept a debt load for years after graduation. Women who earn 72% of men for the same work in Canada will have an added burden of debt repayment and less opportunity to even attend university.

My friend who has a child in elementary school was horrified to learn that a special class on traffic safety would be conducted by – Ronald MacDonald! She was even more horrified when she spoke to other parents about her concern and they thought it was just fine! So the corporate ideology and façade of goodwill in our education is visible and acceptable – a dangerous perception that leads to greater influence.

Canada has a tradition of public schools side by side with private schools – ranging from religious to Anglophile elite establishments that continue to produce the leaders of industry and government to alternate schools, like Waldorf and Montessori. We do yet have “for profit” schools that are being promoted in the USA or what their proponents call “independent” schools vs. “government” schools. Edison Corporation runs over 100 schools in the USA, when they fail due to enormous salaries paid to their executives, the public sector has to pick up the loss and the school. A private USA company has just been awarded the contract to run Iraqi education (Creative International Association Inc.), “fast food” schools for the land where writing, science and literature began. They will get \$62M USA from USAID whose stated purpose is to expand democracy and free markets. We can see war, globalization and philanthropy are in one neat package!

Corporate interest in Canada for lower education costs and tax breaks for the rich have an ideological influence. Schools are forced to stick to “basics” while “frills” like music, art, health and life skills classes are cut. We are all inured to children selling (corporate) chocolate bars in order to fund music or other “frills”. Corporate donations of electronic equipment and biased and dishonest teaching materials are compromising student ability to think critically and create a tolerance for corporate advertising disguised as charity. The corporate ideology of producing willing consumers and a flexible work force is replacing the educational aims of good citizenship and participation in a democratic society. The world’s largest retailer, Wal-Mart, is heavily into school funding – can the University of Wal-Mart with departments of union busting, sweatshop labour and community destruction be far behind?

Class sizes have increased in BC and Ontario, while budgets continue to shrink. Ontario, Canada’s largest and richest province has \$2.3 B less for education in 2002 than in 1995! In the USA, where schools have commercial TV shopping programming in return for equipment, fast food chains and monopoly colas the process of a “creeping coup d’etat” on public education, as Ralph Nader calls it, is more widespread, but Canada is usually only 5 years behind the USA in changes, and we have the same, mainly USA based, corporations and lack of adequate funds. Already one BC school district is putting ADs on report cards while teachers in Canada spend between \$500-1000 (highest in BC) of their own money for basic equipment that the schools cannot provide.

In Canada we see the closing of many rural schools. In BC the sale of alcohol is privatized and made available in shops in small communities. Six year old children must ride in a school bus for 50 km. daily, but our government, led by a convicted drunk driver, believes “that a man should not have to drive 20 km to buy a bottle of whiskey!”

So far, GATS itself has not intruded much on our education but the provisions of GATS and our governments enthusiasm for exporting education services and its corporate love of budget cut for services and tax cuts for the rich makes us vulnerable. Already the services within education – from office work to cleaning- have been separated from the education definition and can be easily privatized locally, making them open to GATS challenges. In BC some school districts have become corporations under new BC laws; they can make a profit and export schooling, as they already do to Asia. They can copyright materials and information – and then sell, rather than share it as in the past: an assault on our knowledge commons and another opening for GATS challenges.

And a word about our other NAFTA partner – Mexico - where poverty levels have doubled since NAFTA, 42% live in poverty now. 750,000 farm workers lost their jobs in 2003 because of dumping of USA food – can they afford books, fees and equipment of schools for their children? Education has suffered with three cuts in already meagre spending by Fox’s government and the doors are open for privatization and corporate penetration. It is a sad contrast to Cuba with the highest levels of literacy and achievement in schools in Latin America.

The particular role of women in the work against an increasingly aggressive, corporate world is a very important one. We need to recognize the global force of the USA is imposing global domination by a willing coalition of complicit governments and corporations. Henry Kissinger said: Globalization is just another word for USA domination. Globalization via WTO- GATS and military oppression must be seen as a threat to the commons of wisdom, resources, and cooperation that we women, as ecofeminists, community workers and justice and peace activists, must resist. The burden placed on women who will provide the domestic labour of health care as our health systems cut hospital care and long terms stays of the infirm and disabled will be an added layer of work. Women’s jobs in clerical, administration, school teaching and service support work – cleaning and cooking etc. become privatized, subject to lower pay or lay-off. Women generally have less seniority because of family life and are the first to be fired. In education we will have to support our young people to learn the value of common values of community, peace-

building and ecological sustainability to counteract the corporate influence in schools that will emphasize individualism, consumerism and competition.

We have seen a civil service replaced by servile governments. What happened? We need to look back to understand global forces in recent history. At the end of the “Cold War”, after we recovered from our naivety that things were fine now, we were confronted by the power of the USA, the world’s only superpower, a corporate-run government. As Ralph Nader says that is the permanent USA government, the provisional government is the one USAns think they elect. The Soviet Union was in tatters and ripe for plucking. But after that there were no new frontiers for the expansion imperative of capitalism, no new continents to conquer. (Except outer space - that is another speech about the so-called Ballistic Missile Defence). So they decided to invade our commons – nature, history, shared wisdom and communication, our community and society structures or how we share our resources and help one another.

The corporate agenda calls for more profit production from this new wealth; this requires complicit governments, be they democracies or dictatorships. They pay to elect their chosen collaborators, who in turn reduce corporate taxes and negotiate the conditions for global pillage – known as trade agreements and international fiscal institutions. Governments get less, tax, so they sell off public assets to their buddies; curtail services to make them less attractive and ripe for privatization. The corporations buy them up cheap with the money they made on their tax cuts and we lose our commons. Smart,eh?

Our daily task of community and family care giving will increase as governments shift to a corporate model that leaves only the power of militarization to governments after the ruling elites have stripped us of our public assets. The corporate agenda wants governments to only have the power to maintain internal order and support the military. Trade agreements protect that power and through military agreements like NATO and a constant state of war mania they help military industries to grow and reap massive profits. Trade agreements deliberately ignore and excuse – and encourage, some would say, much of the world’s trade.

It is necessary to see what trade is excluded from agreements. The arms trade is explicitly exempt from regulation in trade agreements, in fact, leaving only the military industry as a recipient of government subsidy and support. So it is to the advantage of governments to foment war and help the arms industry - a major source of election funds - often disguised as civilian industry. It is easier to get a gun than a water pump in much of the world.

Also ignored in trade agreements is the massive global trade in many illicit substances and products, from drugs, like cocaine and heroin, which funds wars in Afghanistan to Vietnam to Colombia and the movement in endangered flora and fauna that enrich chemical and drug companies.

For women a major concern is the unregulated, rarely acknowledged trade in human life. Woman in the sex trade, by dire necessity or fraudulent coercion, domestic workers, bonded serfs really, go to richer countries, peasants lose their land, women leave rural areas to slave in sweatshops producing luxury items for the minority world. These women have no trade agreements to protect them. As a result of poverty and oppression in one country, often linked to the drug and arms trade, there is massive movement of people around the world. Those who enter other countries outside the law are extremely vulnerable to abuse and violence. Unprotected migrant labour, mainly women, is encouraged by governments where the home countries depend on their returned wages to contribute to foreign currency while the women remain poor and vulnerable. Globalization favours the use of lowest possible pay for labour in an increasingly polarized world, capital moves with elaborate protection; people move with none. Some say that globalization and its institutions not only create the global trade in people, but needs it for cheap, disposal and movable labour. The spoils of war include sex slaves and slave labour and soldiers, mainly women and children. And rich societies benefit from illegal workers and sweatshop production. Militarization, drug production and use and human exploitation break down families and societies, even countries, making cohesive social action and political organization impossible in the areas of greatest impact – another benefit for the ruling elite. The German historian, Clausiwitz, said: War is just business by other means.

There is a direct connection from the power of globalization – domination driven by the lust for power – which causes the violence of poverty, poor health, lack of water, education and community security to, if deemed necessary for the recalcitrant, (especially those sitting on oil, mineral or other wealth), the use of war as the ultimate expression of power. War and economic instability and increasing poverty under globalization contribute to increasing women’s poverty first. They are also responsible for increased murder and abuse of women and girl children. Sexual violence is indeed a weapon of war and civil breakdown. Women everywhere, including Canada, are paid less for the same work, are the first to be fired and in many cultures easier than men to exploit on the job. 70% of the world’s poor – and ever increasing- are women and children. It is the fate of women to have to rebuild lives, families, food production and community after wars – and we live in a state of perpetual war. We in the minority world struggle to save our local commons and communities while trying to work in solidarity with our sisters of the majority world

Many of us are exhausted from months of opposing a war for the fuel of globalization. We carried the heavy stone of inevitability in our guts, knowing that we in our millions would not stop this plunder and conquest. But we did create a greater deeper global movement in which women are the leaders and most of the workers. We have learned that we cannot have a one war peace movement, a one river environmental movement or a one trade agreement democracy movement. We know that war is the ultimate

action of the globalizers and that war preparations rob the world of resources, destroy the environment and society, and that women in the end are left the job of rebuilding and restoring what is left of the commons and society. We see that all our struggles are one, even as in different places we must focus on different concerns; we build solidarity, strength and communication in our shared work.

Now is the time to see the connections as clearly as Colonel Peters of the USA military when he wrote: **"There will be no peace. At any given moment for the rest of our lifetime, there will be multiple conflicts in mutating forms around the globe. Violent conflict will dominate the headlines, but cultural and economic struggles will be steadier and ultimately more decisive. The de facto role of the US armed forces will be to keep the world safe for our economy and open to our cultural assault. To those ends, we will do a fair amount of killing."** I think we can prove him wrong if we build on our connections and shared wisdom.

I have presented the problems and the issues today from my Canadian perspective; I know it is a gloomy picture, but tomorrow we will discuss our vision, our dreams, and our work in the panel on "Resistance and Alternatives Perspectives". We can rejoice in our shared joys and take time to enjoy the gifts of life.

In the words of my friend, the Malaysian activist, Irene Fernandez:
WHO TAKES CHARGE? WOMEN TAKE CHARGE!

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