

# From Cancun to the Miami FTAA Mobilization: Victory's Strategic Momentum

by Starhawk

Those of us who went to Cancun to protest the World Trade Organization's ministerial came back with pinkeye, exhaustion, deep coughs, and heat rashes, but the rosy flush of victory made all the rest worthwhile. Sweet victory is rare in progressive, political work. Generally, we end a mobilization reminding ourselves that we are working for long term change, while the policies we are contesting remain in force. Seldom do we get to dance in the streets, celebrating an immediate collapse of some undemocratic negotiation or unjust institution.

Cancun was a double victory. First, the collapse of the WTO ministerial, occasioned by the walkout of countries from the global south, instigated by Kenya. The many actions inside and outside the conference center, in the streets and around the world, and the powerful act of protest by Lee Hyung-Hai who took his own life at the barricades, created an atmosphere in which the delegates from developing countries could take a strong stand strong. Only because of the actions, delegates told us, did they feel they had the support they needed to resist the bullying tactics of the U.S. and E.U, who refused to consider the agricultural issues which are vital to the survival of farmers and indigenous cultures throughout the south, but were pushing for expanded access for investors to the resources of the developing world. The investment rules under discussion could have opened Mexico's forests to unbridled logging, removed the ecological certification that many indigenous communities in the area have worked hard to achieve, privatized communal lands, fisheries and energy resources, and opened services, and water resources to further privatization. The walkout prevented the WTO from opening new rounds of agreements that would have even more deeply undermined the rights of countries to enact regulations protecting their environment and resources, and labor force.

Second, Cancun brought together activists from the global south and the more affluent north, from a broad spectrum of groups—campesinos, workers, indigenous people, Mexican students, NGOs, peace and ecology groups, and internationals. These groups had different organizing styles, political cultures, histories, cultures and languages.

Vast differences in privilege and painful historical relationships of oppression separated some of us, yet we were able to take action together, support each other, and come away with strengthened alliances and deepened respect.

To understand the depth of this victory, we need to think back to the political climate just four years ago, before the Seattle ministerial. At that time, the WTO and the forward march of neoliberal policies seemed unstoppable, and to question them at all was to ally with flat-earthers and others who just didn't get Progress. Now, the most ambitious institution of globalization, the WTO, has been stopped in its tracks.

Yet there were some progressive voices who warned against shutting down the ministerial. George Monbiot, writing in *The Guardian* on September 2, said, "The combination of (the rich countries) broken promises and their outrageous terms could force the weaker governments to walk out of the trade talks in Cancun, just as they did in Seattle in 1999. They must know that this will mean the end of the World Trade Organization. And this now appears to be their (the U.S. and E.U.) aim. Subverted and corrupted as the WTO is, it remains a multilateral body in which the poor nations can engage in collective bargaining and, in theory, outvote the rich."

He admits, however, that "This never happens, because the rich nations have bypassed its decision-making structures."

A subverted, corrupted, institution, which continually promises advancement to the poor while actually making rules that favor the rich, is not an effective instrument for advancing the agenda of developing countries or anyone else except profit-making transnationals. Holding on to some faint hope of its transformation would be a waste of energy and expose the world to the grave danger that the WTO would continue to extend its destructive policies while we await its potential democratic moment.

But Monbiot's warnings should not be ignored. Cancun will not be a victory for developing countries if they are left to the tender mercies of Robert Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative, or Senator Charles Grassley, head of the Senate Finance Committee, who have promised to shut dissenters out of U.S. favor. Poorer countries can be picked off one by one, maneuvered into bilateral or regional agreements in which they have limited bargaining power. It will not be a victory for working people, farmers, students, or the rapidly eroding middle classes of the U.S. if corporations remain free to 'race to the bottom,' roaming the globe in search of the lowest labor costs and most lax environmental standards. The upcoming summit in Miami November 19-21 for the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the FTAA, will be the next major test of the global corporate agenda. With the failure to achieve a global corporate governance through the WTO, regional trade agreements become even more important. To build on and extend the victory of Cancun, we need a major mobilization in Miami.

The FTAA would extend NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, throughout the hemisphere. Its draft includes the same extension of investors' power that was under dispute in the WTO, the same push toward privatization and commercialization of services, and a clause which allows corporations to sue governments if they enact environmental, labor or safety standards or other regulations which cut into profits.

The same splits between rich and poor, north and south, exist in the FTAA as were present in Cancun. Brazil is already talking about a counter-draft. The developing countries may pressure for reforms or revisions, but they could also walk out of the negotiations. If they do, the FTAA too can be derailed before it is ever put into place.

What happens on the street in Miami is vitally important. A second walkout, so soon after Cancun, would change the global configurations of power. It would be another strike against the Bush administration's falling prestige, and a heavy body-blow to the whole project of corporate globalization. For developing countries to take this step that

could provoke enormous retaliation from Bush's bully boys, they need to know that there is strong opposition within the north and especially, the U.S. The place to effectively demonstrate that opposition is on the street.

We need numbers: masses of people in Miami itself, gathering together where they can be seen and counted, where the media will be focused, and where they can directly affect the delegates and the summit. And along with legal, permitted marches and forums, we need actions that go beyond: acts that directly withdraw our consent from the summit and the policies it represents, broad based nonviolent direct actions that attempt to disrupt and derail these undemocratic proceedings.

Such a mobilization is indeed underway. United for Peace and Justice, the huge antiwar coalition that formed in opposition to the invasion of Iraq, is calling on its membership to join in mass nonviolent direct action. Labor is mobilizing, and expressing support for direct action as well as for a massive march. The broad range of groups that have continued to organize around global economic issues, from NGOs to anti-capitalists, will be there. Miami has the potential to surpass Seattle in the breadth and depth of a mobilization that can reunite 'teamsters and turtles' and link different facets of the movement, forge new alliances and strengthen old ones, deepen the commitment of those awakened to activism by the Iraq war and reenergize those who have been on the front lines for years.

Mobilizations are also crucibles, where we forge the tools to build that new world we keep saying is possible. We enact our vision of what that world would be. We provide food, shelter, medical care, legal support, education and access to information. We carry our creativity into the street with drums and puppets and dance. In mobilizing, we claim an autonomous space, in which we create a temporary but real new society that makes visible the world we want to create.

Miami will not be an easy place to mobilize. We are likely to face hostility from local reactionary forces and possible police repression. Already the city council is considering an ordinance that would outlaw everything from bandannas to puppets to cameras.

But our movement has matured in the four years since Seattle. We have vastly more experience in organizing these actions and in facing potential repression. We have learned hard and important lessons about how to hold the tension of our differences and still act together in solidarity.

And because we have allies inside, our job is strategically easier. In fact, just by showing up in Miami, we create a dilemma for the opposition.

For if we are allowed to carry out our actions without repression, we will make a strong statement to the delegates inside and to the world, and create a climate of support for the developing countries to walk out of the negotiations.

But if the delegates are sequestered behind steel fences in a militarized zone, every closed gate and checkpoint will put the lie to the myth that these policies promote democracy or general well being. Every blow of a police baton, every cloud of tear gas, will strengthen the world's perception that the U.S. can only carry out these policies by

using brute force to quell dissent.

That is not always of immediate comfort if you are the one on the wrong side of the police baton. What does help, in the face of violence, is preparation and training, which we will offer to all who come, the support of our companero/as and the strength of our group solidarity. In Miami, we have time to prepare, to orchestrate the political and practical support we need. We encourage people to form affinity groups now, to come with your friends and allies, or to come early and form groups there that can stand together in action. And it is also possible that we will not face major police violence. In Cancun, we expected police repression. Two years before, students protesting the World Economic Forum were brutally beaten. This time, police avoided beating or arresting demonstrators, and treated us overall with respect.

The Miami mobilization will include safe and legal ways to protest. Direct action also requires support people, to play vitally important roles that do not expose them to the risk of arrest or police violence.

And when we refuse to be intimidated, when we stand up to fear, we claim back political space in which democracy can flourish. We announce to Bush, Ashcroft, and all the rest of them that they cannot take away our rights, sell off our resources, take away our livelihoods and undermine our communities without a struggle. We feel good about ourselves, and we provide an example of courage that can inspire others.

So come to Miami if you can, November 17-21. If you don't think you can, think again. If work or school responsibilities are keeping you away, consider whether you will continue to have a job or whether any public support for education will be left if these policies go unchallenged. If you can't afford to come, ask your community to chip in money to help with your transportation and living expenses. If you truly cannot come yourself, help someone else to get there, from your home community or from the global south.

And after Miami, go on to Fort Benning Georgia to protest the School of the Americas, November 22-23, where the U.S. military trains torturers and assassins for Latin America.

Miami is a strategic moment to make a stand. We have every chance of building on the victories of Cancun and Seattle, and extending them to deepen the alliances we need to build a fair and democratic system in the U.S. and around the globe.

Check the following websites for information:

[www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org)

[www.stopftaa.org](http://www.stopftaa.org)

[www.ftaaresistance.org](http://www.ftaaresistance.org)

[www.peoplesconsultation.org](http://www.peoplesconsultation.org)

[www.asje.org/march.html](http://www.asje.org/march.html)

Resources for nonviolent direct action training:

[www.rantcollective.org](http://www.rantcollective.org)

Information on the Green Bloc and permaculture plans for Miami:

[www.adoptanactivist.org](http://www.adoptanactivist.org)

NGOs organizing educational and permitted events:

[www.citizenstrade.org](http://www.citizenstrade.org)

<http://flfairtrade.org>

(**NOTE:** pages will open in a new browser window)

To link up with the Pagan Cluster, join the Living River listserve: Email [livriv-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:livriv-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) and put 'subscribe' in the subject heading.

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