

Why You Should Come to Cancun

By Starhawk

From September 10-15, the World Trade Organization will attempt to hold a ministerial in Cancun, Mexico. They will be opposed by campesinos, students, international activists, NGOs, and a strong contingent of the Mayan Gods and Goddesses (at least, in the form of giant puppets.) Here's why you should be there, too, if you possibly can—or in one of the many support actions around the globe if you can't get to Cancun itself.

The WTO is the most ambitious and far-reaching of the various trade agreements and institutions that have codified and imposed corporate globalization on a reluctant world. The WTO's reach is global, and its power immense. It is, in a sense, an institution of global governance, making rulings that override the laws we make as citizens and that establish parameters for our policies not just on trade but on how we will feed and educate our children, care for our sick and elderly, provide for our common security, reward those who labor, develop or conserve our resources, and interact with our environment. Its agreements are hammered out in meetings which are not open to the public and in which the rich and industrialized countries hold inordinate power, and its rulings on disputes are made in secret tribunals by trade bureaucrats who are not accountable to the public, and who provide no public record of their deliberations.

On the agenda for this ministerial are some of the basic issues of life: food, agriculture, services. To simplify the complexities of tariffs and subsidies and all the rest of it, the vision put forth by the corporate globalizers is like a bad science fiction film. In their version of the world, no country will produce its own food, devote common resources to provide for human needs or the nurturing of the next generation. All food will be grown in large, industrialized farms for export, using chemicals and herbicides on patented, genetically engineered crops that are further packaged, irradiated, branded, and shrink-wrapped before being sold to you at your corner large corporate supermarket. Profit, not health or sustainability, will be the determining factor in agriculture as in every area of human endeavor. Should you get sick from the chemicals, a privatized medical establishment will minister to your every need as long as you can pay, just as you will pay for your drinking water and your children's private school. And not through taxes, those subversive drains on the rewards of economic aggression, but through simple fees for the privatized services which can now be more 'fairly' distributed: that is, those who have money will get them, those who don't, well, hell, they don't deserve them anyway. Every service that human beings have provided for each other or organized governments to provide will now be privatized and become arenas for corporate profit-making—from teaching our children to running our prisons. The single exception, the last remaining role for government, is the police and military—and private security companies are even making inroads into that. A small elite will hold all the power and the bulk of the world's wealth, and for the rest of us, the

maquiladora, the prison, or a fine career in the military await. Environmental standards, labor laws, worker safety—forget all that!

The vast majority of us don't see that world as desirable. We hold another vision, one that has something to do with community, with valuing human relationships of caring and nurturing, with a love for nature and the diversity and wonder of life. We want a world where everybody has enough: healthy, organic, locally grown food, clean water, comfortable shelter, opportunities to express our creativity and realize our dreams. We know that world is possible. We would like to get on with creating it, with healing the planet, raising our kids, and planting our gardens. But in order to do even these simple things we need to stand up and fight. And the place to do that is Cancun.

The Cancun ministerial has every chance of failing. The project of U.S. global hegemony has become so blatant and aggressive that it has alarmed even our allies. The U.S. is at odds with the E.U. on agriculture and other issues. The less developed countries are tired of being dictated to by the U.S. and the E.U. There is rebellion in the ranks, and we can further that with a massive presence in the streets.

Moreover, there's currently a rift in the ruling classes, a subtle but real difference between the corporatists, who want to see corporate rule backed by U.S. military power, and the militarists, who want to see U.S. military hegemony, backed by corporate wealth. Take this simple test:

Do you believe the purpose of life is:

- A. To produce corporate profit.
- B. To produce weapons and consolidate military power.
- C. Any of the following: love, human relationship; , art; beauty; balance; harmony with the natural world; spiritual growth; to live in praiseful relationship with the sacred; fun; freedom; a mystery that no one can define.

If you checked C, you need to be on the streets somewhere when the WTO meets. We need a mobilization approaching the scale of February 15, in Cancun and around the world. It is time for the world's second superpower, the aroused ordinary people of the planet, to raise our voices again. This ministerial could become the third failure in a row. The Seattle ministerial dissolved in dissension, and the meeting two years ago in Qatar was merely a sequestered holding action. A WTO failure in Cancun would be a serious and possibly fatal setback for the WTO as an institution, and the entire project of global corporate rule.

In Cancun, we need numbers to fill the streets and to counter a very challenging tactical situation. A small turnout in Cancun could lead the globalizers to the mistaken conclusion that the people of the world have ceased to care about their activities. With large numbers, we can derail the meeting. Without numbers, our role will be merely symbolic, although still important. Cancun is expensive and hard to get to, very far away from most centers of population in Mexico. If you can't come to Cancun yourself, students and campesinos need support to get there, and there will be mobilizations at

borders and in cities around the world.

There will be forums beginning on September 8th, days of action starting on the 9th, and a legal march on the 13th. Ecologists and permaculturalists from the US and Mexico are working to set up the campgrounds as models of sustainability. Cancun is a chance to connect and meet with people from around the globe who are working for the same values of life and freedom.

So come if you can, and if you can't, help someone else get there. Organize an event in your home town, or join one of the local or regional mobilizations. This is a crucial moment in history, when the tide could turn. And the moon is rising. Come dance on the shore!

For our report on organizing in Cancun, and to donate to help students reach Cancun, see:

<http://rantcollective.org/>

For information and updates on Cancun:

Indymedia Cancun: <http://cancun.mediosindependientes.org/>

To find out about mobilizations and actions, or for suggestions for organizing your own: www.unitedforpeace.org (Scroll down to September 13 Global Day of Action.)

To donate online to help campesinos and indigenous people get to Cancun:

<http://www.unorca.org.mx/omc/ingles/donate.html>

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

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