

## THE NEW RADICALS

### The people who brought us Seattle have now done Washington. Are they dreamers or sly subversives?

By WALTER KIRN

MAYBE PART OF THE PROBLEM IS THE word. *Globalization*. It has a sinister ring, like a euphemism from the same technocrats who gave us "downsizing" during the Reagan years and "pacification" during Vietnam. The term conjures up a futuristic vision of vast, implacable economic processes steamrolling their way across the earth, levelling forests, languages and customs without regard for puny individuals. Globalization: right or wrong, it sounds unstoppable.

Which may be one reason so many people of so many different persuasions have sworn to stop it. The word itself throws down a challenge. The first mass uprising to meet that challenge occurred last year in Seattle, when 40,000 protesters from across the ideological map surrounded, shouted down and roundly embarrassed the assembled representatives of the World Trade Organization. In Seattle—a city whose name has since become a political rallying cry akin to “Chicago in 1968”—environmentalists, union members, human-rights crusaders and old-school populists locked their arms around a spinning globe and, at least for a moment, slowed it down.

They tried to do it again in Washington. Their target: a meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, two great institutions of global finance and, say critics, corporate dominion over the planet's poor and disfranchised. When the organizations met a year ago, about two dozen protesters showed up—barely enough to block a single limo. But mindful of Seattle's violence, D.C. cops last week shut down the demonstrators' “convergence” point (a warehouse) and came out in force. This time, they faced not dozens but thousands of demonstrators on the barricades, all joined by a feeling that the new world order is really a slick new version of the old one, ruled by Big Money and Big Government. On Saturday night alone, police arrested nearly 600 antiglobalists for “parading without a permit”. Thanks in large part to the Internet, which has allowed them to cement their bonds, air their grievances and swell their ranks, the activists have got their acts together, the clout of old-fashioned labour welded to the cybersaw of campus radicals. Their growing movement makes Hands Across America look like a game of ring-around-a-rosy.

A movement of whom toward what, though? That's the puzzle. What's the opposite of globalization? Socialism? Isolationism? Vegetarianism? The answer is all three things, and many more. The radical-chic outfit of the season is a coat of many colours. If you trained a license plate-reading surveillance satellite on Washington last week (or better yet, swept low in a black helicopter), you would have seen bumper stickers, signs and buttons promoting animal rights, organic farming and Pat Buchanan for President. You'd even have seen a soccer ball or two being kicked around by —this is real— something called the Anarchists Soccer League. (Q. How do anarchists score goals? A. Any way they damn well please.)

What you'd have had to look very hard to see in Washington was anyone resembling a leader. Because there isn't one, in the usual sense. No Abbie Hoffman. No Pat Robertson. Sure, Ralph Nader is wandering around, and so is satirical filmmaker Michael Moore, but they're not calling the shots or giving marching orders. The Mobilization for Global Justice isn't a top-down affair. Like the Internet itself, and unlike the coalition's corporate enemies, the antiglobalist movement is a body that manages to survive, and even thrive, without a head.

It has lots of arms instead, some of them stretching far out into cyberspace. “The Internet has helped people keep in touch in a shorter time frame”, says Chuck Munson, 34, who runs a website called Infoshop.org that acts as a meeting place for anarchists, who are notoriously hard to organize. “The advantage is that we can communicate with each other quickly”.

The Web breeds a sense of togetherness too, and togetherness is important to these activists, so many of whom have spent the last few decades of market capitalism *über alles* feeling more than a little isolated. “From my perspective, and I came out of the '60s”, says Carl Pope, the executive director of the Sierra Club, “Seattle was the first time where you saw multigeneration, multiclass and multi-issue in the streets together”. Pope remembers marchers hugging each other and a bracing moment when a group of young radicals gave a clenched-fist salute to several construction workers, who responded in kind.

This feeling of solidarity grew online long after the last splinters: of glass from Seattle's vandalized Starbucks had been cleaned up. While their foes were busy checking real-time quotes for Intel and GE, the antiglobalists were swapping digital photos of police brutality, reading Noam Chomsky's essays on media brainwashing and posting tips on defending against pepper spray (wear a handkerchief soaked in vinegar). The irony of all this is stark, and possibly galling to the technocrats: the Web was supposed to be globalism's great tool, not a forum for its enemies. The Web was supposed to weld together markets into one enormous worldwide trading floor, not organize thousands into picket lines.

Juliette Beck, 27, is as close to a bigwig as the movement has, but even she feels like a tiny link in the wired cosmos of antiglobalism. An organizer for Global Exchange, a San Francisco-based human-rights group, Beck arrived in Washington fresh from a 20-city road show that was organized largely via e-mail. “We got housing and food for rude people on the road”, she says. “The events and the non-violence training and the political theatre —the Internet made it possible”. Beck, who planned to demonstrate in costume along with 20 others in her “affinity group” (she was to play the Statue of Liberty, she said), takes pride in the movements branching, networked structure. “We have lots of Lilliputians all acting autonomously and at the same time connected”, she says.

It sounds like Utopia, like Oz's Munchkinland after Dorothy squashed the wicked witch and everyone jumped up from hiding to do a dance. "People are turning out because of the Internet -they don't have to be mobilized", says Beck. One motivator, oddly, is nostalgia, an emotion that at her computer last November poring over e-mail accounts of the frontline action. She instantly relayed the news to a list of about 100 other activists, who thrilled at each new shred of information. "Everyone got excited and wanted to sustain the momentum", she says. Soon new volunteers began appearing, eager for war stories of their very own.

Antiglobalism is big on campus, spawning standing-room-only classes and lectures and getting late risers out of bed at dawn to bone up on the arcana of Third World debt: relief. "It all ties back to economic injustice", says Vaughan, who marvels at how the movement has drawn in youthful nonconformists of every stripe. Keith Mann, an adjunct professor of history and sociology at DePaul, agrees that all the antiglobalist roads seem to converge on a single point. "The students feel they are the same ilk, but they're not sure why", he says. "In an age of diffuse power, this is something students can grab onto. The IMF and the World Bank are a clear and present power".

For the antiglobalists, an advantage to having no head is that your enemies can't lop it off. A disadvantage is having no single voice. Though the coalition is singing one song -*We Aren't the World*- let's call it-its hardly singing in harmony. Some protesters can't even agree about the purpose of the rally against the IMF. For Emily LaBarbera-Twarog, who works at the Midwest office of the Campaign for Labor Rights, the goal is "to stop the meeting from happening". For Vaughan the aim is "to-give us a voice at the table. We are not just fighting power", she says; "we are fighting specific policies". Munson's agenda is more sweeping: "We want to get rid of the World Bank".

The antiglobalists prove that you don't have to agree on what you're for to know what you're against. And one thing they're against, it seems, is agreement itself. Too monolithic, too uniform, too global. The protesters prefer debate, diversity. They'd like to teach the world to sing in off-key counterpoint. To their minds, the IMF and the World Bank are tyrannical choirmasters with steel batons and a tin ear for cultural differences. They finance mammoth industrial projects that sweep up hundreds of workers from the countryside, decimating small farms and villages while swelling urban slums. They bottle up small streams into huge lakes contained behind gigantic dams, and they steer the contracts for the dams' construction to American and European companies.

In some ways, the IMF protest was a reunion. It wasn't a replay, though. In Seattle, organized labour ran interference for the ragtag groups assembled behind it, marshalling several thousand union members who feared that free trade might send their jobs abroad. In Washington, labor focused on lobbying Congress over the China-trade issue, leaving the IMF and the World Bank to the ad hoc Netocracy. Munson, the anarchist, thinks ifs just as well. "The union heads are into a protectionist, nationalist agenda," he says. "They want to prevent China from entering the WTO. Our position is that we don't want the WTO to exist."

Not wanting things to exist is not a platform; its an attitude. But it will do, at least until something more positive comes along. Beck, who's already thinking beyond Washington, has her eye on this summer's political conventions. "We need a plurality of ideas. More parties," she says. "We need to break up the two-party system."

Into what, though? And into how many pieces? The antiglobalists seem, at times, Eke "anything but"-ers, like connoisseurs of chaos. With their affinity groups and spokes councils and e-mail listservs, they have mastered the art of creating disorderly order and vice versa. It's a real achievement, despite the feeling of some that they've failed hugely in winning poor Americans and minorities to their sometimes remote, confusing cause. Globalization is a big word and an even bigger enemy. Maybe for people with everyday concerns like paying the rent and keeping the car gassed up, its a little too big.

There's the paradox. Because if one sentiment links the antiglobalists, besides their concern for the world's have-nots, it's a distrust of the large, of the enormous (except for Big Labor - for now). Their spirit recalls a conflict from the '70s that also pitted young idealists against a fearsome acronym. When Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, moved by a belief that small is beautiful and big is hideous, set out to build a personal computer that would challenge IBM's great mainframes, their aim was not merely technical but also social. They wanted to bring power to the people. Now the people have it, and they're using it. To do precisely what is still a mystery.

**-Reported by Mitch Frank / NewYork, Margot Hornblower / Los Angeles, David E. Thigpen / Chicago, and Adam Zagorin / Washington  
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