

# BATTLE IN SEATTLE

## 'Free' Trade vs Animal Protection

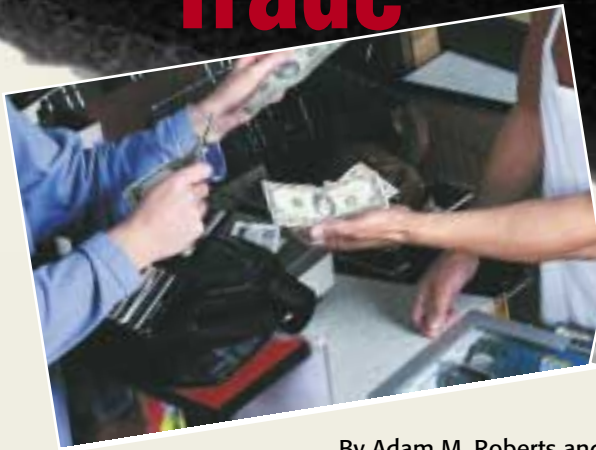


Photo: Jen Rinick

By Adam M. Roberts and Benjamin White

On January 25, 1999, the United States Trade Representative, Charlene Barshefsky, announced that the next Ministerial meeting of the 135-nation World Trade Organization (WTO) would be held in Seattle, Washington. Barshefsky boldly claimed that this meeting "will inaugurate global negotiations which will shape world trade as we move into the next century." After the eruption in Seattle's streets and the vocal opposition to the draconian WTO regime by an outraged citizenry, one hopes that Barshefsky has prophetically noted that the next century of trade discussions will include greater public accountability, transparency, and attention to animal protection and ecological preservation. To accomplish this revolution, the cozy alliance between governments and corporations codified in the WTO must be broken.

What happened in Seattle? Corporate America's worst nightmare: an alliance between turtles and Teamsters, enviros and natives, church groups and food safety activists, organic farmers and human rights activists. Over 1,800 international organizations united in opposing the theft of democracy and spread of corporate control – the emergence of a new global paradigm of populism vs. corporate kleptomania.

By shining the spotlight of public opinion on the WTO in Seattle, demonstrators illuminated the Achilles heel of corporate control: *they need us to buy their stuff*. The idea that we can take control over the consequences of commerce is now spreading across college campuses and small towns like wildfire, with kids giving away their slave labor-made Gap clothing, and increasingly rejecting genetically modified foods. The Seattle revolution of empowerment couldn't have come at a

better time, because the WTO had gone a long way in taking away our control over our homes and families and our democratically enacted laws.

Imagine working for years to convince the United States Congress or your state legislature to pass sensible legislation to protect animals from cruel exploitation or to conserve endangered species. Then, after your laudable success, an international tribunal in Geneva, to which you have no access, decides the law is too trade restrictive and must be struck down. This is not a fictional story by Franz Kafka. It's the new world (dis)order under WTO rule.

The WTO beast was born in April 1994 from the long-

**Swarms of animal protection advocates descended on Seattle in December to protest the WTO's actions.**



standing international free trade agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The purported goal of GATT and WTO is to reduce barriers to the unfettered international flow of goods and commerce so products can be traded without high tariffs or duties.

Governments face problems trying to protect animals under the WTO when different regulations apply to what are called “like” products. In other words, if two end products are seemingly identical then they must be treated identically, regardless of the way in which they are produced: shrimp is shrimp even if turtles are killed while trawling; tuna is tuna regardless of how many dolphins drown during fishing; beef is beef whether growth hormones are injected into cows or not; fur is fur no matter what cruel traps are used to catch the live furbearer.

## Trade KOs Animal Protection Laws

When a sovereign democratic government tries to protect animals or the environment by restricting importation of products to those that are produced in the most humane or environmentally sound manner, any government that disagrees with the law may challenge it. If a nation loses such a challenge, it must change its domestic legislation, pay huge fines, or face retaliatory trade sanctions by the “victorious” nations.

## Sea Turtles

News coverage of the Seattle meeting focused on the hundreds of protesters donning hand-made green turtle costumes. To protect endangered sea turtles, the U.S. prohibits importation of shrimp from countries that do not require shrimp trawlers to be fitted with Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) that enable ensnared sea turtles to escape shrimp cages alive. In 1996, India, Malaysia, Thailand and Pakistan claimed that such legislation arbitrarily and unjustifiably discriminates against countries that do not require such devices. A WTO Dispute Panel ruled against the U.S.

This is a perfect example of the supremacy of “free” trade over all other considerations. The Panel ruling claims, “even though the situation of sea turtles is a serious one, we consider that the United States adopted measures which, irrespective of their environmental purpose, were clearly a threat to the multilateral trading system.” We remember encouraging the U.S. government to enact legislation to protect sea turtles; we don’t remember encouraging the U.S. government to trade away that law to some macabre “multilateral trading system.”

## Dolphins

After more than seven million dolphins were killed by tuna fisherman in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, the U.S. established regulations prohibiting American tuna fisherman from chasing, harassing, harming, netting or

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killing dolphins in the course of tuna fishing. The Congress went further to prohibit importation of tuna caught by setting nets on dolphins and required canned tuna in American supermarkets to be labeled “dolphin-safe.”

Mexico, Venezuela and other Latin American countries took the U.S. to the (then GATT) dispute panel, which ruled that the U.S. could not bar tuna from its market based on the way in which it is caught. To comply with the ruling, the U.S. Congress enacted legislation dubbed by animal welfare and environmental organizations, the “Dolphin Death Act,” which allows foreign tuna fisherman to target and even kill dolphins and sell that canned tuna in American supermarkets, deceptively labeled “dolphin safe.” The Department of Commerce has even come up with a new “dolphin safe” label making it complicit in an uncanny case of consumer fraud.

## Cows

The European Union has banned importation of beef and beef products from animals treated with growth hormones. The U.S. challenged that ban arguing that it is “not based on scientific principles,” effectively undermining the entire premise of the “precautionary principle” – act with caution, especially in cases of scientific uncertainty.



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Naturally, the U.S. won its case and the WTO requested the E.U. remove its beef import ban. To its credit, however, the E.U. refuses to capitulate. The problem is that the U.S. can now place retaliatory sanctions on products coming from the E.U. to the United States - to the tune of 116.8 million dollars! Now, among dozens of other products, prepared mustard from France, tomatoes from Italy, and yarn from Germany are all subject to a gaudy 100 percent import duty. Instead of trade negotiations, the WTO structure creates trade wars.

## Furbearers

Eighty-eight nations across the globe prohibit use of barbaric steel-jaw leghold traps which smash animals' limbs with bone-crushing force. When the E.U. decided to ban the trap within its territories because of the insufferable cruelty involved, it also went further to prohibit importation of furs from countries that still inexplicably allow use of these traps.

The U.S. Trade Representative's Office, backed by a small group of U.S. legislators beholden to the minuscule trapping industry in the U.S., threatened a WTO challenge if the E.U. effectively implemented its judicious regulation. As a result, the implementation of the Regulation was delayed and then weakened to allow continued importation of furs from the U.S. into the E.U. The U.S. pathetically refuses to end the domestic use of this dastardly device. The mere threat of WTO action undermined animal protection.

What do these precedents sug-

gest for the future of humane laws or regulations? Can nations ban import of cosmetics tested on animals? Eggs from hens kept in battery cages? Veal from calves kept in constricting crates? The message from the tyrannical WTO seems to say "no." This undermines democracy at its core.

## The Next Fight?

In the words of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, "Global trade will never again be the same after Seattle."

Early on, the government spin on the Seattle protesters were that we were just malcontents against world trade. Looking to Gore's campaign, Clinton came to soothe labor and enviro concerns by offering us a seat at the WTO table. But the reality is now sinking in that those who blocked delegates from the WTO venue in Seattle do not want a seat at the WTO table; the global corporate WTO government is illegitimate and, after working so hard to steal our democracy, hardly worthy of our trust.

The question now is more fundamental: considering American's vast appetite for the products of the world, how do we ensure that our commerce is as kind as it can be - to the earth, to the workers producing the items, to the creatures involved, and to the bodies of our families? The illusion that Americans don't care how stuff is produced as long as it keeps flowing cheaply has been forever dashed. The realization that it is the same trade

arrangements that hurt animals, destroy wild places, massacre indigenous people, and enslave poor countries to endless debt has given activists clout we have never had. Now we can stand up for the patriotic right to self-determination with the same breath and vigor with which we demand animal protection. The moment cries out for our leadership. We don't want world trade dictated by maximum short-term profit. Our vision of a sane future is compassionate commerce

## ...The emergence of a new global paradigm of populism vs. corporate kleptomania.

obtained and offered with respect to the earth and our extended family of human beings and all other creatures of the world. 🐾

Editor's note: The views of the contributing writers do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or DDAL.

*About the Authors: Adam M. Roberts, Senior Research Associate at the Animal Welfare Institute, has actually read the roughly 900 pages of the agreement establishing the WTO; Ben White, International Coordinator at the Animal Welfare Institute, is responsible for the sea of turtles who swarmed Seattle's streets in protest.*

### What You Can Do

This round of trade negotiations was shut down, but sensible Americans must continue to demand a voice in the future of a world without walls. The WTO must be reformed to protect animals adequately. Otherwise, it must be scrapped. Act now. Write your representative and senators (see p. 4 for contact information) and urge them never to vote for any weakening amendments to animal protec-

tion or conservation legislation - especially when such measures are introduced because of WTO disputes.

Also, write the U.S. Trade Representative and ask that her office never use trade rules to undermine global animal protection efforts. Send your letters to: Charlene Barshefsky, United States Trade Representative, 600 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20508-4801.

The future is ours.