

ATTAC on Free Trade

IT IS HARDLY by chance that ATTAC originates from the European Union's most protectionist country's most protectionist political party: the French Social Democracy, and was launched by the semi-official publication *Le Monde Diplomatique*. It would be interesting to know who finances the giant public relation budget of the ATTAC movement.

It is not recommendable to give up Free Trade. Everybody understands the advantages of free exchange of goods and services. If combined with effective control of monopolies – without which we could not have liberalism – Free Trade would prevent any exploitation, benefit the consumers, and provide for poor countries' access to the markets of the rich countries. The question is whether the rich countries, among which EU, want to do so?

If in reality the purpose is to exclude Free Trade from the agenda because one's shady endeavours are to support the protectionist interests of the big business and the trade unions then it is clever to seek another agenda than the one supporting the interests of the developing countries: TRADE, not AID. As it is known: ATTACK is better than defence.

IN SEATTLE the WTO countries negotiated progress for World Trade. Who blocked these negotiations? First and foremost the EU and USA; they would not give access for the poor countries to enter their home markets. Today the situation is that EU blocks another round of negotiation about the liberalization of trade, in spite of the fact that analysis proves that liberalization of the access for the Third World to our markets would provide results much more effective than all development aid.

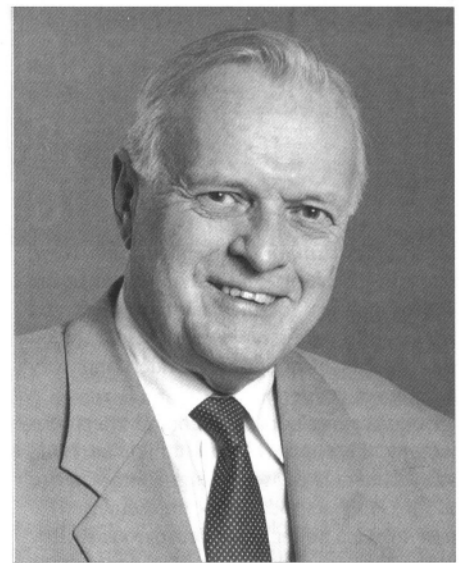
WTO is not the villain of the piece, but its procedures have to be changed in order to end the fact that WTO is run exclusively by the

protectionist and other monopolist interests of the rich countries. First and foremost I am thinking of the patents for life and vegetation that threaten the poor world. We have to give WTO the authority and economic resources to explore, enlighten about and actively fight against the global monopolies.

A decade ago I heard the then chairman of the commission, the French socialist Jacques Delors, promote taxation of speculative capital transactions. That could be all right, but will not at all solve the global problems of poverty. It will never substitute for Free Trade.

Neither can it substitute for implementation of renewed respect for all peoples' rights to natural resources and publicly created values. That means: foundation – under the United Nations – of an international land reform institute, and abstention from attacks against all peoples' rights to own and use the resources of their country such as energy, metal, agricultural soil, wealth from the sea or the enormously increasing values of real estate in the developing areas all over the world. When – for instance – the World Bank forced Mexico to abolish its constitutional provision guaranteeing for the people their rights to the land of Mexico, it was capitalistic exploitation beating ATTAC's agenda. Apart from that, of course, we have to release the debt of the poor countries, tax-free loopholes have to be closed whenever they are found around the globe.

More problematic is, however, the claim for ethical control of the investments of pension funds. As a member for 10 years of the European Parliament's commission on External Economic Relations, I witnessed a bad alliance between protectionists and environmentalists who jointly blocked poor countries' access to the markets of the EU, pleading "dumping" either environmental or



**Ib Christensen,
a former member of
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Parliament, assesses
the arguments
against free trade
as portrayed by
the French**

concerning wages or trade unions; though poor countries outside the EU have no possibilities if they are not allowed to use these parameters of competition. The result was not long in coming: EU's trade surplus is enormous compared to all poor countries in the world.

Will ATTAC take action against these problems? Will it fight against the rich countries' reactionary protectionism and EU's dumping of their excessive agricultural production that is damaging the poor countries in the world market? Considering ATTAC's intellectual and political originators: I do not believe it for a moment!

Will ATTAC turn the public attention to the rights of people to their natural and publicly created resources? The currency transactions attacked by ATTAC occur from a situation in which gigantic speculation in real estate made the artificially/politically decided rates of exchange in Asia easy games for speculation. By taxation of speculative currency transactions one takes a stand only on the symptoms of a much bigger problem of international importance.

I should be pleased if ATTAC would address this problem in a serious way. But what would the intellectual (and economical) masterminds and wire-pullers behind the stage say then?

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■ The Third World needs trade not aid