

### IN THIS ISSUE!

<b>African delegations leave Cancun with a sense of foreboding</b> Chandrakant Patel*	Pages 1-5
<b>No deal is better than a bad deal</b> Percy Makombe	Pages 5 - 7
<b>Vijay Makhhan speaks out on WTO</b> <i>Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)</i>	Pages 7-9
<b>Editorial: A New Road Map for the WTO</b> Yash Tandon	Pages 9-11

#### **African delegations leave Cancun with a sense of foreboding**

Chandrakant Patel\*

The collapse of the Fifth Ministerial meeting in Cancun has spawned a spate of views to apportion blame, together with speculations of the 'if only' variety (e.g. 'if only' the meeting was extended by a few hours etc.) Typical of these, is the claim in the *Financial Times* of 18 September that "African delegates walked out over EU's demands, even though it (EU) had just ditched the most contentious of them". Far from walking out or "celebrating" the outcome, as some in the Western media have claimed, African delegations left Cancun with a sense of

foreboding, conscious of the likely negative fallout from an outcome that totally failed to address any of their concerns. Among the likely consequences of the collapse, many fear, include increased pressures on ACP countries in the context of the forthcoming Cotonou negotiations with the EU, particularly on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), further pressures towards market opening, including accelerated liberalization of critical services sectors. Then again, developing countries have been warned of increased recourse to regional and bilateral trading arrangements, and the implicit threat of sticks and promises of carrots.

The fact is, African and other developing countries went to Cancun expecting to reach an agreement on modalities for negotiations on agriculture and begin the long process of reforming this Agreement. African countries, after all, are the principal victims of the current regime that has licensed the devastation of the livelihood of their rural communities, undermined their comparative advantages and distorted global production and trade. In particular, many in Africa had expected some progress on the issue of cotton subsidies, although they had no illusions as to the obstacles and resistance to a meaningful reform of this invidious regime. In the event, they were confronted with a text on cotton (Job/150/Rev.2 Para 27) drafted under the aegis of Mr Supachai, the Director General of WTO (acting as the Facilitator on Cotton) that outraged many who had worked extremely hard to make a modest dent in this area of critical importance for many African countries. The text gratuitously advised African cotton producers, who have undisputed comparative advantage in this sector, to 'diversify' out of cotton in order to accommodate the rich and heavily subsidized farmers of EU and the US.

In as much as consideration of this and many other issues on the Cancun agenda are now put on hold, there is real concern among many in Africa that solutions to their problems have been deferred, if not put off for a long time. In the process to and at Cancun, the overriding consideration guiding the deliberations in the African and the ACP groups was the desire to have a positive outcome that would have been palatable to their domestic constituencies. At the same time it was repeatedly stated by Minister after Minister in several ACP meetings that it would be better to have no agreement than to have a poor one and forced to re-visit the mistakes of the Uruguay Round and Doha.

Nowhere was the sense of being marginalized and let down greater than with respect to the Chairman's text that dealt with the four Singapore issues. (Job/150/Rev.2 Paras 14-17). Ostensibly

prepared under the name of the Chairman of the Conference, in reality it was the handiwork of the Canadian Minister Pettigrew (designated as a Facilitator for the Singapore issues) and his cohorts in the WTO secretariat. Not only did the text completely ignore the views of a strong majority of WTO's membership, but also worse, it linked progress on issues critical to their livelihood (agriculture and non-agriculture market access (NAMA)) to Singapore issues, which are of only marginal concern to the EU's businesses and public.

The language for the linkage could not have been clearer: "...modalities that will allow negotiations on a multilateral investment framework to start shall be adopted by the General Council no later than [date] Footnote 1." The footnote in question states "***The date will COINCIDE (emphasis added) with the date for agreeing on modalities on agriculture and NAMA.***"

Whilst the reaction of African delegations (and most of the other developing countries) were of outrage, the question remains: how could the Chairman of the Conference and the Canadian Minister, as the Facilitator for the Singapore issues, have been so misled or so misread the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of WTO's membership not just on the Singapore issues but also on agriculture, NAMA and several other issues?

The breathtaking presumption underlying this text was perhaps the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. It galvanized many in the developing countries, leading the Minister of Malaysia to write on the afternoon of the 13 September that "Malaysia cannot support any text to imply the commencement of negotiations on modalities. Malaysia's position is non-negotiable regardless of any move or developments in the other issues being discussed in the Cancun Ministerial." Against this clear statement of an absence of consensus on the one hand and the alacrity with which the EU (in the Green Room on Sunday) was ready to jettison at least three of the Singapore issues on the

other, the question still remains: why did the EU, the WTO secretariat and Pettigrew continue with the strategy of brinkmanship?

The answer perhaps lies in the culture of hubris, secrecy and denial that characterizes the methods of work in the WTO and its secretariat. How else could one explain the arrogant denial of the carefully crafted Doha Ministerial text on Singapore issues and the need for an explicit consensus to launch the negotiations?

It was left to the Chairman of the Conference to remind the Ministers present in Cancun (at one of the Green Room meetings) that it was indeed they who had decided in Doha that negotiations will take place after "the Fifth Session of the Ministerial Conference on the basis of a decision to be taken, by explicit consensus, at that Session (i.e. at Cancun) on modalities of negotiations".

The carefully concocted Chairman's text at Cancun was designed to circumvent the Doha mandate and decisions, but was so palpable that delegations saw through it. The extent to which the WTO secretariat went overboard in drafting Para 14 on Investment is further indicated by its egregious effort to extend the scope of "... a single undertaking" (Doha, Para 47) by elevating the concept to the status of a legal norm and unilaterally christening it as "**the Single Undertaking**" (Job 150 Rev/2, Para 14, bullet two).

If the progenitors of this mischief have once again been exposed as unbiased advocates of the majors, is it perhaps not opportune for member states to take the WTO's management to task and hold it, at least partly accountable for the denouement in Cancun? Just as lessons will continue to be drawn from the successes and failures at Cancun, so will finger pointing and accusations. It is important therefore that African and ACP countries perspectives about Cancun are documented before the current hysteria directed at NGOs, among others, (by, for example, *The Economist*: Cancun's

Charming Outcome, 20 September 2003) becomes received wisdom.

From SEATINI's vantage point, several developments stand out above others.

**First**, unity, cohesiveness and professionalism were the hallmark of deliberations in the African and the ACP groups. Several of the Groups constituents were also active and influential participants in the Groups of 22 and 33 on agriculture. The unity was sustained throughout the Conference, despite reports of special deals and offers to break the cohesiveness of the African Group.

**Secondly**, the Group's deliberations were characterized by a great deal of transparency and inclusiveness: those in the ACP Group invited to participate in the Green Room - both the mini- Green Room of 13/14 September and the larger Green Room of 14 September - provided detailed briefings to the ACP Group throughout the Conference. Kenya's Minister participated in both, skillfully defending the position of the African Group adopted by their Heads of States in Maputo earlier this summer.

**Third**, was the perception among the various Chairmen of their respective roles in the Green Room? All of them - the Chairman of the African Union, (Mauritius), the Chairman of the LDCs (Bangladesh) and the Chairman of the ACP (Botswana) acknowledged that their presence in smaller and selective meetings such as the Green Room on 14 September was in an *ex-officio* capacity and as such it was incumbent upon them to take positions and obtain instructions on the basis of the deliberations of the entire Group. Accordingly, it was clearly understood that any decisions to be taken in the Green Room were on an *ad referendum* basis, subject to deliberations and approval (or otherwise) by the whole Group.

This modality in the conduct of their work represents, in many ways, among the more positive outcomes of Cancun. It permitted many smaller delegations (particularly from the Caribbean and the Pacific

islands) to participate and contribute to the deliberations. This gave greater credibility and voice to their spokesmen in the Green Room. It also set a much higher standard of inclusiveness and democracy than is characteristic of WTOs practices and procedures.

If this working procedure is regularized in all future WTO Ministerial and Senior officials meetings, (it is after all, normal practice in the deliberations of the UN and indeed of the EU/OECD with its own consultation procedures) the majors and the WTO secretariat will no longer be able to ignore the deliberations and views of the majority with impunity.

**Fourth**, by organizing the conduct of their work in the most transparent and democratic manner, the African Union and the ACP Groups have sent a wider message: the credibility and legitimacy of the multilateral system will be safeguarded only if it is inclusive and participatory. If these procedures result in 'unwieldy' or even 'UN' type of meetings and decision-making, that is surely a small price to pay for ensuring the long term survival of the multilateral trading system.

**Finally**, beyond Cancun, there are important tasks ahead, for the civil society, for developing country Governments and for national Parliamentarians. The latter played a critical role in Cancun, not the least of which was in providing a bridge between NGOs and Governments and between Southern and Northern legislators. Their continued involvement in trade negotiations-including regional trade negotiations-represents a major and welcome departure in the reach of their activities.

Among the immediate tasks include first, safeguarding the positives from Cancun. One such positive is the almost certain demise of the Singapore issues from WTO's agenda. Whilst this nearly came to pass in Cancun, it will require vigilance to ensure that the issues do not metamorphose under some other guise, such as a refurbished TRIMs. In as much as EU was prepared to dump at least three of the four Singapore issues from the

WTO's work programme, it is unlikely that it can now come back and claim any standing whatsoever for these discredited shibboleths.

Second, the forced evacuation of the Singapore issues from WTO and the Doha work programme will now help focus attention on issues of priority concerns to Africa: agriculture, NAMA, TRIPs and S&D. Third, is the emergence of G-33 focusing on agricultural problems of smaller producers seeking special measures to safeguard their rural sectors and food security. African civil society must ensure that their own work programmes now complement the efforts of G-33 and of G-21.

Fourth, the high standards for inclusiveness and democracy set by the African Group in particular, must be taken as the yardstick for reform of the WTO's methods of work. In particular, the practices of arbitrarily forwarding non-agreed texts in the name of Chairman, of appointing so-called Facilitators without any consultation, of convening Green Rooms and mini-Ministerial (and then denying their existence and activities) and conducting the work of the Conference without any agreed rules of procedure must stop. Likewise, the practice of convening WTO Ministerial meetings outside Geneva, the permanent headquarters of WTO, must also be brought to an end. Meetings outside Geneva are excessively costly, generally disadvantageous for smaller countries (who have to grapple without offices, staff, equipment and resources) and are subject to pressures from host country, seeking 'success', often at any cost, as in Doha. Civil society must be prepared to advise their Governments that efforts by Hong Kong (China) to host the next Ministerial meeting must be politely declined on the grounds that they are far too costly and puts them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis developed countries. Moreover, the fact that Mr. Stuart Harbinson, (presently with the WTO secretariat but who was Hong Kong's Ambassador and Chairman of the General Council preceding Doha) is responsible for this

initiative must serve as a warning to developing countries about the hidden agenda behind moves to host the next meeting in Hong Kong (China).

Fifth, the civil society appears to have come of age in Cancun. If it was barricaded and an outsider in Seattle, in Cancun, it was also barricaded but was part of the process, providing advice and analysis to both Northern and Southern delegations. They are now seen as a challenge to international secretariats (both of the WTO and the UN system) who were expected to help developing countries, in particular with technical support and objective analysis but have over time been found by these countries repeatedly to be either misleading in their advice or failing to provide useful analysis. This has resulted in developing countries, particularly the smaller ones, to look to public interest civil society groups for help. Many of the NGOs, in the North and the South, are also now more equipped technically and in terms of political development economy, to undertake analysis and implications of drafts and provide the hard-pressed and smaller developing country delegations with knowledge-based advice. The international secretariats, and some of their top officials, now seem to be uncomfortable with this, and there is a campaign of misinformation against civil society groups. But international secretariats have to blame themselves for this state of affairs that by and large their advice is seen as biased in favor of the majors. Although an important development and much commented upon, importance of the civil society cannot and must not be exaggerated.

Finally, a major challenge for the civil society lies ahead in supporting African and ACP countries deal with the forthcoming Cotonou negotiations. The challenges and efforts required in addressing these may well dwarf those of confronting the WTO. It will require shifting focus and mobilizing knowledge and expertise in new areas, at least for some civil society groups, including SEATINI.

*\*Chandrakant Patel, a national of Uganda, represents SEATINI in Geneva and was in Cancun with the Uganda Delegation.*

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### **No deal is better than a bad deal**

Percy Makombe

At the recently ended 5<sup>th</sup> ministerial World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Cancun (10 -14 September), Mexico, there was agreement by the developing countries that “no deal was better than a bad deal.” Commenting on the revised draft text, Antigua and Barbuda Minister, Sir Ronald Sanders summarized the feelings of most developing countries when he said: “My government has a duty to care for its people. Were we to accept this document we would deserve our people’s condemnation. For we would not only have gained no relief for them, we would have condemned them to a life of perpetual underdevelopment. And that my delegation will not do. I have to advise that this draft does not enjoy the support of my government.”

The draft text was described by NGOs and social movements as “outrageous and offensive”. While sidelining the views of the majority of WTO members, it gave prominence to the positions of rich countries and corporate interests. For instance on the contentious Singapore issues, the text proposed the start of negotiations directly on trade facilitation and government procurement and implied the beginning of slow negotiations on investment and competition. This was despite the fact that 80 countries had explicitly said no to new issues. Previous language indicating developing countries’ objections had mysteriously disappeared raising the question of : “Who wrote the text?”

It was apparent that the EU and the US while pushing their own agenda of WTO expansion, had completely ignored development related issues including special and differential treatment (recognition and acceptance that

developing countries need a separate set of rules from developed nations because of structural differences). On Agriculture the text still allowed developed countries to maintain their protectionism – dumping their subsidized produce on African economies while demanding that developing countries bring down their tariffs. Proposals by Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali for the elimination of subsidies on cotton fell on deaf ears. The EU and US seemed to be saying negotiate on our terms or not at all. This was captured in the arrogance of EU Agriculture Commissioner, Franz Fischler, who proclaimed: “Developing countries are asking for the moon. If they want to continue in their space orbit, they will not get the moon and the stars, but rather empty hands.”

It was therefore not surprising that the revised text was subjected to attacks by the developing countries, leading Conference chairperson, Mexican Trade Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez to say that it may not be possible to reach an agreement before the Conference ends. As the text was brought under sharp focus, meetings lasting from 7pm to 1am were convened in a bid to coerce the developing countries to accept the text. The all-night negotiations and steamroller tactics from the EU and US failed to garner acceptance for the battered text.

Adriano Campolina Soares, head of ActionAid’s international campaign commented that: “The EU and US leave Cancun in shame, exposed as cheap conmen. The rich countries have only looked after their own interests and clearly never had any intention of offering anything of real benefit to developing countries. If the WTO can do no better than this, developing countries will simply question why we need it at all.” At the heart of Soares comment is the legitimacy crisis faced by the WTO. Questions have been raised about the lack of transparency and democracy in the WTO, and these questions still remain if what happened in Cancun is anything to by. It is still a mystery who writes and produces draft

texts given that the views of the majority are not reflected.

Cancun demonstrated that there is strength in numbers. While NGOs were demonstrating outside the convention hall, people’s movements were marching in the city center. The African Union, Least Developed Countries, the African Caribbean and Pacific countries were holding press conferences reiterating that there would be no movement until there was explicit consensus on modalities. Led by Brazil, China, India and South Africa the Group of 21 helped the weak countries to turn the tide against the bullies. The message was clear – Our World Is Not For Sale.

The temptation after the success of Cancun is to sit back and have never-ending celebration parties, but this would be a gross betrayal of the struggle. The struggle has only just begun. There is going to be a serious backlash as the EU and US seek to punish those countries considered to have been too vocal in Cancun. Added to that the EU and US will prioritise bilateral trade deals. We must already have begun campaigns against Cotonou and AGOA. These trade arrangements will try to get through the backdoor what was rejected in Cancun. What is demanded at Cotonou is more than what is demanded at the WTO. We need not abandon the campaign against WTO. For now the whole WTO agenda has been referred back to Geneva, the position should still be that: no to new issues. All four Singapore issues must be dumped not just two of them as is being suggested.

As the Africa Trade Network observed: “The collapse of this Ministerial, following from that of Seattle for similar reasons, should serve notice to the rich and powerful countries of the international trade system that the time is running out for their imposition of their narrow interests on the rest of the world. It should signal the beginning of a new way of interaction in international affairs of genuine and mutual respect.”

Ultimately, the question is: who is best suited to represent the developing countries' interests if not the developing countries themselves?

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### **Vijay Makhan speaks out on WTO**

*Vijay Makhan is the outgoing African Union Commissioner for Trade, Industry and Economic Affairs. In an interview with the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), just days after returning from the collapsed trade talks in Cancun, Mexico where he led the AU mission he argues that rich nations have let down Africa once again despite their repeated promises and he calls for a radical overhaul of the World Trade Organization (WTO).*

#### **Question: How do you feel regarding the events in Cancun?**

A: To say the least, a bit disappointed at the way our partners approached the entire negotiations though we kept ourselves open as the African union to dialogue with the US, EU and Japan. In fact, they all solicited meetings with the AU which goes to show the AU member states have a role to play in these negotiations. So we met with the US trade representative, Ambassador Robert Zoellick, and also with Pascal Lamy [from the EU] on a couple of occasions. We made known our positions and so everybody knew the African position. But what disturbed us was that it was not taken onboard, so to say. I have my own feeling that all the facilitation was a question of formality rather than to inject anything into the final text.

#### **Q: So you are saying no one was taking Africa's concern seriously?**

A: Well, yes a bit. When you look at the final conclusion or text coming out from the chairman, that text had left the position expressed by Africa on many of the issues, to the side. And that really went to prove that the Cancun process was more geared

towards the developed countries' concerns yet again as opposed to the concerns of the developing countries. On top of that, bearing in mind that this round of negotiations is called a development round, it has to take on board the concerns and preoccupations, the expectations, the aspirations of the developing countries. This is what we went to Cancun for but there was no movement.

#### **Q: So what did you do?**

A: We met with all these people, we kept on telling them ..., but what we did as an African Union is form a strategic alliance with the group of least developed countries - since already in Africa you have so many of them - and also with the African and Caribbean, Pacific countries, and I think this demonstrated the common idea of purpose of these three groups. People started calling them the group of 90 because they formed 90 countries out of 148. I was asked a cynical question what percentage of trade these 90 countries represent. That is not the issue. The issue is not about the percentage of trade the issue is about all those poor people who live in these countries that make up the bulk of their populations.

And the international community keeps on spending resources and energy to bring together mega conferences, to organize mega conferences to address the issues of poverty, poverty eradication, education for all, all these social issues by a certain cut-off date, 2015, and yet this is an opportunity that is being given to the international community to really take concrete action to meeting those objectives. Yet what we find is hardly any of those were onboard.

#### **Q: What was the problem as you see it?**

A: The problem was there was an insistence by the development partners to address new issues. Again the Singapore issues [Four issues that are: How countries treat foreign investors, Standards for anti-monopoly and cartel laws, Greater transparency in government purchasing, which might help foreign companies win

public sector business, and Trade facilitation - making things like customs procedures simpler. Developing countries are concerned especially about investment rules, because many want to retain control over their own key industrial sectors] were brought up. All the time the Singapore issues [came up] while we were discussing issues about market access and agriculture, things were being cooked with respect to the Singapore issues and we are not ready - we have said that time and time again.

**Q: So why do you think the talks broke up?**

A: We are blaming the entire system. They [the developed nations] did not take on board what we wanted and these were very minimal things. There was no progress made on issues like market access, the issue of tariffs. We cannot play the same kind of games because the playing field is simply not level. And yet people expect us to commit more than the others are prepared to commit. On agriculture there was practically hardly any movement. We should not be forced into giving up our position. While we were discussing these there was an insistence, a kind of give and take situation where Singapore issues were going to be placed on the table. There was an insistence and we could not accept that. We simply do not have the capacity to do this.

**Q: Given your view do you think the WTO as an organization is useful or important to Africa?**

A: If the trend carries on this way I think there will have to be a rethink of the workings or non-workings of the WTO. We simply have to look at the way things are working. You can't blame the secretariat because this is a member-driven process. It is the member states that take the decisions. The Secretary-General does what the member states expect him to do, of course; he facilitates issues. So maybe there is need to do much more in terms how to rationalize that organization. We are not living in a jungle so therefore we are respectable people, we are supposed to play the rules of the game,

but the rules have to be the same for everybody. The imbalances that exist in the rules will have to be addressed and these have not been touched on at all. Our plate is still full with issues that have not been resolved.

**Q: And if things don't change what should Africa do?**

A: Well Africa will have to take a political decision, whether it is worthwhile to stay in an organization that is not proving its worth. Look at the cotton producers. We managed to put that item on the agenda and everybody thought just by putting it on the agenda we would be satisfied. No. We want the issue to be addressed. It is the solution to that problem that we want, not just simply someone to come and talk about cotton and nothing is done. It is not on. I am wondering whether it is now a case of getting together the larger developing countries, like Brazil, India, China, South Africa, etc [...] to try and become a pressure group.

**Q: What does the failure of talks in Cancun mean for the poor of Africa?**

A: Cancun did not deliver. Cancun did not deliver on the promises that are taken on the Millennium Development Goals, on the way to eradicate poverty, give us more access for our products which would raise the living standards for the people of Africa, the peasants, the farmers. No such thing happened. The subsidy issue was not even addressed. In a world where people are saying that Africa is a scar on the conscience, to quote Tony Blair, a scar on the conscience of the world, and yet when you get a chance to try and heal that scar nothing is done. Nothing is being done to address that.

**Q: You think pledges by developed countries to help the poor are mere rhetoric?**

A: It is rhetoric. Yes we have to do this, we have to do that, for me so far - and Cancun has proven it again - it is rhetoric. Now what is going to happen in the next 14 months, I start having doubts about it

because all these now will have to be negotiated in Geneva. This round is supposed to come to an end in 2004, yet when we have met and reviewed the process and what goals have been achieved, it's nothing.

**Q: So what should the AU do now?**

A: The AU will have to keep on pushing its position forward and keep that alliance, that historical alliance that came out of Cancun alive. And I have told our office in Geneva that they must try and work in tandem with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries as well as the least developed countries.

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**Editorial: A New Road Map for the WTO**

There will be many who, after Cancun, would be clamouring for the demise of the World Trade Organisation. And although this editorial argues otherwise, there are good reasons why the WTO should go, if things continue the way they have been ever since it came into existence. The WTO's wished death has been the clarion call of many in the global civil society movement, who see in it Capitalism's worst abomination, the others being the World Bank and the IMF. To this trinity goes the dubious distinction of lording over the developing countries over the last now fifty years and more. Rhetoric notwithstanding, they are the real authors of strategies and practices that have kept vast numbers of people in the South poor whilst a tiny minority in the North is accumulating wealth to shameful levels.

To these voices is now added the voice of those in the world of commercial diplomacy who, soberly and patiently, have been trying their best to work the system. Among these belong the trade negotiators of the developing countries based in Geneva, some international experts who have seen through the hypocrisy and double standards of the WTO but kept on giving their advice to the developing countries, and a large group of people in the civil society movement who have hoped against hope that rationality and good sense will somehow prevail in this organisation. Some of the frustrations of these groups of sober and generally restrained voices are reflected in the articles carried in this issue of the Bulletin. One of them, Vijay Makhan, is the outgoing African Union Commissioner for Trade, Industry and Economic Affairs. Asked what Africa should do if things do not change, Makhan said Africa may have to reconsider "whether it is worthwhile to stay in an organization that is not proving its worth."

And that, after nearly a decade of WTO (1994-2003), must be the verdict of history. The WTO has not "proved its worth" as far as the developing countries (DCs) are concerned. On the contrary, the DCs have been pushed to the brink. Cancun has come at the end of a long and painful process in which reasonable and fair demands on the part of the developing countries have been systematically and callously ignored by the big players and the WTO Secretariat until the inevitable happened. The developing countries could no longer put up with this chicanery and perfidy (not strong words, given the context) on the part of the industrialised countries (ICs). Cancun was a rebellion of the DCs against the ICs.

So what now? How do we move forward? The tragedy of the WTO is that it has lost credibility and legitimacy not only in the eyes of the developing countries, but also in those of all thinking people in the North who believe in fair and honest trade. What is even sadder is the fact that the WTO's highest officials – the Chairman of the

General Council and the Director General – are both guilty of riding roughshod over the sensibilities of the developing countries. They allowed themselves to be pushed around by the big powers, and thought they could get away with this in Cancun the way their predecessors did in Doha. Well, they did not. The DCs were driven to the edge by the brinkmanship diplomacy of the Secretariat of the WTO, no less than by that of the quad countries – namely, the USA, the EU, Japan and Canada.

Thus the very leaders who should put the WTO back on the tracks – the chairman of the GC and the DG – are now lame ducks. They cannot hold their necks up and guide the negotiations as honest brokers. One irony of this is that the next Ministerial is supposed to take place in Hong Kong (China), the home of the Chairman of the GC. He carries around his neck a bag of shame from Cancun. He cannot possibly provide the kind of leadership that is needed in Hong Kong. If the DG and the GC Chairman were responsible officials in a domestic (national) context, then political decency and propriety would have required them to resign their positions. Alas! This is not likely to happen in the WTO. The WTO must plod along with them. The imagery of two lame ducks pulling the WTO cart up the Hong Kong hill should excite the imagination of a skilled cartoonist.

Perhaps time has come, as suggested in the article by Patel, that the WTO no longer goes to exotic places for its Ministerials. Let all negotiations take place in Geneva itself. What is so secretive about the WTO that it must conspiratorially run to remote places like Doha and Cancun? If the objective is to bring the smaller developing countries to inaccessible corners of the world - far from the maddening crowds! – where they can be subjected to humiliating pressure, then Cancun has shown that this objective has deluded the conspirators. The Seattle train was stopped at least partly by thousands of sheep lying on its tracks, and the locomotive could not move. But Cancun train could not move because the driver

himself stopped the locomotive when he saw that the third class passengers had revolted against the nobility riding in the luxury first class compartments. This happened even when the nobility gratuitously (sic!) offered to the Third Estate pieces of cake in the form of two (or three) of the Singapore issues. Imagine the chagrin of the nobility when the riff-raff refused to accept the (gratuitous) offering! Cancun was a rebellion of the Third Estate. So places like Cancun and Doha can no longer provide the refuge for the conspirators of the WTO. There is nowhere to hide; so they may as well have the negotiations openly in Geneva. This is a serious suggestion, and the developing countries must put it forward as one of their proposals before the GC Chairman and the DG call the mandated meeting before 15 December 2003.

By the same token the Mini-Ministerials must go. They are highly undemocratic and secretive, and they played a significant role in undermining the trust between the WTO's more powerful members and the smaller ones that are excluded from these Mini-Ministerials. To be sure, there is the problem of decision-making in an unwieldy body of 148 members. But the answer to this is not to hide in the nooks and cracks of the world in an exclusive, conspiratorial manner, and then expect decisions taken there to be miraculously accepted by the excluded. And who says that the WTO's decisions are more significant for the subsidised 200,000 cotton farmers of the United States than they are to the two million cotton peasant farmers of Uganda? Why should Idaho or South Dakota (or wherever they grow cotton in America) be represented in the Mini-Ministerials but not Uganda or Mali?

Having said all this, SEATINI believes that the WTO should be preserved. And the reason is not the "threat" by the industrialised countries that they will now put the developing countries under even greater pressure under bilaterals and regionals, such as Cotonou, AGOA and the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

They are doing that in any case. The WTO was in no way an alternative to Cotonou or AGOA or FTAA. In fact, the WTO was an “add on” on top of the bilaterals and the regionals. The industrialised countries were having it both ways – at the WTO as well as in the bilaterals and regionally.

What had become indefensible about the WTO is that the big players refused to play by the very rules they created at Marrakesh. The WTO was supposed to be a rule-based and member-driven organisation. Instead it became a Chairman-driven organisation, run at the behest of a self-selected coterie of states that systematically excluded the bulk of the members from democratic decision-making. That is where the problem began. The WTO put a hierarchy where the

privileged farmers of Bordeaux and South Dakota would have a greater voice than the impoverished peasants of Mali and Mexico. The WTO has become an unjust society where the rich are protected at the cost of the poor. The world needs a multilateralised trading system, yes, but it must be one where the human life of the poor in Uganda or the Philippines has the same value as that of the rich in France or the US of A. If this basic human principle is not acknowledged, then yes, the WTO must go.

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