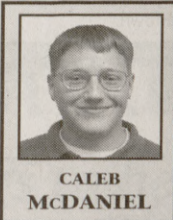


RESTLESS IN SEATTLE

Mass protests spotlight dissenting opinions on free trade, serve as moral check on WTO

The streets of Seattle are crowded this week, but not with throngs of holiday shoppers. Angry protesters and police officers have clogged the downtown area. Photo images have been stark and startling: police in riot gear, clouds of tear gas, handcuffed demonstrators and armored vehicles. It has been a blessedly long time since headlines contained news about rubber bullets and anarchists.



CALEB MCDANIEL

But perhaps more shocking than the activity in the streets is the object of all the angst. Thousands of protesters have come to fight free trade by disrupting and delaying the highly publicized meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO), an international body that establishes rules about trade.

What? Never heard of the WTO? Neither had most people until this week. For that reason alone, the protesters in Seattle have done much good. They have arrested the world's attention and made it consider the potential dark side of free trade.

The demonstrators — a hodgepodge of environmental, labor and human-rights groups — have denounced the WTO for toppling trade barriers at the expense of important interests.

Unfortunately, the national media has hurried to make these dissenting voices seem laughable, or worse. On Tuesday, for instance, airwaves were filled with reports of protesters who had been arrested.

The federal government's anti-trust case against Microsoft has made a lot of news lately. Something that probably shouldn't have surprised the so much is that free-market capitalists have been criticizing the government's action against Microsoft's monopoly as unwarranted, heavy-handed interference in industry.

It's funny that when the government breaks up a monopoly to allow competition, that's what laissez-faire capitalists call government "meddling," but when a single company prohibits free competition by controlling the market with tyrannical and unethical tactics, that's called the "free" market.

After all, they ask, is it Microsoft's fault that it's a monopoly? Should Bill Gates be punished because people like his products? If the monopoly weren't Microsoft's fault, the situation would be different. It's not mere market share that makes a monopoly illegal, it's the wielding of the power a monopoly affords.

But it is Microsoft's fault, for precisely that reason. Microsoft, with a 95 percent share of the personal computer operating system market, refuses to license its operating system to computer manufacturers unless they bundle Windows with every PC they sell.

This is only one of the points of the anti-trust case. It isn't just detrimental to competitors, it hurts consumers too. If you buy a PC from any major computer retailer, you are forced to buy a license for Microsoft Windows at the same time. This "Microsoft tax" is hidden, but included in the price. Never mind that you might already have a license for Windows and just want to upgrade your hardware.

violent rioting in downtown Seattle, grossly misrepresenting the day's events. Yesterday, after the dust had cleared, the picture became clearer as well.

Although a handful of anarchists in the crowd did go on a rampage of vandalism and property destruction, they were by far the exception, rather than the rule.

The groups that had organized the protests have been quick to disassociate themselves from these unruly individuals.

Workers are more important than capital. They should be treated that way.

In fact, it turns out that chants of "shame, shame, shame," originally broadcast as protests directed at the WTO, were in fact being shouted at those who departed from the demonstration's non-violent intent.

The truth is that the vast majority of protesters were peacefully making a point worth saying — economic health is not worth sacrificing the welfare of human beings and the world they inhabit. Commerce, untempered by conscience, would be a grave social sin.

If it is not careful, the WTO's credo could encourage unethical economics. When free trade is treated as an unqualified good,



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

other goods — such as labor rights and environmental protections — often go unnoticed.

For instance, the WTO has not given much attention to a country's fair-labor laws when deciding whether it should be opened to trade.

But ensuring a country does not exploit its workers should be paramount. Otherwise, corporations will be encouraged to enter those nations in which they can abuse unprotected labor with substandard wages and unsafe conditions.

All the Seattle crowds are

asking is that the WTO give more attention to these vital human concerns.

Workers are more important than capital. They should be treated that way.

And if they are not, a country should be refused uninhibited trade until they are.

WTO officials have attempted to dismiss these ideas as backward and outdated.

They say trade acts as a miracle medicine for underdeveloped economies. Capital allowed to flow freely into a country would create jobs and markets with

benefits that will ultimately trickle down to the lower class. The economics behind this argument are dubious.

Even in the United States, which has one of the most open trade policies in the world, the richest continue to get richer while the poorest continue to get poorer.

Besides, the question remains worth asking: Even if trade creates jobs, are the jobs worth creating? If trade encourages industries, are the industries worth encouraging?

These are the issues the WTO

should treat as primary. They have too often been neglected.

The leaders of the WTO may try, as they already have, to chuckle at their opponents, caricaturing them as half-wits who cannot keep up with the march of globalization.

But the true proponents of globalization are those who care about the globe. They want to ensure that dollars are not valued over decency and that the benefits of a global economy are extended to all.

It is obvious free trade puts money in the pocket of those who wear the silk suits. The question is whether it helps the sweatshop workers who make the silk suits.

Therefore, the events in Seattle should give the WTO pause. Perhaps for once in his disappointment of a career, the leadership of President Clinton should be headed.

"I believe the WTO must make sure that open trade does indeed lift living standards, respects core labor standards that are essential not only to worker rights, but to human rights," Clinton said in a speech Wednesday.

If more of the world's leaders would join in that call, the streets of Seattle would be empty instead of the pockets of the underprivileged.

If the protests have proved anything, they have proved free trade is not unanimously popular, and anything that can make 30,000 people upset enough to organize deserves to be examined. Tear gas will not make this go away.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

Microsoft deserves to be reprimanded

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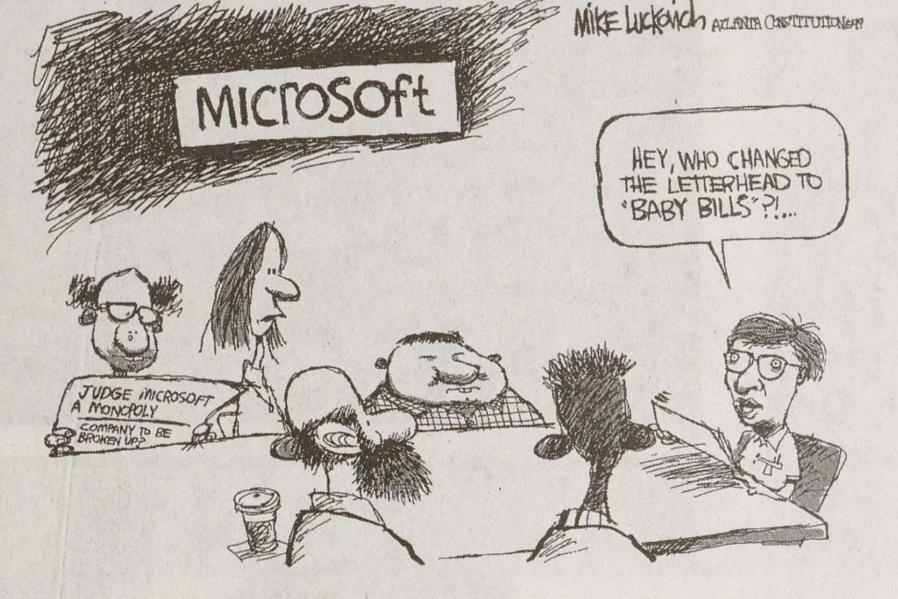
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It doesn't matter if you're planning to erase the hard drive and install a non-Microsoft operating system like Linux. You have no choice but to buy Microsoft's product. Free-market capitalists don't see this as a problem. They tell us that if we'd just repeal all these silly anti-trust laws and bleeding-heart labor regulations, and get the government out of the business of governing business, then the market would work it all out in our best interest.



MIKE LUCKOVICH

we got to where we are. The regulations we have today weren't just drawn up at random.

Our government had to enact anti-trust laws in order to stop huge industrial monopolies from clogging commerce by charging exorbitant and inflated prices. Your eight-hour workday, your safety regulations, your weekends — these exist not because the company you work for cares about your well-being, but because labor activists and union women and men fought so that you could work under livable conditions.

The idea of laissez-faire also implies that by deregulating business we are somehow staying out of the economy, forgetting that government is already waist-deep in any economy because state power is needed to enforce private property.

If we repeal the laws against businesses stealing labor from workers, can we also repeal the laws against workers stealing products from businesses?

Many businesses fight workers and regulations at every turn, making pay cuts, "downsizing," cheating our "free" market by colluding with competitors to fix prices, even moving into other countries so they can pay their employees less than our minimum wage.

They are driven to these tactics because they want more money. Why, if we removed all the laws that keep companies from cheating and exploiting people, would they suddenly grow a social conscience?

Right now our ways of dealing with companies that break the law is inadequate, largely because the actual law-breakers can hide behind corporations.

A corporation is a legal fiction which absorbs responsibility and shields criminals from prosecution.

An example of this is the recent case in which General Motors (GM) discovered a defect that caused certain cars to explode in flames when hit.

GM decided not to release the information when it was determined that it would be cheaper to settle court cases with the families of the hundreds of estimated victims than it would be to fix an item costing just a few dollars in millions of cars.

If any of us decided to sacrifice a human life for a few thousand dollars, we'd be sent to prison, or worse.

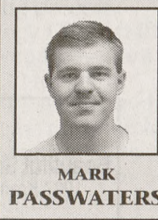
When a group of people, operating within a corporation like GM, does that exact thing a few hundred times, they get slapped with a fine that they pay with a company check. There is no accountability.

Because corporations are legal entities created and enforced by the government, it is within our power to dissolve a corporation's charter. Of course, Microsoft hasn't actually killed anyone yet, but GM has. Many states have enacted harsh "three strikes" laws for repeat felons. Why should we be less vigilant in ending crimes by corporations?

Brian Crabtree is a columnist for The Oklahoma Daily at the University of Oklahoma.

Cuban child suffers while adults argue

For four decades, Cubans in the United States fought to free their nation from Fidel Castro.



MARK PASSWATERS

This conflict has seen many low points, including the Mariel boatlift in 1980 and the shooting down of two aircraft rented by Cuban exiles which skirted Cuba's airspace.

The lowest point in this 40-year struggle may have come this week when a boat carrying 10 Cuban refugees sank off the coast of Florida.

Only three of the boat's 10 passengers survived the accident.

One of the survivors was a 5-year-old boy who clung to an inner tube for two days until he was picked up near Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Elián Gonzalez not only suffered through this horrific situation, but he also lost his mother and stepfather when the boat sank.

Elián is living with relatives in Miami, but his story has yet to be finished.

Elián now is being used as a point of contention between the Cuban government and the many U.S.-based anti-Castro groups.

Gonzalez's father lives in Cuba, and has appeared several times on CNN, crying about how he misses his son and wants him returned.

Upon the arrival of TV cameras, neighbors appear to lead "spontaneous" demonstrations against the United States, carrying signs written in English. Cuba's government claims the boy was kidnapped by his mother and should be returned to his father.

Ninety miles away, a picture of Elián Gonzalez strapped to a gurney after being plucked from the Atlantic can be seen on flyers everywhere.

The Cuban-American National Foundation has created these flyers, which call Elián "another child victim of Fidel Castro." This organization and others like it have made this little boy's struggle political.

This issue's battle lines, like those of many others like it, have been drawn up too quickly.

On one side are Castro and the Cuban government, who obviously want the boy back.

Their motivation is not necessarily a humanitarian one allowing Elián to remain in the United States would be a political embarrassment.

Cuban-American organizations know this is the case and therefore want Elián to stay in the United States.

One of the most effective ways to draw attention to an issue is to show how it affects children and Elián Gonzalez's story of pain and suffering in an attempt to gain freedom can be used effectively against Castro.

Caught between these two factions is Elián Gonzalez himself.

What does he want? The major combatants in this issue claim to speak for him, but are they really?

Apparently not, and that is the saddest part of this tragedy.

Elián is being used as a pawn by two groups that could care less about his well-being.

Castro wants the boy returned because the Elián's situation is a stinging indictment of his outlaw state.

The Cuban-American organizations have shown themselves to be almost as callous by showing interest in the 5-year-old more as a statistic than as a person.

The most basic issue is the one most neglected by both sides and the media — Elián's future.

From all indications, Elián wants to stay in the United States, and he should be allowed to do so.

He also should be allowed to see his father, who apparently wants to be reunited with his son. While the struggle to remove Fidel Castro from power is a challenge, the welfare of this child should come first.

Elián Gonzalez is 5 years old and already has endured more than most people could expect in a lifetime. It is unfair to use him as a bargaining chip in a fight he is not old enough to understand.

Castro, Cuban-Americans and the U.S. government should at least attempt to reach some sort of compromise on the health and welfare of this child before they do anything else.

Once that is done, these groups can go back to doing what they have for decades — acting like little children themselves.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.