

A letter from France on the anti-globalisation movement Attac

3 January 2002

The following letter was submitted in response to an article on the founding of Attac Germany, published on October 26: Attac conference in Berlin: opportunism and unwavering loyalty to the state

At the same time as the founding congress of Attac Germany was taking place in Berlin, the Attac Somme (France) association, already some two years old, was holding a series of lectures and public meetings as part of its awareness campaign on “the dangers for democracy” of the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services). The World Trade Organisation (WTO) conceives GATS as “opening up to the market (liberalisation) of all services, including the public sector.”

Strongly supported by the trade union federation SUD, which organises joint meetings with Attac, the association includes members from a whole range of leftwing organisations: the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Stalinist trade union body, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the main teachers union federation, the FSU, and others.

Speeches by Marc Delepouve (Attac), Vincent Espagne (Coordinating committee for the monitoring of the WTO by citizens, one of the founding organisations of Attac) and Philippe Clochepin (Attac Dieppe) stressed the stranglehold over the WTO exercised by government bureaucrats from the rich nations, which send teams of experts comprising hundreds of functionaries who work in the interests of the major global corporations. The 22 committees of the WTO, which deliberate virtually every day in Geneva and which adapt the trading regulations to the needs of these very corporations, generate literally tonnes of documents. Enormous resources are needed to keep up with these committees, an impossibility for poor countries. Burundi, for example, has one expert to cover all the UN agencies, while the United States

deploys more than 150 for the WTO alone. The principle of “horizontality” means that decisions taken on trading in a certain category of products can be automatically applied in other sectors that are, at best, often only remotely similar. The regulations for hotels and tourism could be applied to hospitals, for example.

The speeches raised the issue of public services, which, if privatised, represent an enormous potential market for capital in search of profitable investments. The speakers gave a graphic description of the scramble to open up and deregulate markets, to allow their takeover by the transnational corporations, but offered no progressive alternative. Instead, they sought to encourage fresh illusions in the global institutions of the bourgeoisie, by claiming that they could be reformed in the interests of ordinary working people.

Vincent Espagne declared: “We are not against globalisation. We are against free market (liberal) globalisation and we are not against the WTO, we just want its regulations to be subject to a system of norms compatible with human rights”. This position is fleshed out in the Attac *Information Email* of November 13, 2001 in an article by Arnaud Zacharie of the Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt (CADTM): “The WTO’s powers must be limited to commercial products and must be subordinated to the WSDO (World Social Development Organization) or, until it is created, to existing UN organizations (UNDP, UNCTAD, UNEP, ILO, ECOSOC etc). This will involve a deep-going reform of the UN and its Security Council.”

Attac proposes the setting up of new rules and regulations to govern world capitalism at the very moment when all the previous arrangements established after World War II—from Bretton Woods to EFTA and NAFTA—are breaking down. Espagne indicated a series of international bodies which might

be set up to regulate the world's economy and trade: "an independent international court of economic justice", a "security council", an "international agency for the environment", an "international agency for medicines," etc. The speakers emphasised the fact that "it would be madness to withdraw from the WTO. To leave would be catastrophic, isolationism."

Attac's programme creates new reformist illusions in order to oppose the development of the class struggle. It represents the hopes of a number of bureaucrats, aspiring to lay their hands on well-paid jobs. A speaker from the floor asked the Attac representative a question regarding the US bombing of Afghanistan. He drew attention to the declaration by Socialist Party and Attac leader Yann Galut of the Gauche Socialiste (Socialist Left) tendency that "Of course a military response is needed; but one which does not add to the toll of victims". The questioner asked if, after the reactionary utopia of humanitarian multinationals, Attac now wanted us to believe in a victimless imperialist war.

Philippe Clochepin's reaction was violent: "I'm sick and tired of these vanguardist shits," he ejaculated. The organisers then proscribed any further debate on Afghanistan, asserting that it was not on the agenda. In an interview with *Agence France Presse* on November 3, Bernard Cassen, the chair of Attac France, insisted, "Never has president George W. Bush been so close to our positions... We could say that the Western governments are getting closer and closer to us." This position certainly found an echo in Amiens.

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