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INTRODUCTION: AFTER THE WASHINGTON CONSENSUS

No event in the two years since the first issue of *Workplace* has changed the editors' hopes and perspectives more than the events of Seattle in November of last year. Over the course of those two years, graduate students and faculty in the MLA have helped shift the profession's focus from its narrow (if sometimes unspoken) mission--to legitimate its "professional" authority, to stave off political attacks from the right, and to preserve its self-image as the repository of wisdom in matters cultural, to its place in a larger cultural, political and social scheme of things. That has been no mean task. But with Seattle, and now, D.C., the landscape has changed. For with Seattle and DC a broad coalition of the left has made itself visible, once again. That coalition has given academic labor both a map and a responsibility: a map with which to locate itself with respect to larger (dare we say, "global"?) political and social movements, and a responsibility to join them.

But what does that mean, exactly? Such is one of the questions that the essays in our first feature section, *The WTO and After*, address, though can't fully answer. Rich Daniels' inspiring account of Seattle offers what I consider a breathtakingly *immodest* response to this question: Seattle, says Daniels, was not only about reanimating the left, but also of articulating a vision of the left in which the old divisions between "cultural" and "real" politics, between the Lesbian Avengers and the Teamsters no longer obtain. Seattle put the world-historical kibosh on the idea that there is no alternative to American-style global neoliberalism. At the same time, as Daniels suggests, it opened up new vistas in the contemporary imagination of what such an alternative might look like.

But the hard questions, the hard choices lie ahead. As both Doug Henwood and Ken Surin suggest in their own ways, going after the WTO, or even the IMF and the World Bank, will not be enough. Henwood, editor of *Left Business Observer*, maps out some of the potential fault lines in the left's incipient strategy. For all the well-placed disenchantment with the global order as governed by what Robert Wade and Frank Veneroso have called (following Jagdish Bhagwati), the "Wall St.-Treasury-IMF complex," protesters who hail from the relatively affluent North should be wary of positioning the South or Asia as the hapless victims of Wall St. neo-colonialism. Elites in those countries are as happy to exploit workers there as elites in the U.S. or Great Britain. We cannot **lose** sight of that fact.

Ken Surin, for his part, traces the genealogies of the WTO and Bretton Woods institutions to a moment when the U.S. insisted on setting in place an *illiberal* international trade regime. Contrary to all of the neo-liberal cant that suggests that free trade internationalism is the most beneficial policy for everyone at all times, GATT and its successor, the WTO, as well as the World Bank and the IMF, testify to the strategic nature of economic policy and theory in the U.S. and the North more generally. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of "fairness" in which free traders wrap WTO policy, its policies are generally a testament to the one-sided nature of "globalization." The principle behind US support for postwar trade restrictions and capital controls is the same principle that governs their demand for free trade and liberalized capital flows: self-interest.

So where does this leave us? As Surin points out, the current Bretton Woods institutions embody menace of global capital governed by the "Washington Consensus." The limits of that consensus were starkly shown last year with the sacking of World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz, who had the temerity to publicly disparage IMF handling of the Asian financial crisis. To those who regard the "Washington Consensus" as common sense, the policy prescriptions for a country in the midst of a currency crisis aren't all that different from those appropriate to a country with healthy economic growth: tight fiscal policy, liberal financial markets, free trade, little or no government oversight (i.e. burdensome regulation), and plenty of short-term debt are the rule of the day. Stiglitz repeatedly pointed out the folly of applying a-historical economic models to developing economies and was asked to leave. The protesters in Seattle and DC pointed out the folly of putting profits before everything else in economies already developed and threw a monkey wrench into capital's millennial dream.

On-the-ground, the vision offered by the Seattle and D.C. protests will certainly be one of cooperation across old divisions, against the world made in the image of the United States, and most of all, against the grain of the Washington Consensus. It's a world glimpsed here by Jamie Owen Daniel, who describes the challenges and the potential rewards of organizing and developing solidarities across class and professional lines. Daniel writes from the heart of Chicago, one of the **United State's** global cities, a place where the effects of the Washington Consensus have come home to roost with a vengeance. She shows how workers caught in seasonal labor flows as well as those beholden to Chicago's cultural tourist economy share interests not often enough articulated, and suggests that academics and cultural workers can and should shed the illusion of their "specialness" and organize with workers beyond their professions. Together, she suggests, they can imagine and put in place a better world, and help to build a fearsome political left.

For the editors of *Workplace*, this issue marks a renewal of sorts. Of course, each issue sharpens our sense of what we're about. This issue, we think, has sharpened our sense of what we—and *Workplace*—can become.

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