



BY LESLEY ADAMS

In a significant blow to the economic colonization of the planet, the fifth ministerial of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ended in failure in Cancún, Mexico, on September 14.

As people from around the world gathered in the streets of Cancún to share their resistance to the WTO, ministers from more than 20 poor countries formed an alliance to stand up to the richest countries in the world. The global South demanded that contentious agricultural issues be resolved before moving on to the new trade regulations being pushed by the European Union and the US. The global North would not budge, so the global South walked out. No deals, no agreements. Millions of dollars were spent to secure a meeting that completely failed, the second time in four years for this illegitimate global government. The ministers from Swaziland and Brazil commented that without the actions of resistance on both the inside and outside of the meeting, they would have never stood up to the European Union and the US.

### A Tapestry of Resistance

On the first day of the ministerial, when *campesinos* (farmers) led more than 10,000 protesters toward the hotel zone where the meetings were being held, police stopped the march six miles from the convention center at a spot that became known as "Kilometer Zero." The site became a focal point for outrage.

"The WTO kills farmers" was the chant Korean farmer Lee Kyung Hae screamed from the frontlines before stabbing himself and falling to his death on the opening day of the talks. This act of sacrifice set a tone for the rest of the week. That same chant continued throughout the ministerial in street theater, banners, 24-hour vigils and demonstrations carried out by non-governmental organizations inside the convention center.

Large and small affinity groups took action around the fortress hotel zone. These included marches, a building squat, disruption of the opening ceremony, a pagan spiral dance outside of the convention center, an evening *caserolazo* (Argentinean-style street drumming and marching) and the dumping of genetically engineered

# We Won This Round

The Cancún WTO Ministerial Summit

corn at a press conference. Three protesters hung a banner from a 300-foot-tall crane that read "*Que se vayan todos*" ("They all must go").

On September 10, women from Mexico and around the world marched to Kilometer Zero, determined to break through the barricades using bolt cutters to dismantle the wire. The Koreans tied ropes to the remaining metal, and hundreds of people pulled it down. Less than 24 hours after the fence came down, the talks also collapsed.

### Strengthening the Fabric of the Grassroots

Many people found strength in the diversity of groups gathered in the streets of Cancún. We were challenged by the integration of different cultures with different tactics, organizing methods and social relations. The language barrier was also challenging. People who came with a working knowledge of Spanish had an easier time and perhaps were ultimately more helpful. Some who did not speak any Spanish felt isolated.

Direct-action planning meetings started early, but they lacked attendance by the majority of people who would be in the streets. *Campesinos* traveling during harvest season and students who caravanned from Mexico City faced time constraints, which left internationals as the majority who came early to help set up.

Ultimately, the attempts to integrate Mexicans and internationals into concerted, pre-planned direct action failed. Once the Mexican students arrived, many felt unfamiliar with the spokescouncil model used by the US activists at the organizational meetings. Activists from the US, although experienced in mass mobilizations (due largely to privilege), needed to observe and assist rather than emphasize an organizing model that would unfortunately waste time. However, creativity, flexibility and the integration of new information allowed ideas, processes and actions to succeed in modified form.

Direct action that incorporated different communities unfolded in a decentralized and spontaneous manner—two attributes that became our greatest strengths. Another asset to this mobilization was the Koreans' militancy, although their gender dynamics were challenging for many.

In the weeks preceding the ministerial, the Green Bloc constructed an eco-village to demonstrate a sustainable model of living. The village helped to diffuse the harm done by the local media, which had labeled the protesters as "*globalofobicos*" who were coming to destroy the town. Through our creativity and transparency, the local media changed its tune and gave the protests favorable coverage throughout the ministerial.

The patriarchal foundation upon which the WTO was built affected many within the mobilization as men often took the stage, the microphone and the decisions. Yet several actions challenged this dynamic. Commandante Esther of the *Éjército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* issued a statement that addressed the struggle of women:

"Clearly, we say that when we demand respect for women, we do not only demand it of the neoliberals. We are also going to demand it from those who say they are revolutionaries while acting like Bush in their homes."

Lee's suicide generated feelings of respect, honor, confusion and disappointment. One group from Europe communicated that suicide is not an appropriate form of

collective struggle, citing their philosophy that rebellion is an expression of life. While many may agree with this sentiment, this criticism is also an example of the misunderstanding that often surfaces between cultures that are learning to work in solidarity despite differences in social or political constructs. Lee's death symbolically fell on Chusok, the most important Korean national holiday where family and friends gather to give thanks to their ancestry and for the food that sustains life.

Although people worked to unify a voice against the WTO, there was still a lack of an Earth-centered critique among the majority of protesters. As environmentalists, we must continue to infiltrate the masses and articulate an Earth-centered message that connects the differing strands of resistance to corporate globalization.

Ultimately, the success of our collective struggle in Cancún manifested as a living process of imaginative improvisation in the face of militarism, pessimism and intimidation.

### Where Will the WTO Go from Here?

With the failure of the Cancún ministerial, many WTO members are questioning the feasibility of such a global institution. The original 2005 deadline for the Doha round of negotiations is highly unlikely given the outcome in Cancún, since significant progress was needed on these issues in Mexico. According to WTO Deputy Director General Roderick Abbott, "The Cancún episode has already cost us three to four months." Abbott estimates that the Doha negotiations may not be completed until 2006. The WTO General Council is scheduled to meet in Geneva by December 15 to determine the next course of action for the organization.

Some people speculate that the US actually wanted the Cancún talks to fail. US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick made it clear that the US would pursue bilateral trade agreements with countries that played a "constructive" role in Cancún. These agreements may be easier to slip past the defenses of global resistance, which could result in a more fragmented global justice movement. To divide and conquer is an old and trusted method of the conqueror.

This is reason to focus on the upcoming meeting of the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Miami, Florida, from November 20-21. The events in Cancún derailed the global trade agenda, and progress during the negotiations in Miami will be more difficult. While the WTO sits stunned and retreats to Geneva, we must go on the offensive. Revolution is a process, not a moment to wait for.

There is, and should continue to be, a constant critique of the efficacy of mass mobilizations, especially in the face of increased military repression. However, just as the world that we envision fits many worlds, our activities should manifest both large and small, quiet and loud. Standing up together against the oppressors should never be dismissed. Building alliances and solidarity between struggles is vital to counter the ways in which the current power structure is connecting our global community. The world is being globalized whether we like it or not. They choose to globalize capital. We choose to globalize resistance.

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