
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every era has its defining influences. In the post-Second World War decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s it was technology. The world then was either awestruck or horrified by Sputnik, the moon landing, the Aswan Dam, the 'green' (fertilizer) revolution, the Thalidomide scare, the birth-control pill and mainframe computers.

In the 1980s, the 1990s and the present decade, the defining influence is money – particularly global money. We've become familiar with the Nasdaq and the Dow Jones indexes. Everyone knows what Enron is. Most of us have a pretty good idea what the latest national exchange rate is or what the daily spot prices for oil and gold are. We've seen the Asian 'meltdown' of 1997, the Argentinian collapse of 2002 and the post-September 11 stock-market gyrations played out on our television screens. There's no escaping the all-pervading influence of economic globalization. We are all caught up in it now.

This book holds a mirror to the face of economic globalization. It charts the rise and negative consequences of economic globalization and profiles the policy responses of the anti-globalization movement, which, like the Nasdaq and Dow Jones indexes, has become ubiquitous, particularly since the 'Battle for Seattle' protests of 1999.

The anti-globalization movement is a very broad church which takes in activists concerned with nonviolence, feminism, poverty, the rights of indigenous people, the rights of the unemployed, preservation of the environment and responsible media, to name just a few issues. This book concentrates exclusively on economic globalization. Economic globalization is necessarily connected to all the myriad issues covered by the anti-globalization movement but it deserves specific attention. It is the dominant influence behind many of the world's present-day ills and needs to be examined in its own right. This does not mean the other issues covered by the anti-globalization movement are not important; they are important, but for the purposes of understanding and reasoned response it is necessary to pull the globalization machine apart and specifically examine its economic parts.

Many would have you believe that economic globalization is the product of an inevitable rightward swing in politics over the past few decades. Others say it is the predictable consequence of the march of technology. Many in the anti-globalization movement say it is the product of the irrepressible greed of transnational corporations. In reality it is the result of all these things, and more. It is the convergence of many haphazard and planned influences. As a result this book tries to avoid pigeon-holing economic globalization, and its origins, into neat boxes, and instead tries to take a holistic overview of its various defining influences and consequences.

Like economic globalization in general, the anti-globalization movement has evolved haphazardly with resulting significant internal policy differences on economic globalization. But increasingly there is common ground, common purpose and common hope that economic globalization can be redesigned in a sustainable way. The first half of this book (Chapters 2 to 6) examines what economic globalization is, how it has emerged and what its consequences have been. The second half of the book (Chapters 7 to 13) presents an overview of the anti-globalization movement, paying particular attention to its policy alternatives to economic

globalization. It focuses on the radical and more mainstream policy schools within the movement and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each school's policies, as well as the areas of agreement and disagreement between them.

In 1998 British prime minister Tony Blair said 'globalization is irreversible and irresistible'. This book gives the lie to that claim. Economic globalization has never been an inevitable part of human evolution and is therefore eminently reversible and hugely resistible. This book attempts to give hope to those dedicated to resisting and reversing it – not a naive hope but one based on real and viable alternatives.