

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 07 September 2000

Next Monday in [Melbourne](#), the World Trade Organisation will host a conference of the world's top business people called the Millenium Summit. As happened in Seattle last year, a number of protest groups too will gather in Melbourne to protest over the policies of multi-national companies which the Millenium Summit represents. Both the Federal and State Government of Victoria too is making their plans to quell what they see as a threat to public order the protest demonstrations will generate.

What is the World Trade Organisation and who or what do they represent? That is the focus of the Shakthi editorial today. Consisting of representatives of some of the world's biggest corporations, the Melbourne Conference of the WTO is aimed at propagating their current economic policies of globalization and its pursuit of concentrating economic power in the hands of a selected few. The Millenium Summit can also be described as an attempt to convince world governments to their way of thinking.

An enormous amount will be spent by WTO to host this conference. But the question that must be asked is, are the aims and objectives of WTO the same as that of the millions of ordinary people in the world. At a conference which brings together such powerful figures, surely the concentration of [wealth](#) among an elite few and the imposition of an economic dictatorship under the guise of globalization must surely be an important factor that will be discussed. So how could these aims be compatible with the needs of millions of people who have suffered under their policies?

The drastic curtailment of government services, economic reconstruction policies resulting in massive job losses and the effects of privatisation are the realities that the ordinary man and woman in the street have faced under WTO policies then and now. This is no longer a phenomenon peculiar to poverty-stricken people of Third World countries. Even in developed countries, governments have become mere administrators of the economic policies of the WTO. Decisions affecting millions of people are taken today mostly in the boardrooms of multinational companies that WTO represents.

Withholding investment funds is a powerful tool used by them to coerce reluctant Governments to extend generous tax credits and [tax](#) holidays to their enterprises. Protecting the world's environment is the least of their concerns as they pursue their empire-building goals.

So what has been the result of all these policies? Apart from the billions of dollars they have been able to gather for themselves, that is? The gap between the rich and the poor have grown even bigger, the loss of democratic rights of the people, repressive laws which seeks to control and manipulate those employed under them, long working hours, low wages and disregard for the health and safety of everyone has been the legacy these business leaders are leaving us.

Sri Lanka is a shining example of their policies. What has its free market policies since 1977 brought to its citizens? Moves to privatize its power, water, telecommunications, [banks](#) and natural resources on a scale never imagined. And as Sri Lanka, like many other countries of the world, continues to come under such awesome economic pressures, ultra-nationalistic groups such as Sihala Urumaya and, possibly very soon, Dravida Urumaya, talks about fighting for and retaining boundaries which have to relevance at all these days.

As they fight to divide Sri Lanka along racial, religious and social lines, they fail to understand the reality of a recent election slogan in the United States which said "It's the economy, stupid!" But then, one shouldn't be too surprised by the campaign of the Sihala Urumaya at least, some of their leaders are great pillars and supporters of multi-national companies themselves.

If the ordinary Sri Lankan is to ever see an end to the terrible suffering they undergo every day, they can only do so if they stand up, with the people of Melbourne and elsewhere, against this economic juggernaut represented by the WTO and its very willing agents amongst us.