

Do Globalise



Review of : **Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate** by Naomi Klein Editor: Debra Ann Levy Leftword Books October 2002 [CED Ref. B.U00f.K60]

About a decade ago this intellectual dude called Francis Fukuyama argued that history, as humans had conceived of and tried to live it (a process that had an in-built redemptive goal or outcome), had come to an end. The Berlin Wall had fallen; the erstwhile USSR's emission levels had nose-dived; 'time' was nothing but a series of moments in an endless present. In such a situation one could only lead a McLife, forever. Not any longer, reveals journalist Naomi Klein in her latest book.

McLife is McStrife, it is now clear to many. When thousands gather to protest a McMeeting (a WTO or G-8 'summit'), they are living proof that the end-of-history idea itself has come to an end. They protest because they want to live by their own rules; make their histories in their own little ways.

The book isn't actually a book, as *No Logo* (her prize-winning analysis of the emergence of anti-corporate activism the world over) was. By her own admission, *No Logo* was a "thesis-driven project". *Fences and Windows* is more like a patchwork quilt, a collection of newspaper articles, essays and speeches she wrote and delivered between 1999 and 2001. It travels over similar ground, but in a completely different manner. Klein isn't arguing here; she merely puts together pithy pieces of writing and invites the reader to take short strolls through 3 years of global summits/protests. The two are inseparable, although in deadly opposition.

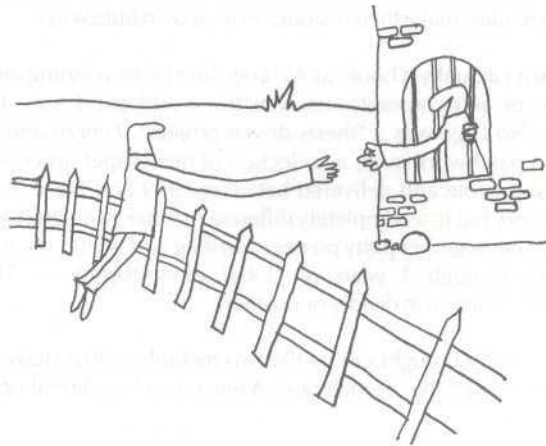
This fact is neatly brought out by the two metaphors that make up the title, and thread through the 'despatches'. A fence can be a literal obstacle, as in

the chain-link one throws around conference venues to keep people out. It is also virtual: a tariff or tax, or rule or clause inserted in a treaty, which affects people and natural resource-use globally, often turning lives and ecologies upside down. A window is what you open to either reveal the reality of the way the world is being governed, or to catch glimpses of the ways to reclaim an eroding earth.

Klein's articles are passionately informative. The world today is not a global village "intent on lowering walls and corridors, as we were promised, but a network of fortresses connected by highly militarized trade corridors." Power has moved out of local through national levels to be centralised in faceless global governing institutions; this makes it more difficult for people to respond to its effects:

"Sure, capitalism thrives in representative democracies that embrace pro-market policies such as privatisation and deregulation. But what about when citizens make democratic choices that aren't so popular with foreign investors? What happens when they decide to nationalise the phone company, for instance, or to exert greater control over their oil and mineral wealth? The bodies tell the story."

Enter, at this point, a man or woman – laid-off worker, homeless person, landless peasant, local resident, university student – with swimming goggles and wet cloth (to ward off tear gas and pepper spray), hell-bent on getting to



the bottom of the story. Is s/he an 'anti-globalisation protester'? No, says Klein. "At issue is not the merits of internationalism. All the activists I know are fierce internationalists. Rather, we are challenging the internationalization of a single economic model: neo-liberalism." These people ask: "exactly what is globalisation, and who gets to define it? "What we are calling 'globalization' must be recast not just as an inevitable stage in human evolution but as a profoundly political process: a set of debatable, deliberate and reversible choices about how to globalize."

Seattle was the "coming-out party" for those who define globalisation as a movement towards "deep, responsive democracy." Klein records with curiosity their tactics: they are fighting a "war of the fleas"; they are like "spiders." They are de-centralised and stand for power dispersal. Their political practice is of the "hub and spokes" variety: no one grand ideology, but links between ideas. They march, but also hold concerts and parties full of satire and poetry. Not only do they tote laptops to create and share Web-archives of every conference or the all-night "strategy party" they attend, they are as concretely elusive as the Net itself. This is why, Klein tells us, they are a subversive force to be reckoned with.

Fences and Windows is about the many little ways in which globalisation has entered the lives of many ordinary humans. Not only as a monopolistic uprooting force, but also as a spur to inter-connect and build new forms of co-existence. This quilt of a book does not keep out the cold, but it will make you warm. ▶