

# Kamikaze Capitalists

By Naomi Klein

**W**hat do you call someone who believes so firmly in the promise of salvation through a set of rigid rules that he is willing to risk his own life to spread those rules? A religious fanatic? A holy warrior?

How about a U.S. trade negotiator.

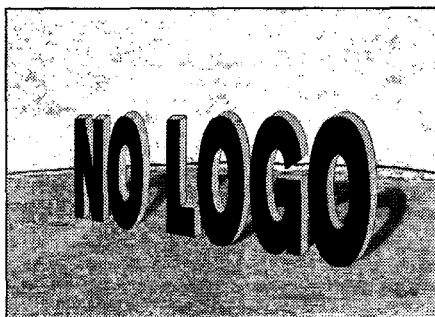
On November 5, the World Trade Organization began its meeting in Doha, Qatar. According to U.S. security briefings, there is reason to believe that al-Qaeda, which has plenty of supporters in the Gulf state, has managed to get some of its operatives into the country, including an explosives specialist. Some terrorists may even have managed to infiltrate the Qatari military.

Given these threats, you might expect the United States and WTO to have canceled their meetings. But not these true believers. Instead, U.S. delegates have been kitted out with gas masks, two-way radios and drugs to combat bioterrorism. As negotiators wrangle over agricultural subsidies, softwood lumber and pharmaceutical patents, helicopters will be waiting to whisk U.S. delegates onto aircraft carriers parked in the Persian Gulf, ready for a Batman-style getaway.

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick has praised his delegation for being willing to "sacrifice" in the face of such "undoubted risks." Why are they doing it? Probably for the same reason people have always put their lives on the line for a cause: They believe in a set of rules that promises transcendence. Call it Kamikaze Capitalism.

In this case, the god is economic growth, and it promises to save us from global recession. New markets to access, new sectors to privatize, new regulations to slash—these will get those arrows in the corner of our television screens pointing heavenward once again.

Of course, growth cannot be created at a meeting, but Doha can accomplish something else, something more religious than economic. It can send "a sign" to the market, a sign that growth is on the way and expansion is just around the corner. An ambitious new round of WTO negotiations is the sign they are



praying for. In rich countries like ours, the desire for this sign is desperate. It is more pressing than any possible problems with current WTO rules, problems mostly raised by poor countries, fed up with a system that has pushed them to drop their trade barriers while rich countries kept theirs up.

So it's no surprise that poor countries are this round's strongest opponents. Before they agree to drastically expand the reach of the WTO, many are asking rich countries to make good on their promises from the last round. There are major disputes swirling around tariffs on garments and the patenting of life forms.

The most contentious issue is drug patents: India, Brazil, Thailand and a coalition of African countries want clear language stating that patents can be overridden to protect public health. The United States and Canada are not just resisting—they are resisting even as their own delegates head for Qatar popping discount Cipro, muscled out of Bayer using exactly the kind of pressure tactics they are calling unfair trade practices.

These concerns are not reflected in the draft ministerial declaration, which is why Nigeria has blasted the WTO for being "one-sided" and "disregarding the concerns of the developing and least developed countries." India's WTO ambassador says that the draft "gives the uncomfortable impression that there is no serious attempt to bring issues of importance to developing countries into the mainstream."

These protests have made little impression in Geneva. Growth is the only god at these negotiations, and any measures that could slow profits even slightly—of drug companies, of water companies, of oil companies—are being treated by believers as if they are on the side of the infidels and evildoers.

We are witnessing trade being "bundled" (Microsoft-style) inside the with-us-or-against-us logic of the war on terrorism. "By promoting the WTO's agenda," Zoellick explains, "these 142 nations can counter the revulsive destructionism of terrorism." Open markets, he says, are "an antidote" to the terrorists' "violent rejectionism." (Fittingly, these are non-arguments glued together with made-up words.)

Zoellick has called on WTO member states to set aside their petty concerns about mass poverty and AIDS and to join the economic front of America's war. "We hope the representatives who meet in Doha will perceive the larger stakes," he says.

Trade negotiations are all about power and opportunity, and for Doha's Kamikaze Capitalists, terrorism is just another opportunity to leverage. Perhaps their motto can be: What doesn't kill us will make us stronger. Much stronger. ■

Naomi Klein, whose new column will be appearing in the magazine regularly, can be reached at [www.nologo.org](http://www.nologo.org).



**NEED TO CATCH UP?**  
For back issues of **In These Times**  
call 773-772-0100



# Democracy Begins at Home

## The 2000 Election must not be forgotten

By John Nichols

**H**istorians reflecting upon America's rough transition from the 20th to the 21st century will identify two crises on which the nation's future turned. Both will be recalled to have arisen with little warning, to have exposed fundamental flaws in the political, legal and bureaucratic structures of the nation, and to have demanded dramatic responses that would change forever how the United States conducts its affairs. And historians will explain, with the wisdom of time, that it is unnecessary to debate the relative consequence of these two crises; rather, they will argue, it is vital to recognize the clear consequence of both.

One of these crises is, at this critical stage, inescapable. The September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and the response to them, have consumed the interest and energy of the nation. The second of these crises, though it too demands dramatic responses, has been shunted aside with such force that political and media elites do not dare address it—for fear the mere mention of the issue will affront a newly stirred patriotic fervor.

The contested presidential election of 2000 has been pushed so far off the national radar that a consortium of media outlets, after spending more than \$1 million to sort through Florida's uncounted ballots in search of a winner, felt no compunctions about delaying revelation of the results for two months in order to avoid the suggestion of disloyalty to a president whose electoral legitimacy remains dubious at best.

A year ago on November 7, a clear plurality of Florida voters joined a plurality of their fellow American voters in going to the polls to elect Democrat Al Gore as their president. Gore's national popular vote win is well documented, but the preferences of Florida voters that should have given him that state's 25 electoral votes and the presidency were obscured by



MICHAEL SMITH/NEWSMAKERS

**Our political and media elites seem to think that Americans are simply too fragile to deal with more than one crisis at a time.**

36 days of partisan machinations from Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, House Republican Whip Tom DeLay's Izod-clad rioters and the complacent media. When those manipulations proved insufficient, the unprecedented intervention of a Supreme Court controlled by Republican partisans handed George W. Bush the presidency.

Over the ensuing months, industrious journalists, engaged academics and angry citizens have, in piecemeal yet ultimately conclusive fashion, exposed the fallacy of partisan pronouncements about Bush's "mandate." Even if some artificial standards applied in media recounts continue to concede Bush technical victories, the obvious intent of the electorate was otherwise. "There's a pretty clear pattern from these ballots," explains University of California at Irvine political scientist Anthony Salvanto, who conducted some of the first and most exhaustive examinations of contested ballots. "Most of these people went to the polls to vote for Al Gore."

The attention paid to electoral matters in the post-Florida period also has exposed a democratic infrastructure that is in serious disrepair. A General Accounting Office survey of election officials nationwide found that 57 percent of jurisdictions experienced "major problems" in conducting the 2000 election. Yet, one year after that election, with Bush enjoying 90 percent approval ratings, the elite consensus seems to be that