

trade order, global corporations may demand levies against nations which sell or buy products outside the zones they have marked out by brand names and market segments. The WTO's penal system for prohibited importing and exporting goes under the psychedelic title TRIPs (Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights).

Among those at the receiving end of Palast's vitriol are the usual suspects (Bush, Blair, Reagan, Pinochet, the World Bank, the IMF, etc.). He doesn't even spare Bill Clinton, whom he accuses, bizarrely in one piece, of endorsing Milton Friedman! How much wackier can one get?

* FROM KOSOVO TO KABUL by David Chandler, Pluto Press, London, 2002, pp xvii + 268, £14.99 (pbk), ISBN: 0-7453-1883-5.



The modern human rights movement has, for all its popularity, often displayed an arrogance and a sense of self-righteousness which has not gone entirely unnoticed. Much of the criticism has traditionally come from the right, but as this powerful polemic illustrates, the movement does have some strong critics on the left as well. David Chandler's quarrel is with the new-found willingness, even enthusiasm, of human rights activists to support military intervention by the West in places such as Kosovo, in the name of humanitarianism – a policy that is often justified by Western governments on the basis of a new “ethical” or “moral” foreign policy, but which, according to Chandler, has led to the abandonment of many cherished principles of the post-war consensus on human rights. The “new humanitarians” have, says Chandler, changed the rules of the game completely:

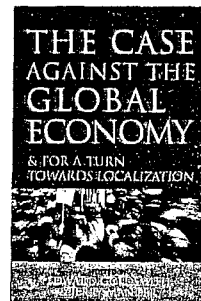
No longer do they advocate principled neutrality, nor defend the most basic level of humanitarian relief as a universal right if this threatens to undermine broad strategic human rights-based aims. Through the human rights discourse, humanitarian action has become transformed from relying on empathy with suffering victims, in support of emergency aid, to mobilising misanthropy to legitimise the politics of international condemnation, sanctions and bombings.

Chandler points out the many flaws in this approach. Take democratic accountability, for example. By “internationalising” responsibility for human rights, “we are,” says Chandler, “all responsible but at the same time no one is accountable.” He is dismissive of the argument that there is a higher moral accountability in supporting the rights of victims. “[T]he problem with universal moral accountability is that it can never be a replacement for political accountability. In fact, the claims for universal moral accountability undermine the notion of democratic accountability itself.”

This is a compelling read, regardless of whether or not you share the author's worldview. At the very least, it delivers a shattering blow to the prevailing cosy consensus highlighted

by the author of another recent book that “anything done in the name of human rights is right, and any criticism is not just wrong but tantamount to supporting murder, torture and rape.”

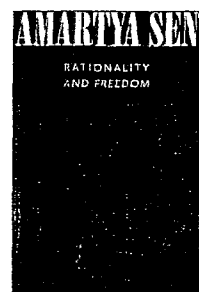
THE CASE AGAINST THE GLOBAL ECONOMY by Edward Goldsmith and Jerry Mander (ed), Earthscan, London, 2001, pp viii + 328, £14.95 (pbk), ISBN: 1-85383-742-3.



The central thesis of this book, stated simply, is that globalisation is evil. It has, say the contributors, merely served to perpetuate, even exacerbate, the many existing ills of the world, such as “the spreading disintegration of the social order and the increase of poverty, landlessness, homelessness, violence, alienation and, deep within the hearts of many people, extreme anxiety about the future.” Globalisation has also “led to the near breakdown of the natural world, as evidenced by such symptoms as global climate change, ozone depletion, massive species loss, and near maximum levels of air, soil and water pollution.” A more comprehensive indictment is difficult to imagine.

As can be guessed, a deep vein of anti-capitalist sentiment runs through this book. The contributors are, in the main, deeply committed left-wing activists who see little to commend in the market economy or in free trade. Edward Goldsmith equates the current attempts to bring economic development to the third world as “colonialism ... under a different name”. Tony Clarke is convinced that the “fundamental purposes of the new free trade deals (such as GATT and NAFTA) are to enable TNCs [trans-national corporations] and banks to act unhindered by national laws and constitutions.” Vandana Shiva believes that “[g]lobal trade rules, as enshrined in the WTO agreement on Agriculture (AOA) and in the TRIPs agreement, are primarily rules of robbery, camouflaged by arithmetic and legalese.” And so on, and so forth. Those looking for any acknowledgement in this book of the numerous benefits that globalisation has brought to the very constituency that the contributors claim to represent, i.e. the world's poor, would be looking in vain.

RATIONALITY AND FREEDOM by Amartya Sen, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (USA) and London, 2002, pp ix + 736, £26.50 (hbk), ISBN: 0-674-00947-9.



This is the first of two volumes in which Amartya Sen deals with the roles of rationality, freedom and justice in the realms of economics, philosophy and the social sciences. His purpose in the present book is to argue, in the words of the blurb, “that freedom cannot be assessed independently of a person's reasoned preferences and valuations, just as rationality, in turn, requires freedom of thought.”