

WDM and trade

Over the past forty years, the World Development Movement (WDM) has had many successes campaigning against unjust trade rules which only benefit the rich and powerful. Today we continue to actively campaign for a trading system that works in the interests of the poor.



WDM groups actively campaigning in the 1970s.

1970 – Sugar

WDM's first ever trade campaign succeeded in securing market access for developing country sugar producers into the European Union¹.

Sugar is a key agricultural crop for many poor countries but they need access to global markets to profit from it. While Europe now accepts global imports of sugar, local producers are still competing on unfair terms with European agribusinesses which receive massive subsidies from Europe's common agricultural policy.

1992 – Textiles

WDM's Stop the Stitch-Up campaign united Bangladeshi textile workers, trade unions and NGOs to call for the removal of textile quotas for the world's poorest countries.

These quotas specified the quantity of a product that could be imported into one country or economic community from another and were severely restricting Bangladesh's ability to develop its textile sector.

1996 – Investment

WDM played a central role in the global campaign that defeated the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).

The MAI was developed in secret by some of the world's richest countries and would have removed important powers from governments to control foreign investment and handed them over to multinationals. It would have allowed companies to sue governments and override existing laws designed to protect the local community and environment.

2000 – Trade activism

WDM was a founding member of the Trade Justice Movement (TJM) - a coalition of over 80 organisations campaigning against unfair rules that govern international trade. In 2004 over 8,000 campaigners cast their 'Vote for Trade Justice' outside the Labour Party conference and in 2005 TJM supporters achieved the largest ever mass lobby of parliament where over half of all MPs were lobbied in a single day!

2001 – Services

WDM exposed the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to be nothing more than a corporate grab for the services sector in the developing world.

GATS is aimed at restricting the ability of governments to regulate foreign service companies. Key services under threat through GATS include health, education, finance and water provision.

WDM mobilised public concern and helped increase skepticism amongst developing country negotiators which has contributed to undermining rich countries' negotiating agenda.

As of early 2008 no agreement has been reached.

**'Efforts by the
World Development Movement
... have got GATS exactly where
the WTO does not want it to be:
in the public domain.'**

Nick Cohen, The Observer.

¹ The European Union will be referred to as Europe from this point on

2004 – World trade talks

WDM has tracked and exposed the behind the scenes bullying at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks for a number of years. World trade talks have historically worked in favour of the rich and powerful. Not surprisingly developing countries demanded reform of existing unfair rules but in the latest trade round, rich countries tabled a whole set of 'new issues' which they wanted to discuss – issues that would clearly benefit corporate interests.

In late 2003, in response to campaigning by WDM and other TJM members, the UK was the first European country to call for the damaging so-called 'new issues' to be dropped from the agenda. In mid 2004, they were dropped.

2005 – Trade conditions on aid and debt relief

As a result of action by WDM supporters as part of WDM's Colludo campaign, the UK government agreed to stop imposing economic conditions on developing countries in return for aid and debt relief.

Until 2005, the UK government placed economic conditions, such as privatisation or increased market opening, on developing countries in return for aid and debt relief. These conditions prevented countries from choosing their own economic policies to tackle poverty and severely affected a country's ability to trade – ignoring the fact that trade can be a sustainable way to lift people out of poverty.

2005 – Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)

Since 2005, WDM has campaigned as part of TJM to halt these damaging trade agreements which has led to these deals being mired in controversy. In December 2007 the deadline to complete the process with all countries was missed.

EPAs are agreements that Europe is negotiating with 76 of its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific. These deals will do little to benefit the people in these countries as poor farmers and producers of other goods like textiles will be forced into direct competition with Europe.

2006 – Regulating companies

WDM successfully campaigned as part of TJM to bring in laws that forced UK companies to take into account the social and environmental impacts of their operations.

In the era of globalisation, large companies are operating all over the world, often with little accountability. The Company Law Reform Act passed through the UK parliament in 2006 and was the biggest shake up to company law in one hundred years. While more reforms are needed, the Act is an important first step.

2008 – Regional trade deals

WDM is launching a campaign to stop Europe's new wave of trade deals and is calling on European leaders to adopt an approach to trade that prioritises the needs of the poor.

European companies are struggling to get what they want through the WTO so the new strategy is to negotiate trade deals through individual countries or regions. A number of trade deals are in the pipeline, which cover 34 countries where 920 million people live in poverty.

WDM Groups



In 2007, WDM protested against EPAs at different European embassies in London, as part of the Trade Justice Movement

WDM groups have been critical to the success of WDM's trade campaigns over the last 35 years – getting the message out and driving change. Recent highlights include:

- ✦ Tens of thousands of WDM members casting their vote for trade justice*
- ✦ One thousand WDM members attending the biggest ever mass lobby of parliament in 2005*
- ✦ Hundreds of trade articles being secured in local press by WDM groups*