

On Monday, seven antiprivatization activists were arrested in Soweto for blocking the installation of prepaid water meters. The meters are a privatized answer to the fact that millions of poor South Africans cannot pay their water bills.

The new gadgets work like pay-as-you-go cell phones, only instead of having a dead phone when you run out of money, you have dead people, sickened by drinking cholera-infested water.

On the same day South Africa's "water warriors" were locked up, Argentina's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund bogged down. The sticking point was rate hikes for privatized utility companies. In a country where 50 percent of the population is living in poverty, the IMF is demanding that multinational water and electricity companies be allowed to increase their rates by a staggering 30 percent.

At trade summits, debates about privatization can seem wonkish and abstract. On the ground, they are as clear and urgent as the right to survive.

After September 11, right-wing pundits couldn't bury the globalization movement fast enough. We were gleefully informed that in times of war, no one would care about frivolous issues like water privatization. Much of the US antiwar movement fell into a related trap: Now was not the time to focus on divisive economic debates, it was time to come together to call for peace.

All this nonsense ends in Cancún this week, when thousands of activists converge to declare that the brutal economic model advanced by the World Trade Organization is itself a form of war.

War because privatization and deregulation kill--by pushing up prices on necessities like water and medicines and pushing down prices on raw commodities like coffee, making small farms unsustainable. War because those who resist and "refuse to disappear," as the Zapatistas say, are routinely arrested, beaten and even killed. War because when this kind of low-intensity repression fails to clear the path to corporate liberation, the real wars begin.

The global antiwar protests that surprised the world on February 15 grew out of the networks built by years of globalization activism, from Indymedia to the World Social Forum. And despite attempts to keep the movements separate, their only future lies in the convergence represented by Cancún. Past movements have tried to fight wars without confronting the economic interests behind them, or to win economic justice without confronting military power. Today's activists, already experts at following the money, aren't making the same mistake.

Take Rachel Corrie. Although she is engraved in our minds as the 23-year-old in an orange jacket with the courage to face down Israeli bulldozers, Corrie had already glimpsed a larger threat looming behind the military hardware. "I think it is counterproductive to only draw attention to crisis points--the demolition of houses,

shootings, overt violence," she wrote in one of her last e-mails. "So much of what happens in Rafah is related to this slow elimination of people's ability to survive.... Water, in particular, seems critical and invisible." The 1999 Battle of Seattle was Corrie's first big protest. When she arrived in Gaza, she had already trained herself not only to see the repression on the surface but to dig deeper, to search for the economic interests served by the Israeli attacks. This digging--interrupted by her murder--led Corrie to the wells in nearby settlements, which she suspected of diverting precious water from Gaza to Israeli agricultural land.

Similarly, when Washington started handing out reconstruction contracts in Iraq, veterans of the globalization debate spotted the underlying agenda in the familiar names of deregulation and privatization pushers Bechtel and Halliburton. If these guys are leading the charge, it means Iraq is being sold off, not rebuilt. Even those who opposed the war exclusively for how it was waged (without UN approval, with insufficient evidence that Iraq posed an imminent threat) now cannot help but see why it was waged: to implement the very same policies being protested in Cancún--mass privatization, unrestricted access for multinationals and drastic public-sector cutbacks. As Robert Fisk recently wrote in *The Independent*, Paul Bremer's uniform says it all: "a business suit and combat boots."

Occupied Iraq is being turned into a twisted laboratory for freebase free-market economics, much as Chile was for Milton Friedman's "Chicago boys" after the 1973 coup. Friedman called it "shock treatment," though, as in Iraq, it was actually armed robbery of the shellshocked.

Speaking of Chile, the Bush Administration has let it be known that if the Cancún meetings fail, it will simply barrel ahead with more bilateral free-trade deals, like the one just signed with Chile. Insignificant in economic terms, the deal's real power is as a wedge: Already, Washington is using it to bully Brazil and Argentina into supporting the Free Trade Area of the Americas or risk being left behind.

Thirty years have passed since that other September 11, when Gen. Augusto Pinochet, with the help of the CIA, brought the free market to Chile "with blood and fire," as they say in Latin America. That terror is paying dividends to this day: The left never recovered, and Chile remains the most pliant country in the region, willing to do Washington's bidding even as its neighbors reject neoliberalism at the ballot box and on the streets.

In August 1976, an article appeared in this magazine written by Orlando Letelier, former foreign affairs minister in Salvador Allende's overthrown government. Letelier was frustrated with an international community that professed horror at Pinochet's human rights abuses but supported his free-market policies, refusing to see "the brutal force required to achieve these goals. Repression for the majorities and 'economic freedom' for small privileged groups are in Chile two sides of the same coin." Less than a month later, Letelier was killed by a car bomb in Washington, DC.

The greatest enemies of terror never lose sight of the economic interests served by violence, or the violence of capitalism itself. Letelier understood that. So did Rachel Corrie. As our movements converge in Cancún, so must we.

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