

## [Fazzi on Adler, 'No Globalization without Representation: U.S. Activists and World Inequality'](#)

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**Paul Adler.** *No Globalization without Representation: U.S. Activists and World Inequality.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. 344 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-5317-7.

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It is hard to write a fair review of a book one has so thoroughly enjoyed. Paul Adler's study is one of those examples of scholarship that is at the same time informative, engaging, timely, and compelling. Furthermore, for somebody who witnessed firsthand many of the events Adler talks about, the gusto of reviving them is conjoined with the intellectual pleasure of seeing them—eventually—so finely historicized.

The praise is even more deserved if one thinks of the nature of the matter on Adler's hands. Dealing with the rise of a wider antiglobalization movement—or “fair globalization” movement, as Adler puts it—is a daunting task. First of all, such a movement had not the coherent, clear-cut structure of a traditional, early twentieth-century sociopolitical body.[1] There was no hierarchy, no central office, no national clearinghouse, and no local chapters with a paper trail to follow. Nor was it absolutely comparable to those movements aimed at transforming collective identities that arose during the 1960s and early 1970s.[2] It did not have an organic agenda, it lacked widely shared symbols and slogans, it did not launch a well-identifiable single-issue campaign, it could not be associated with a single remarkable event.[3] Such a movement resembled instead a patchwork of cultures of dissent kept together by a variegated opposition to the neoliberal turn in world affairs, which was considered to be a drift away from democracy. This movement brought together experienced activists, community builders, neophytes of internationalism, shrewd politicians, and common people, and inherited many of the egalitarian, progressive, and reformist features of a long-standing US tradition of radicalism.[4] While indebted to this tradition, however, this movement also renewed it and projected it on a global scale.

Adler's research is wide, multifaceted, and relies on a set of primary sources so diverse as to include campaigners' correspondence, international organizations' deliberations, and US administrations' policy memos. Despite the variety of agencies and sources, however, Adler manages to provide a coherent argument, which revolves around the idea that such a broad “fair globalization coalition” was first and foremost preoccupied with understanding the rules that govern neoliberal globalization—its system of governance—as a tool to determine its fate. Fair globalization's crusaders swung between the necessity of reforming the system and the goal of subverting it, though they never managed to build a consistent alternative.[5] Yet, by retracing these trickles of protest, Adler

unearths their common origins in what he defines as “public interest progressivism,” that is, the quest to “rejuvenate the regulatory state and revive U.S. liberalism” so as to contain the neoliberal tides of free market deregulation and the erosion of states’ powers (p. 2).[6]

Adler’s journey into what he portrays as an apparently irreconcilable tension between private capital’s interests and people’s democratic demands, in which the governments of the world’s most developed countries—and the US in particular—tended to constantly favor the former over the latter, begins with the 1977 Nestlé infant formula boycott. The organization of this campaign, which started locally but ended up influencing multinational companies’ behaviors and international organizations’ advice, is read by Adler as the launching pad for the coalescence of a larger constituency of public progressive groups that represented the backbone of the antiglobalization protests.[7] Adler argues that one of the main legacies of the Nestlé boycott lies in its symbolism, insofar as it contributed to framing the struggle against neoliberal globalization within the classical David-and-Goliath trope.[8] Ill-funded but high-spirited campaigners challenged multinational behemoths with apparently unlimited resources and influence. Though partial and contingent, the success of the boycott mostly consisted in having placed people’s interest, and the Global South’s concerns, on the global neoliberal agenda.

Another crucial legacy of the Nestlé boycott was that it spurred coalition building. Adler explains how pressures coming from a motley crowd of consumer associations, environmentalist organizations, and civic groups converged into fierce criticism of those patterns of exploitation that neoliberal forces, and the international institutions they sponsored and supported, were bound to recreate. The institutionalization of free trade and the risks that this posed, according to the fair globalizers, to human and environmental rights groups found its incarnation in such frameworks as GATT and NAFTA. Both agreements came to identify the bending of governmental protection to the exigencies of global capital and finance, the rising influence of commerce vis-à-vis the demise of national authority, the defense of profit at the expense of safeguarding workers and the natural environment’s.[9] Fair globalizers denounced the neocolonial (a term surprisingly absent from Adler’s narrative) dependency created by international debts and unregulated high-yield investments[10]—an architecture eventually surmounted by the installment of the WTO, which in the eyes of global reformers embodied the darkest sides of neoliberalism.[11] Such a broader critique, which took off under the presidency of Ronald Reagan and slowly faded away in the aftermath of 9/11, coincides, as Adler maintains, with the resurgence and transformation of the American Left.[12] Less confrontational and more open to compromise, internally conflictual but adaptive, locally driven and yet globally oriented, in constant dialectic relation with labor unions, environmentalist groups, and women’s associations, this modern “fair global” Left learned how to master the new tools of information technology, remained committedly world-minded and tendentially Third Worldist, and warned against the risk of projecting into a global scale the structural inequalities that affected the US sociopolitical system.[13]

Hence, it is the activism beyond the campaigning that constitutes Adler’s chief object of study. This determines certain critical, though largely understandable interpretive choices. For instance, Adler prefers not to engage in an in-depth analysis of the nature and evolution of neoliberalism, which throughout the book seems to be conflated into a coherent, monolithic, and rather homogenous grand design.[14] This is particularly striking in the case of President Bill Clinton’s “Third Way,” whose attempt to bridge the gap between profits and people could have received a better elucidation.[15]

The lack of attention devoted to the tenets of global neoliberalism is nevertheless compensated by an accurate rendering of the individual biographies and personal motivations of the main protagonists of the struggle against neoliberal globalization. Through the experiences of activists like Leah Margulies, Mark Ritchie, Doug Johnson, and Anwal Fazal, Adler brings to the fore fair globalizers' shared worldviews. Perhaps more importantly, the focus on life stories allows Adler to emphasize personal choices, like the one to invest less in direct action and more in education; the role of networking and lobbying; and, above all, the progressive but inexorable professionalization of social advocates and organizations.[16]

As Adler argues, however, social mobilization was not an end in itself. Fair globalizers did not want to mount a traditional campaign solely aimed at influencing public opinion. Rather, they were interested in affecting the internal functioning of the intricate system of global governance that neoliberal forces had been designing and enforcing. In this regard, the clash between the proponents of the so-called New International Economic Order, a set of developing countries that feared the reiteration of global inequality as a consequence of unbounded liberalization of global free trade, and those conservative positions à la Jeane Kirkpatrick, who lambasted NGOs and fair globalizers as paternalists, was exemplar. The battleground was the very nature of globalization, its overall purposes, the legitimacy of its main actors, and the redistribution of its potential benefits. The establishment of G-groups, the rising importance of closed-door meetings like the ones of the World Economic Forum, and the leverage exerted by private interests through the implementation of such instruments as the investor-state dispute settlement clauses, which divested governments of their regulatory and redistributive authority, undermined in the eyes of the protesters globalization's democratic features.[17] Conversely, the privatization of globalization alienated and further radicalized the positions of a global public opinion that in the meantime had grown fully aware of its role and international influence.[18]

Though not their primary goal, affecting public perceptions became nevertheless one of the main litmus tests through which to assess fair globalizers' political efficacy (p. 122). Their overall success, in other words, was a function of their impact on global public opinion, because it was through that impact that they could impinge on global governance. The shocking battle of Seattle, its widely televised images, and the radicalization of violence that it unleashed marked the collective conscience much more than the tactical victory of temporarily stalemating WTO's discussions.[19] It was there, among the fumes of tear gas and the screams of nonviolent protesters that the demands of inclusivity, equality, and fairness hit the nerves of the global civil society. The long road from Minneapolis, where the Nestlé boycott was conceived, through the experiences of the autonomists in Chiapas and the work of social advocates in Geneva contributed to setting in stone the principle that another world—different from how profit-oriented companies, unscrupulous financial speculators, and complicit governments saw it—was possible. At least as long as people were able to imagine it.

Just a few quibbles affect Adler's thought-provoking book. One of these has to do with the reception of fair globalizers' views at the highest levels of American politics. In other words, Adler does not fully elaborate how the voices from the periphery—both nationally and globally declined—were heard and interpreted inside the administration in Washington. This may ultimately be due to sources' unavailability, but the discussions among key decision-makers and between them and key representatives of the neoliberal financial-industrial complex are largely absent. It is a pity, for instance, not to know how Clinton's closest national security and foreign policy advisers tackled the

WTO issue before and during the Seattle meeting and protests of 1999. Similarly, Adler struggles with the spatial boundaries of his analysis, its core geography. Whereas the book is mostly centered on the United States and on US actors, the interactions between the local, national, and transnational dimensions are not always straightforwardly exposed.[20] How, for instance, were US national actors cooperating with local actors in the Global South? What was the role of transnational networks of solidarity that, while cutting across the North-South divide, fostered fair globalizers' standpoints? In fact, the Nestlé boycott perfectly epitomizes the constant interplay between local demands and transnational advocacy, but such a mutually advantageous relation remains overall subtle and latent throughout the rest of the book.[21] In it, supranational dynamics and transnational activism seem to eventually prevail over local pressures and concerns. Yet the globalization of nimbyism is one of the book's most fascinating and interesting hints and surely worthy of further investigation. The concurrent expansion of a varied consumers' movement in Europe, the rise of a massive global environmentalist constituency that coalesced around environmental justice and anti-toxics campaigns, a germinal global youth network that in the aftermath of the 2007-08 crisis would give birth to such phenomena as "Occupy Wall Street," along with the renewed demands for national investments in carbon-free economies and in patterns of local and global sustainability are just a few examples of possible future research avenues.[22]

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#### Notes

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