

9 What is Globalization?

DO YOU REMEMBER the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Hong Kong in December 2005? Hong Kong then experienced some violent demonstrations, mostly led by Koreans, Filipinos and visitors from other countries, as well as a few from Hong Kong. Some local people agreed with the demonstrators; others complained of the nuisance, because they had to close their shops to avoid possible damage by rioters.

How many realized that the cause of the disturbances was globalization, one of the main aims of the WTO? It calls for free trade everywhere in the world. So why do so many people oppose world trade? Maybe you already know the answer: the objectors claim that underdeveloped countries do not enjoy a “level playing-field”. They consider that globalization is unfair to poorer countries, and favours the rich corporations of developed countries.

Among the demonstrators were some Filipinos. Many Filipinos are farmers, who depend upon a good harvest to support their families, and to sell some crops for other expenses such as education for their children. Time after time, their crops are destroyed by typhoons, but their government seldom helps them.

Conversely, governments of rich countries usually provide huge subsidies for their rich farmers, who can produce enough

crops to sell cheaply to poor countries. That destroys the trade of farmers in poor countries, because they cannot sell their crops so cheaply. For many years, farmers of poor countries have been crying out for a more level playing-field, but they say that their voices have not been heard. That is why they demonstrate in every country where the WTO meets.

A Canadian writer, Maude Barlow, in her book “Too Close for Comfort” shows how Canadians too are suffering from the takeover of their resources, even water, by American corporations. She worries in case a company named Monsanto may force Canadian farmers to change from traditional to Genetically Modified Food (GMF) seeds, as has happened in some poorer countries. Once farmers use GMF seeds, they cannot return to their traditional crops, and they become dependent upon a foreign company to provide seeds.

The outlook is not good at present for poor countries, but some governments are beginning to realize the danger, and have begun to nationalize their resources for the benefit of their own countries. Also, more people join the protests every time the WTO meets. Hopefully rich corporations will eventually realize that they must provide a level playing-field if they want poor countries to join world trade agreements.