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Letter to the Editor
The New York Times

David Frum (Op-ed, April 19th) derides the Seattle and Washington protesters as vision-less. Without Marxism, he notes scornfully, they are left with nothing except their hatred of capitalism. Instead of criticizing those who proclaim no fixed model as their solution, he and we all should be celebrating the emergence of an international citizens' movement unfettered by formulaic thinking but holding a clear, positive vision. The vision is democracy, understood as people's capacity to participate in public decisions affecting their lives and values.

Frum ridicules protestors for offering nothing more. How unfortunate. Admittedly, this vision of democracy is unoriginal: Over two hundred years ago Thomas Jefferson wrote that "No one could be called happy or free without participating and having a share in public power." Neither is this vision one that protestors can neatly outline for David Frum. How fortunate. The great thing about democracy is precisely that it's not a rigid model. Democracy is messy because it is an ongoing process we ourselves must evolve to match new realities. I hear the protestors saying: let's get on with the messy, urgent, exhilarating business of figuring out what it means to apply principles of democratic accountability to today's most powerful decision makers, international economic institutions and organizations -- including multinational corporations and the World Bank and IMF -- whose decisions now affect our lives as much or more than those of national governments. Contrary to Frum, I don't want a few offering their already-worked out model to the rest of us. Let's figure out together how to bring economic life into the democratic fold.

Frances Moore Lappé, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Visiting Scholar, MIT, where I am writing a sequel to my 1971 Diet for a Small Planet
617 441-4050 home
617 253-7956 MIT