

Association. "But what is flawed with that idea [that the WTO protest rejuvenated activism] is that it implies nothing came before."

Nevertheless, Fischer says Seattle was a key moment.

"What happened in Seattle was amazing," she said while on the phone from Washington, D.C. "I don't believe in apathy or people who say students are apathetic."

Further north in Ottawa student politicians are cautiously optimistic about the future consequences of the WTO protest.

"I don't know if I can say it was a turning point," said Elizabeth Carlyle, the national deputy chairperson for the CFS, when asked if Seattle marked the beginning of broad student opposition to Neo-Liberalism.

"If you ask people in Chile they would say, 'Are you kidding? We have been living with economic readjustment for years,'" she continued, while putting the question in a global context.

"But what happened in Seattle gave people a lot of confidence. And confidence is necessary for political change. People will not vote or get active in a certain way if they are not confident."

One Chilean who became confident after Seattle was Miguel Fredes.

Inside a small bookstore in Santiago - adorned with texts by numerous Chilean poets,

Spanish translations of Kafka and an English copy of the complete works of William Shakespeare - Fredes describes his thoughts about attending the WTO protest.

"You can make a division before and after Seattle," the environmental lawyer said in Spanish. "You can no longer talk about the economy of Canada and the United States in isolation. You can now talk about world governments versus groups like environmentalists."

This "the people versus the nation states of the world" comment touches on an important argument: citizens cannot trust their political leaders to deliver social programs, a clean environment or labour rights.

And if you look carefully you will see this argument is being articulated, in one form or another, by students across the Americas.

Take Cabrera, the student leader at the University of Chile, for instance.

Like numerous students interviewed in Chile, Cabrera wasn't 100 per cent clear on what happened in Seattle, but he is well aware of what Neo-liberalism has done to his country.

In 1970 Chile captured the international spotlight when Salvador Allende became the first ever democratically elected Marxist in the world. His radical program, which included agricultural reform and nationalizing the country's copper industry, divided

the country.

On Sept. 11, 1973, a U.S.-sponsored military coup overthrew Allende who died the day of the army revolt. For the next 17-years the country was ruled by a ruthless dictatorship.

When democracy returned in 1990 hope swept across the country. Every opponent of the military regime - Communists, Socialists, gays, feminists, left-leaning Christian Democrats - supported the centre-left Concertacion coalition.

But hope soon subsided.

Only two military officials were jailed for the thousands of people killed during the military regime.

The current constitution, written by the military during the dictatorship, still stands.

And the Neo-liberal economic structure imposed by the army was not dismantled. In fact, the centre-left government recently privatized Chile's water, electricity and telephone companies by selling it to Spanish consortiums.

"The people may have more freedom to speak what's on their mind," said Cabrera. "But structurally Chile is the same as the dictatorship."

And it's here where things get interesting.

Granted, the Chilean political reality is very different from Canada or the United States.

In Chile they are still haunted by the ghosts of the 1973-1990 military dictatorship that imposed ruthless economic reforms.

Pensions were slashed, free post-secondary education eliminated and countless industries privatized.

In contrast, Canada has Medicare, some government operated firms - buses here are run by each municipality, whereas in Chile transportation is in private hands - and have several strong unions that workers in the third-world can only dream of.

But in these different political realities students are asking similar questions.

Student leaders like Cabrera are angry that Chile's post-dictatorship government did not change the economic system. So, he argues, the people must organize and fight back.

In Mexico working-class students are fighting what they see as an attempt by the government to eliminate publicly funded post-secondary education. So they organized and shutdown the country's largest university.

And in Canada and the United States thousands of students are worried that their own governments are chipping away at publicly accessible post-secondary education, while compromising environmental and labour rights in the name of free trade. So they organized and took to the streets of Seattle.

-With files from  
Cynthia Lee, Steve  
Worth and the New York  
Times

## Education not necessarily a social program says Minister

By Chris Bodnar  
Source: Ottawa  
Bureau Chief

OTTAWA (CUP) - Jane Stewart, federal minister of Human Resources and Development, says her government recognizes the importance of a strong post-secondary education system in Canada, even though it may not be seen as a social program anymore.

In an exclusive interview with Canadian University Press, Stewart outlined what she views as her government's accomplishments in the realm of higher education.

But she avoided commenting on whether Canadians can count on their education system to get the same attention as other social programs.

"Education is certainly viewed as an important piece of a healthy Canada," said Stewart in regard to her government's view of spending on post-secondary education.

The Minister says Ottawa has shown its commitment to education through initiatives like the use of Registered Education Savings Programs, the Millennium Scholarship Fund, making interest on student loans tax deductible and by extending loan repayment

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