

Canada: The Trans-Pacific Agreement Will Sap Whatever Is Left of Our Sovereignty

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If you really think we live in a free and independent society, think again. What sovereignty are we left with, when we have already forfeited our birthright to multinationals?

What freedom are we talking about when a private company can challenge our laws in court, according to the various so-called free-trade agreements, negotiated by our governments in secret: NAFTA, the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union (CETA) and now the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)?

Trade is the new euphemism for a Bill of Rights for Corporations.

Pushed by employers and transnational corporations, our governments are increasingly bartering our freedom in favour of a handful of private transnationals, whose powers surpass those of the state. These agreements grant their member companies, the right to challenge our laws and regulations in areas, such as: the protection of water, the environment, our public services, our health care, our roads and bridges and our sewer systems. Consequently, a transnational can sue our government, in secret, in private courts, without recourse, should they consider our laws an obstacle to their profits.

According to the *Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives*, Canada has forked out \$171 million in compensation to transnational corporations under Chapter 11 of NAFTA, since it was implemented in 1994.

By way of example, in 1997, the US company *Ethel Corp.* demanded \$251 million of the Canadian government, because it was forbidden from using MMT, a neurotoxic, gasoline additive, harmful both to human beings and to the environment. An agreement to the benefit of the company enabled it to continue selling its harmful product. Moreover, the Canadian government was forced to recant publicly and to pay the company the sum of 1.3 million U.S. dollars in compensation.

Similarly, in 2002, the U.S. firm *SD Myers*, successfully sued the Canadian government for 6 billion dollars, for daring to ban the export of PCBs, a toxic product.

More sinister still, our public health care system is coveted by private companies as a source of profits. A US investor, from Phoenix Arizona, threatened to file a complaint under NAFTA, against our public health care system, because he was frustrated in his plan to build and manage a private hospital in Vancouver.

In 2005, the US giant UPS complained to the NAFTA tribunal, supposedly on account of

unfair advantages, granted to a domestic company, Canada Post.

Worse still, the transnational Dow Chemical sued Quebec before the NAFTA tribunal, for banning the use of a harmful pesticide in the province.

Another example that demonstrates the excesses practised by transnationals is that of U.S. *Abitibi Bowater* paper mill, which sued the Canadian government under the auspices of NAFTA, simply because the government of Newfoundland dared to remove the free use of hydro-electric power, following the savage closure of the company plants. Subsequently, the company received \$130 million in compensation.

In 2010, an American oil company, *Lone Pine Resources* sued the government of Quebec, claiming \$250 million dollars, because of a moratorium on the exploration of oil and gas in the St. Lawrence River.

After the ban by British Columbia of bulk water exports, *Sunbelt Corporation* of California challenged this prohibition under Chapter 11 of NAFTA, demanding \$10 billion in damages.

Under the NAFTA accord, Canada now exports 70% of our oil reserves and 61% of the natural gas we produce to the United States. Although we may experience a shortage of oil ourselves, we are not allowed to reduce our exports to the United States under any circumstances. Thus, we are obliged to import large quantities of oil from abroad, to meet our own needs. Moreover, we do not have the right to reduce our oil production to save our planet from greenhouse gases.

Another example of serious consequence is the fact that our Canadian public Central Bank, the only one of its kind in the world, created in 1935 to help our governments through interest-free, affordable loans, must now bow to the dictates of private European and U.S. Central Banks.

For years, our elites kept hammering that globalization and free trade would be a source of employment and prosperity. Upon verification, it is a lie. Canada lost thousands of well-paid, permanent jobs in the manufacturing sector; wages stagnated, outsourcing is spreading everywhere, resulting in precarious, part-time jobs and inequalities increased. Women are particularly affected by this downward trend, since they are allotted poor, part-time jobs in the services' industry. To make things worse, many unemployed workers are excluded from coverage of state benefits.

These international ententes have nothing to do with the public interest. Under TPP, the cost of our medication will skyrocket, our public services will be up for grabs, and our environmental laws will be challenged. Had these trade deals existed in the 80s, asbestos, a cancer-causing product, would not have been banned and its producers would not have been forced to compensate victims!

In this context, governments have become puppets in the hands of large corporations and to hell with the sovereignty of the state. We are no longer masters in our own country. Before rallying around *Free Trade*, we should be clamouring for *Fair Trade*, as we try to reclaim our sovereignty from the tentacles of large corporations.

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