

Trading Away the Future

CAFTA and the FTAA are continuing a trend whereby current and future legislation to protect animals and the environment is sacrificed to free trade. To date, free trade under the auspices of GATT, the WTO and NAFTA has had a devastating impact on animal and environmental protection legislation. Whenever a nation has challenged an environmental protection regulation, the relevant authority has ruled that regulation to be an illegal trade barrier. The nation that has enacted the offending rules must either change its law or pay a heavy financial penalty.

Negotiations for CAFTA and the FTAA are proceeding in the same vein. Proponents of environmental issues are not welcome to the closed door negotiations between corporate and government elite. This happens because the thrust of trade talks is purely profit-related. Anything else is left in the margins or left out altogether.

Polluted Thinking

In 1996, the Canadian government approved a bill banning the use of MMT, a gasoline additive suspected of being a brain-damaging neurotoxin. In response, the Ethyl Corporation, a U.S. manufacturer of the additive, used NAFTA rules to launch a \$347 million dollar lawsuit against the government, claiming expropriation and loss of profits. The case was settled in 1998 when the Canadian government decided to settle out of court, paying Ethyl Corp. nearly \$20 million, retracting the ban on MMT, and providing a written letter of apology.



Disservice to the Earth

Service corporations, running activities such as mining, oil drilling and pipeline transport, water extraction and collection, hotel and tourist facility construction, transport and travel, and waste incineration, are responsible for some of the most environmentally destructive activities on the planet. They also make up two-thirds of all international trade in services.

An FTAA agreement on services would open markets to foreign service operators, making it more difficult to choose service companies according to environmental impact. It would also virtually eliminate the ability of governments to ensure environmental protection through laws and regulations. Multinational service corporations would be given broad rights similar to those in an international investment agreement. No exceptions would be made for countries seeking to conserve exhaustible natural resources, while the exception for animal and plant life is very narrow. Environmental damage would increase as harmful service operations expand. As it stands, fossil fuel extraction and mining are one of the leading causes of deforestation. Soon a country could be forced to allow an unlimited number of oil rigs to be built in an ecologically sensitive area, by overruling environmental regulations specifically intended to protect that place. Hotel and tourism activities, already a great strain in ecologically sensitive areas like beaches and coral reefs, would proliferate. And water extraction and supply services would be privatized on a wider scale, depleting scarce water resources.



Invasive Species

Growth of international trade has amounted to a worldwide experiment, essentially breaking down physical boundaries between the planet's diverse ecosystems and blending them into a handful of biologically boiled-down mono-systems. And once it starts, this "biological pollution cannot be easily stopped, but continues to grow and spread.

Thus, global trade's need for speed has resulted in relaxed import regulations and "streamlined inspections" at borders world-wide. WTO rules force countries to back down from scientifically sound precautions to stem this ecological threat. In 1998, when the USDA adopted emergency rules to stop the Asian long-horned beetle, Hong Kong threatened to file a complaint with the WTO that could override the new safeguards.

Past pests that changed the U.S. ecology forever include Dutch Elm Disease, which caused the near extinction of the

formerly ubiquitous American elm, and the medfly, which has threatened the citrus industry.

Unsafe Food and Farms

Food and agriculture are among the largest economic sectors in the Western Hemisphere, and their impacts on the environment are enormous. In Latin America, almost half of the soils in grazing lands have lost their fertility. Meanwhile, forest destruction has increased substantially due to the encroachment of agricultural production such as beef farming. It is also increasingly evident that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) cannot be contained once they are introduced into the environment or the food supply.

The FTAA would exacerbate these serious problems by reinforcing WTO and NAFTA rules that have made it difficult for countries to protect health and the environment or regulate genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Countries would lack the clear right to use precautionary standards in establishing guidelines for food and agriculture.

Also, the FTAA would displace locally oriented, sustainable forms of farming with mass market and high technology agriculture. The FTAA's agriculture provisions would benefit large-scale agriculture corporations at the expense of sustainable small-scale farming, primarily encouraging trade-oriented agriculture which companies like ADM and Monsanto can most successfully exploit. But family farmers and peasants - who use environmentally sound agricultural practices - would be bankrupted if imports flood their markets. When corn markets were opened under NAFTA, many traditional corn farmers were either unable to maintain their businesses or had to employ greater levels of pesticides.

Intellectual Property

In addition, the FTAA may include a set of intellectual property rules that would give major agricultural and pharmaceutical corporations the right to patent and own traditional farming knowledge and indigenous medicines. These rules would assist corporations in the Americas seeking to promote GMO food seeds and products, and to develop formerly traditional remedies as proprietary pharmaceuticals.