



PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Elections 2011

Canada's Free Trade agenda: Dissing democracy and rewarding despots

(Montreal and Ottawa, April 27, 2011) – Since coming to power the minority government of Stephen Harper has vigorously pursued preferential free trade with despots abroad and spared no quarter for democracy at home, says a broad group of Canadian organizations which are demanding a new foreign policy and trade approach by the next government.

The Harper government is moving stealthily and quickly to complete the biggest trade deal Canada has ever seen with the European Union, which will fundamentally reshape our national and local economies while undermining environmental policy, public services and democratic decision making. Harper has also rewarded foreign investors for suing Canada under the North American Free Trade Agreement's investor-state provisions while Canadian investors applaud Canada's trade negotiations with some of this hemisphere's worst human rights abusers such as Colombia and Honduras.

We, civil society networks and organizations from Canada and Quebec say that's enough!

An end to investor-state clauses in trade agreements

Both Common Frontiers-Canada and the Québec Network on Continental Integration believe that free trade agreements modelled after the flawed NAFTA pose an unacceptable risk by diminishing governments' right to set public policy. A recent case is the August 2010 record-setting \$130 million settlement given AbitibiBowater by Ottawa.

AbitibiBowater closed its pulp and paper mill in Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) in 2008 claiming rights to sell its assets including timber harvesting licenses and water use permits. These permits are a public trust owned by the Province, not by private firms. When the NL government moved to re-appropriate them as a right under Canadian law, AbitibiBowater sidestepped the Canadian court system by challenging the NL government in a NAFTA tribunal. However, rather than defend the principle of public ownership, the federal government settled AbitibiBowater's claim before it could be heard.

We call on the next government of Canada to follow the lead of Australia and eliminate investor-state provisions from trade agreements, including NAFTA.

Call off the perimeter security deal with the US

Last February Stephen Harper and US President Barack Obama announced a secretive ‘security perimeter’ plan whose details can’t be shared with Parliament or the public – despite it posing a risk to Canadian sovereignty.

The private sector has agitated since 9/11 for Canada and Mexico to take on as their own the US’s security agenda. The Beyond the Border perimeter security plan will establish a common understanding of the “threat environment”, which we think will inevitably be defined by US interests. This approach to perimeter security will mean a jointly patrolled outer perimeter under US control. Another possible result could be the merging of Canadians’ personal information into joint databases that are accessible to US security and law enforcement.

We call on Canadians to oppose the secretive Beyond the Border security plan

No trade deals with despots.

Negotiating free trade agreements with the likes of Colombia, Honduras, and most recently Panama, is sending a signal to the rest of the world that Canada is a country where the pursuit of mining and bank profits trumps human rights. In spite of the systematic killings of dozens of trade unionists every year in Colombia, Conservatives and Liberals teamed up to hurry ratification of a Canada-Colombia FTA through Parliament before the 2010 summer recess. Canada just signed a trade agreement with Panama, a country widely known as a ‘fiscal paradise’ that turns a blind eye to the laundering of drug cartel money. Canada is currently engaged in a series of secretive trade talks with the illegitimate government of Honduras – a country that lost its seat at the Organization of American States due to the recent military coup and ongoing human rights abuses. Canada’s former image as ‘good neighbour’ is being shredded before our eyes, and there could be no clearer proof of this than the recent vote against Canada having a seat on the UN Security Council.

We need to discuss Canada’s foreign policy and trade directions

The Québec Network on Continental Integration and Common Frontiers-Canada decry the lack of foreign policy discussion in these elections. It is now time for the candidates to focus on the free trade agenda that is contributing to making Canada and the world a much more unequal place while destroying our image on the international stage. The next government of Canada must commit to an extensive debate on an alternative model of integration - one that privileges the equitable distribution of wealth and guarantees peoples’ economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, over and against the ambitions of the trans-national corporations and their quest for profits at all costs.

-30-

Contacts:

Common Frontiers: Rick Arnold, tel. # (905) 352-2430; comfront@web.ca

RQIC: Pierre-Yves Serinet, tel. 514-276-1075; rjic@ciso.qc.ca