

Enough of NAFTA:

We need a people-centred trade model*

What's wrong with "free" trade deals?

Canada's experience with trade deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) shows that they lock in the "free market" agenda by limiting the role of governments to make decisions about economic, social and ecological policies. We've learned that "free" trade agreements (FTAs):

- hamper governments' ability to protect the environment and access to medicines
- limit conditions on foreign investors
- restrict public sector procurement and the use of subsidies as tools of development
- increase corporate profits while workers wages deteriorate

Under the investment protection provisions (Chapter 11) of NAFTA, foreign investors can not only sue national governments for millions of dollars in compensation for lost profit opportunities, but they can also overturn government measures designed to protect human health and the environment. Canada has used NAFTA-Chapter 11 as a template in its efforts to embed 'investor's rights' in FTA negotiations with Colombia, Peru, and four Central American countries. Furthermore, as the 2007 softwood lumber debacle clearly shows, NAFTA-type agreements do not guarantee "free" access to U.S. markets.

Renegotiate - or withdraw

U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama has called for the renegotiation of NAFTA, and most Canadians agree. In July 2008, an Angus Reid poll found that 52% said Canada should renegotiate. Massive protests in Mexico show that Mexican workers and farmers want out too. NAFTA article 2205 says: "A party may withdraw from this Agreement six months after it provides written notice of withdrawal to the other parties."

A new trade agenda to put interests of people ahead of the profiteers:

- Build on fairness, cooperation and mutual benefit in trading arrangements
- Create good jobs that pay well, ease poverty, while also protecting the ecology
- Ensure that countries can make rules so that small farmers can get a decent price for their products
- Re-institute government food inspection and raise standards to prevent epidemics like listeriosis

What can you do?

Help make NAFTA an election issue. Use this information in writing letters to the local media, or challenge political leaders at all-candidate meetings with questions like these:

- *Will you (and your party) press for the renegotiation of NAFTA?*
- *Will you oppose future investor-protection schemes like NAFTA's Chapter 11?*
- *Will you work to protect the ability of governments to guarantee the rights of their own citizens, including having access to life-saving medicines?*
- *Will you put protection of human rights in countries like Colombia ahead of commercial considerations in a trade deal?*



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*One of a series of 'one-pagers' prepared by Common Frontiers. To see them all go to www.commonfrontiers.ca