

# Fair Trade, Not Free Trade

## Why Students Will be Hitting the Streets of Quebec City

By BJ McCarville, UPEI Student Union President

The UPEI Senate passed a motion on Friday, April 6 encouraging professors to be flexible in their exam scheduling for students wishing to attend the Summit of the Americas or the People's Summit activities on April 19, 20 and 21 in Québec City. This motion was put forward by the student union so that students who are impassioned by ongoing free trade criticisms, or those who are inclined to find out more and get involved, may not be denied this opportunity.

FTAA, WTO, MAI, IMF. What is this puzzling array of acronyms and legal jargon which is provoking a massive eruption of demonstration within civil society? Why are students and many other concerned citizens linking arms to barricade trade meetings? Why do these people make the time to protest and take the risk of physical assault and injury? The answer is both noble and simple: freedom.

Next week in Quebec City, 34 heads of state representing every country in the western hemisphere, with the exception of Cuba, will gather at what is being called the Summit of the Americas. Amongst the summit's proceedings political leaders will engage in negotiations of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Agreement. This agreement promises to be a geographical extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as well as adding a new and broader scope of content: the addition of 'services' to the trading table.

There are several concerns to be brought forward by existing trade agreements as well as the hypothetical content of the FTAA.

First of all, NAFTA has

proved to be less than satisfactory in several regards, most notably in matters of environmental, health and labour policies. Within this agreement there is what is called an 'investor state' clause which protects corporations from unfair trade barriers and gives private industry the right to sue a country, a province, or a state. A good example of how disastrous this regulation has been is the case in which US-based Ethyl Corporation forced Canada to pay \$19.3 million in damages for lost revenue when Canada banned MMT (methylcyclopentadienyl manganese tricarbonyl). Perhaps even more alarming is the fact that Canada was forced to drop its ban on this dangerous gasoline additive, a toxin known to attack the human nervous system. This example does not stand alone: time and time again, corporations have gone up against government regulations and consistently the public loses out.

So imagine the situation if 'services' become a tradable commodity. This could pose a serious threat to many of the social programmes we Canadians value as rights. For example, if such an 'investor state' clause is attached to the trading of a service like education, then it is safe to assume that a for-profit corporation could sue our government for providing grants to public schools, claiming these grants are a major trade barrier. As taxpayers, we could be forced to fund a privately owned institution, leading to the demise of our public education system. This is foreseeably a road to the destruction of our public post-secondary system, a system where private universities and colleges are already existing

**A Race to the Bottom...**

Private Education, Health Care, Water, Utilities  
No regard for Environment, Labour Rights, Human Rights  
Corporate Control Instead of Democracy

**FTAA, NO WAY!**

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Freedom

and competing.

Until recently, the working texts of the FTAA agreements were to remain away from public scrutiny, but it was announced on Saturday, April 7 that these texts will be released, although not in time for the Québec City meetings on April 21 and 22. Until these texts are made public we must make our concerns known and remain skeptical of the democratic processes involved in these deliberations. Any meeting which takes place behind concrete barricades and barbed wire would appear to be hiding something.

There are many other areas of concern within these negotiations, all of which culminate to one chief concern: who holds the power

when all is said and done? The answer may regrettably not be society as a whole; not the voter or the elected official. These agreements have the ability to move power into a corporate sphere which is accountable to no one.

Next week, everyone in the streets of Québec City will come with their own background and concerns, but all will come together and play active role in civil society activities, educating ourselves and speaking out. Democracy in action. Freedom.

For anyone interested in attending activities in Quebec or local activities, or if you have any questions, concerns or comments, please contact me for further information at [bmccarville@upe.ca](mailto:bmccarville@upe.ca).