

What the heck is MAI

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ernment from giving special incentives to Canadian entrepreneurs, while limiting many job creation programs.

For these reasons, and many others, critics of the MAI say it is nothing less than "a charter of rights and freedoms for corporations." They say it must be stopped or else it will do massive damage to the majority of the world's citizens.

Proponents Arguments

Proponents of the MAI say the treaty is not a bid to entrench corporate power, but rather an attempt to regulate the arbitrary power of government. They say that there is too much red tape for investors right now, and that the only way to ensure the growth of investment is to lock governments into agreements which allow for the free movement of capital.

The benefits of the MAI are clear, proponents say. For domestic corporations investing abroad, the MAI will assure that they have maximum freedom and protection for their investments. By freeing international investment, proponents of the MAI say that the treaty will ensure massive growth in investment of all

kinds. This will translate into new jobs and increased economic growth.

As for the "national treatment" provisions, proponents say that these will only ensure all investors are treated fairly and equally. Likewise, they argue the dispute settlement provisions -- which allow corporations to directly sue government -- will assure that all disputes over trade and investment are settled in a equal and just manner.

Proponents of the MAI say globalization is inevitable, and that those countries that fail to participate in the process will be left behind. They admit that there are some problems with process, and that some workers -- especially unskilled ones -- may lose their jobs, but they say that in the long term, eliminating barriers to foreign investment will assure a better life for all citizens of the planet. They say that the criticisms of the MAI are unfounded and opponents of the treaty are scare-mongers.

The need for public debate

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that there will remain sharp disagreements over the likely impact of the

MAI on living standards, income distribution, democracy, and the sovereignty of national and local governments. Opponents believe that the agreement will have a negative impact in all of these areas, while proponents argue that it will contribute to worldwide economic growth without these unfavourable repercussions.

Given these sharply diverging views, an extensive and well-informed public debate on the issue is essential. That the public should be aware of the MAI and able to participate in a constructive dialogue about its implications for the country may be one of the few areas of agreement among the proposed pact's supporters and critics.

In order to help get the ball rolling, there will be surveys set up across campus this week starting Tuesday. Students will be able to anonymously state their opinion on the MAI. You can also visit the MAI information web site <<http://www.islandnet.com/~ncfs/maisite>> for a neutral look at the MAI. For more of the opponents views, see MAI-Not at <<http://mai.flora.org>> and for more of the proponents view, see the OECD at <<http://www.oecd.org>>.

Vancouver police criticized for treatment of activists

BY ALEX BUSTOS

VANCOUVER (CUP) — A University of British Columbia student charged with one count of mischief has accused the Vancouver Police Department of waging a war against social activists.

Jesse Scott, a 19-year-old philosophy major, was arrested March 22 for allegedly scrawling a Royal Bank window with glass chalk during a rally in late January protesting student debt.

The arrest, which took place seven weeks after the January protest, was made at a Vancouver's Canadian military drill hall just prior to an anti-war rally.

Scott says he believes the real purpose of the arrest was to scare off the anti-war protestors.

"My arrest was an act of intimidation," he said. "It's scary when [the police] have information on you and can use it when they want.... It seems like a war on activists."

But according to Anne Drennan, spokesperson for the Vancouver Police Department, Scott's arrest was due to chance rather than an orchestrated police campaign.

On Jan. 28, Scott was one of 1,500 protesters in downtown Vancouver who participated in the National Day of Action against student debt.

"We had an officer videotaping the demo," Drennan said, "which is

standard in these demonstrations."

The videotape, she says, captured several protestors perpetrating acts of "vandalism."

Seven weeks later, the officer who filmed the Day of Action protest spotted Scott at the drill hall and, after recognizing him as one of the protestors on the videotape, arrested him.

When asked why Scott wasn't arrested earlier, Drennan replied, "There was no opportunity. There were over 1,000 people [at the January rally]. The officer couldn't get a chance to arrest him."

This explanation doesn't satisfy Milton Smith, the lawyer representing Scott.

Smith says the police know full well the mischief charge will probably be thrown out of court. The purpose of the arrest, he continues, was not to win in court, but rather to scare off potential protestors.

"It's a way of subverting the justice system," he said. "[The police] use their powers to punish someone without going to trial for exercising their right to exercise freedom of speech."

Smith says he is also concerned with police filming protestors at rallies like the one last January.

"It's incredible that our tax dollars are being used to survey groups engaged in perfectly legal activities," he said.

F.Y.I

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