

“NO MANDATE” FOR MORE FREE TRADE

BY DAVID ROBBINS

Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew thinks he has a mandate to expand free trade — just because government-funded opinion polls often show that Canadians think there are benefits to increased trade. And with major meetings of both the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) on the horizon, now is the time for Canadians to test the Liberal government’s mandate.

There is nothing wrong with trade per se. But the more Canadians know about the real nature of the actual trade deals that Canada is advocating and signing, the less Canadians support the Liberal government’s “free trade” policies.

We are on a collision course with even more free trade. High-level leaked government documents show that the Liberals are pursuing an aggressive expansion of free trade at both the WTO and the FTAA, without a real public debate on the impacts. The government is planning to simply avoid the concerns of Canadians and merely repeat “key messages” that hide the truth of trade’s unprecedented new scope.

Furthermore, these documents reveal Canada’s shocking attitude towards poorer countries. Canada has revealed itself to be a real bully at international trade negotiations, as it actively seeks to “isolate” what it calls “hard-line opponents” and undermine the ways in which poorer countries are trying to make the WTO fairer for them. It would appear that the Canadian government has become a true believer in free trade, now that the necessary domestic “structural adjustment” has been made.

The WTO, the global free trade enforcer, is gearing up for its next major meeting this September. Trade ministers from WTO member countries will gather in Cancun, Mexico, from September 10–14, 2003. Just two months

later, trade ministers from the Americas (except Cuba) will gather in Miami to speed along the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which is shaping up to be the world’s most far-reaching and potent free trade agreement yet.

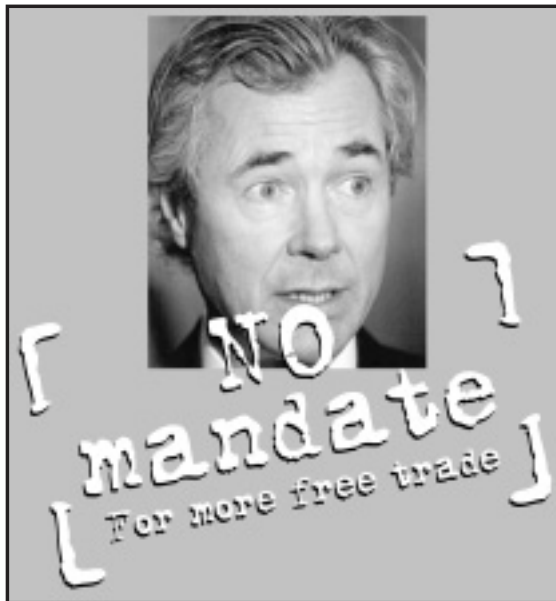
While there are key differences between the WTO and the FTAA, it is becoming clear that the two trade regimes have a mutually reinforcing relationship — by enhancing the provisions of the FTAA, major corporations will have more leverage to extend those so-called rights at the global level through the WTO. And the two regimes have a similar function: to expand the reach of trade agree-

ments into our everyday lives, lock in privatization, and prevent government from regulating the economy, setting social goals, and protecting the environment.

Perhaps worst of all, the Canadian government thinks it has a mandate to do all this while avoiding a real debate on the implications of their trade policies. That’s where we as citizens come into the picture. With your help, more Canadians will see through this deceit and get ready to take action to test Minister Pettigrew’s “mandate” for more free trade. Working together, we can deny trade negotiators this false mandate, and fight for fair trade, global justice and true sustainability by exposing what is really on the table at the WTO and the FTAA.

Canada’s current trade policies lock in privatization and take away the power of government to protect the environment, enhance social justice and maintain public services. The Canadian government is rushing massive new deals through the negotiation process and avoiding full, informed public debate. Until we have public debate, there can be “No Mandate” for more free trade!

David Robbins is the Trade Campaigner for The Council of Canadians. ✪



“Mandate / noun, the authority given to an elected group of people, such as a government, to perform an action or govern a country”

– Cambridge International Dictionary of English