

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the European Union and Canada Transnational Corporations Must Not Write Our Laws!

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While the economic crisis is still having an impact on the people, our governments continue to want to impose antidemocratic and harmful regulations on the economy. We, living both in Canada and in Europe, are aware of the concerns of civil society and we are worried by the fact that once again negotiations are taking place behind closed doors between the Canadian government and the European Union Commission on an agreement called the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Four negotiation sessions have already taken place and a fifth is being held in Ottawa from October 18 to 22, with the goal of finishing in 2011. Only the business lobbies have been duly consulted, despite the fact that the subjects included go far beyond just trade issues.

Despite the secrecy surrounding these negotiations, a leak of the draft agreement and some official documents allow us to grasp the main objectives of the CETA. This agreement will liberalize and deregulate even more sectors of the economy than previous free trade agreements. It risks threatening public services, authorizing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in great numbers, and hindering the adoption of serious social or environmental regulations. Moreover, it constitutes a first step towards the creation of a vast free-trade zone that includes the countries of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and of the EU, sacrificing social protections, environmental regulations and public services.

The goal is in essence to ensure short-term profits for transnational corporations on both sides of the Atlantic. The means of accomplishing this is to provide these corporations with the ability to have dispute resolution panels overturn any regulation that might reduce their potential profits now or even in the future.

A city or local government wants to support an activity to fight unemployment? A social or environmental regulation is adopted that might limit the potential profits of a transnational corporation? They could attack such measures as counter to their interests. One of the 27 states of the European Union wants to forbid GMOs? Backed by the CETA, corporations could file a complaint and have such a decision overturned. We recognize this type of system from Chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). We can also see that it is a carbon copy of the late Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), which an international campaign defeated in 1998. Twelve years ago, the MAI included the same judicial monstrosity: a law

written by and putting the rights of transnational corporations above all others. The people were made aware of this and the governments had to back off.

How can there be any question of accepting today what we collectively have already rejected? Other models of commercial trade are not only possible, but desirable and urgently needed. They must be based on respect for democratic laws and the needs of populations (which are not merely equivalent to those of transnational corporations), cooperation, respect for human rights, the rights of workers and indigenous peoples, the protection and development of public services, and the inalienable right of states to make laws in the public interest and to safeguard ecosystems. As long as we do not see these principles at work in trade negotiations, we will continue the fight for democracy and human welfare, and call on the citizens and social movements of Canada and the countries of Europe to mobilize against them.