

Editorial

Trade Wars Are Not a Solution

Since the refusal of the U.S. government to abide by a decision of the NAFTA Extraordinary Challenge Committee (ECC) and drop its tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber, Prime Minister Paul Martin and several members of his cabinet have promised to retaliate against the Americans. Others, including some of those who negotiated the free trade deals in the first place, are calling for the government to threaten to withdraw from NAFTA if the Americans do not back down. In response, the U.S. ambassador to Canada has issued veiled threats, warning that retaliation would not be in Canada's best interest. It would appear from all of this that the trade war which has been waged for the past two decades over which monopolies will dominate the North American market is becoming extremely intense and the Canadian people are being called upon to take sides in this dispute.

When the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was negotiated, the Reagan administration in the United States and the Mulroney government in Canada declared that the agreement would put an end to the trade war between Canada and the U.S. The Mulroney government and its successors presented and defended the FTA and NAFTA as trade agreement that would bring prosperity to Canada by opening up the U.S. market to Canadian business. The experience of the past decade and more proves, however, that not only have these agreements failed to end the trade war, but they have raised it to a new level, and the overall standard of living of working class and people in Canada, as well as in the United States, has deteriorated.

The Canadian and American governments, and the monopolies on both sides of the border, selectively push protectionism and free trade, sometimes

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Commentary

The Tragedy of New Orleans and the Fraud of "American Homeland Security"

When the tsunami disaster struck southern Asia at the end of 2004, U.S. warships and military personnel were on the scene within two days. By contrast, it took the U.S. National Guard five days to arrive in New Orleans with food and water following last week's hurricane disaster. During those five days, hundreds of people had perished and tens of thousands more were left to survive as best they could. Furthermore, the tsunami disaster struck without notice, while the hurricane that struck large areas of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama gave several days advance warning. This cruel irony exposes the fraud of "American homeland security" which clearly has little to do with the "American homeland" and virtually nothing to do with the

security of ordinary Americans.

There are many reasons why it took American relief efforts three days longer to reach the people stranded in New Orleans than it took to reach the people of Indonesia, not the least being that U.S. imperialism has military designs on the whole of south and southeast Asia, so its warships were already in the area. Furthermore, almost half of the Louisiana and Mississippi National Guard, the organizations supposedly in charge during natural disasters, are currently stationed in Iraq and the Bush administration refused to make alternate resources available in the days leading up to the hurricane.

This has been a recurring theme, particularly in

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The Dismantling of the CBC

As the lockout of over 5,000 reporters, producers, technicians and other workers at the CBC enters its third week, there is growing pressure from supporters of public broadcasting and cultural workers from around the country to restore some of the CBC funding cut by the Liberals when Paul Martin was still finance minister. The CBC's budget has declined by over one third since the mid-1990s. This is the biggest factor in the current lock-out of employees as the management team looks for ways to continue finding cost savings – this time by converting more of its workforce from permanent to contract employees. The search for savings has become a game of *Catch 22*, with layoffs leading to programming cuts leading to further layoffs.

The CBC is an important Canadian cultural institution. Founded in 1936 as a national radio broadcasting network, it was established as a means to ensure a Canadian presence on airwaves that were increasingly dominated by transmissions from the U.S. The corporation was expanded to television in 1951 and for decades, especially in rural and remote areas, the CBC was the only source for Canadians news and Canadian cultural programming. In the tradition of other public broadcasters around the world, funding for the CBC ensured the creation of programming that was distinctly Canadian and created a space for discussing questions of identity, nationhood and the role Canada should play in the world.

However, under the neo-liberal policies of the Mulroney Conservatives and then the Chretien Liberals, funding for the CBC began to be slowly eroded at precisely the same time that concentration of the ownership of the public airwaves and newspapers was increasing. The first major cuts to the CBC were introduced by the Mulroney government supposedly as a temporary measure. The government then promised to reinstate funding to appease critics of the Free Trade Agreement, who were arguing that the FTA threatened Canada's cultural sovereignty.

The Chretien Liberals, in their 1993 Red Book of election campaign promises, pledged to restore CBC funding levels and also provide long-term stable funding. However, once elected, they changed their tune. The 1995 budget delivered by Paul Martin outlined \$350 million in cuts to the total CBC operating budget of \$1.1 billion. Anthony Manera

was the President of the CBC board at the time and he resigned almost immediately after the budget was tabled. Manera, who had joined the organization as an employee in 1985, told *Maclean's* magazine shortly after his resignation that he refused to preside over "the dismantling of the CBC".

Following Manera's resignation, the Liberals appointed former Mulroney Cabinet Minister Perrin Beatty as CBC president and, between 1995 and 1999, he imposed the cutbacks. Thousands of workers were laid off, regional cultural programming was eliminated and the CBC eliminated many foreign news bureaus throughout the world. The Chretien Liberals also promised to restore CBC funding after they eliminated the deficit.

Now, six years later, public funding for the national broadcaster remains under \$1 billion, with only \$60 million of the \$350 million that was cut restored, and even that \$60 million is renewed annually and not part of the permanent funding. The percentage of funding the CBC receives as a percentage of Canada's GDP is 0.07 per cent – the fifth lowest of the 26 member-countries of the OECD. This is especially astonishing given the dominance of American-made cultural and news programming across Canada. However, the Martin government has made it clear that restoring CBC funding is not a priority. Instead, the CBC has been instructed to rely more on revenue from the sale of advertising space on its television network – another *Catch 22* for the public broadcaster.

Until the cutbacks of the mid-90s, ad sales on the CBC were restricted, but began to be expanded to include all news and cultural programming during the 1990s. Within the last month, ad sales have been expanded to the CBC's Web site, leaving many to worry radio will be next. The resulting increased competition for advertising revenue has resulted in an intense campaign by private broadcasters calling on the Liberals to privatize the CBC. They argue that it is unfair for them to have to compete with a publicly-funded broadcaster for advertising dollars. Leading the charge for the CBC's privatization has been the Asper family, which controls the country's second-biggest media company, Canwest Global Media. The private broadcasters have used the lock-out at the CBC as the basis for stepping up their privatization campaign, leading many to wonder whether this is indeed the next step in the dismantling of the CBC.

Martin Government Plans to Extend Police Powers

Public Safety Minister Anne McClellan will introduce legislation this fall to enable police forces and Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) agents to read e-mails and tap cell phone calls without a warrant, according to media interviews with several anonymous sources within the Public Safety department. The interviews came just before the start of the annual Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police's conference, held during the last week of August, and just over a year after a senior FBI official said Canada needed to make these changes to its existing law or become the "weak link" in the "global war on terror".

At the police conference, participants said law enforcement agencies, including municipal, regional and provincial police forces, the RCMP and CSIS need to "exercise better co-operation and integration" to protect national security. A paper presented at the conference said there has already been "tremendous success" in fighting security threats in Canada by co-coordinating strategies, but added "coherent and seamless policing, including resource and intelligence sharing across domestic and international borders" is critical to public safety.

One of the suggestions made by RCMP Commissioner Guiliano Zaccardelli at the closing news conference was for greater use of video surveillance in public spaces. He also talked about the need for increased "flexibility" in terms of engaging in certain practices without getting warrants. Although pressed by reporters, Zaccardelli did not elaborate but many believe he was referring to the

measures talked about in the interviews by Public Safety department staff.

In April 2004, Mike Kirkpatrick, assistant director in charge of the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division, said Canadian law, which does not give police and CSIS agents the power to require cell phone and Internet service providers to make their equipment easier to tap, was undesirable. "You're only as strong as your weakest link, so if you have places that don't adopt such measures than that's a weak link", Kirkpatrick said while in Ottawa last year speaking at an international conference on cyber security and law enforcement.

Following September 11, 2001, the Bush administration in the U.S. passed legislation which allows circuit-switched and cell phone conversations to be tapped without a warrant if deemed necessary for national security. In Canada, it is currently much more difficult for police to do this, which Kirkpatrick argued is hindering the ability of Canadian security forces to provide their American counterparts with information on "persons of interest".

It was the sharing of information with American security officials that led to the deportation and torture of several Canadian citizens of Middle Eastern origin following September 11, the most infamous case being that of Maher Arar. Neither the conference of police chiefs nor the anonymous departmental officials being interviewed would comment to reporters on the Arar case and its implications for "so-called" "seamless policing" and information sharing.

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regard to the tragedy of New Orleans. A disaster of these proportions has been predicted for several years and has been openly discussed in the local and national news media. For the past several years the New Orleans municipal government, the Louisiana state government and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have been demanding federal funds to rebuild and reinforce the levees protecting the city, much of which is built two to three metres below sea level. However, the Bush administration has repeatedly turned down those requests for funding, citing the budget deficit resulting from the U.S. war in

Iraq and the tens of billions of dollars being spent on "homeland security".

Despite several days of advance warning that the hurricane was headed towards New Orleans, no efforts were taken to prepare for it. Even when the call to evacuate New Orleans was issued, no federal or state assistance was provided and people were told to make their own way to safety as best as they could. As a result, those with the resources to do so were able to flee to relative safety, while hundreds of thousands of poor people were left to their fate. Some made it to the Superdome and Convention

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emphasizing one and sometimes emphasizing the other, depending on whatever suits their interests. What both sides in this trade war have in common is that they are not interested in the well-being of the people of Canada or the United States, and they are not interested in developing economies that serve the interests of the peoples of Canada and the United States.

In our view that the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the United States is part of an inter-monopoly and inter-capitalist trade war. The Canadian working class and people should refuse to take the side of one group of monopolists against another group in this trade war. This is not to say that Canadians should remain aloof on issues of trade and simply let the politicians and monopolists do whatever they want with the Canadian economy. On the contrary, the Canadian working class and people need to involve themselves deeply in the political affairs of the country in order to play a decisive role in the society, including the direction of the economy. However, they should not fall into the trap being set for them which is based on the lie that the interests of one section of the monopoly capitalist class and the interests of the working class and people are synonymous.

The solutions to the problems facing the Canadian economy cannot come about through free trade or protectionism. A secure and decent livelihood for Canadians can only come through ensuring the continuous expansion of the economy, of the means of production and consumption, in a planned way, specifically geared to serving the rising material and cultural needs of the people. It requires the building of a self-reliant economy which flourishes, not through the import and export of capital or by seeking to capture foreign markets for goods, nor by exploiting others in any way, but primarily by meeting domestic needs and then engaging in equal trade for mutual benefit.

Canada should withdraw from NAFTA. The decision should not be based on either the short-term gain or loss of some jobs, or the short-term expansion or diminishment of a particular sector of the economy. The trend towards Canada's further economic, political, cultural, social and military integration with the United States poses a serious danger. The withdrawal from NAFTA would be a step to reverse this integration. It would raise for discussion and solution the challenge of building a self-reliant economy and developing trade with other countries on the basis of equal trade for mutual

benefit. It would contribute towards getting Canada out of the trade wars that are growing around the world, causing instability and war in various regions and threatening the peoples of all countries with wider and more dangerous conflicts.

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Centre, where they managed to survive for five days without any supplies of food and water.

Compounding the complete lack of concern for the wellbeing of the people trapped in the city, by the second day of the disaster state officials gave orders to police to end their rescue operations in order to concentrate on putting an end to "rampant looting". The Louisiana governor issued a call to the New Orleans police to use the harshest measures against these "looters". In other words, not only were New Orleans' poorest citizens abandoned to cope as best they could with the hurricane and then left for several days with no food and water, they were then labelled as criminals subject to the "full force of the law" when they broke into stores looking for food and water. Attacking the victims is apparently the method adopted by various levels of government in the United States to cover up their own criminal disregard for the lives, wellbeing and security of their citizens. The people of New Orleans, as well as many other Americans, are questioning the purpose of the Department of Homeland Security when it has failed so miserably to take any measures to protect the security of the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama before, during or after the hurricane disaster.

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