

Spring 2007

TILMA: Another trade agreement we never voted for!

Courting TILMA: U.S. investors eye Alberta and B.C.'s interprovincial trade agreement
BY Stuart Trew

Policy harmonization and investor rights are the goals of all free trade agreements. They were a main component of NAFTA and are acquiring new urgency within the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). They are also at the heart of the Alberta-B.C. Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA), which will go into effect on April 1, 2007.

TILMA creates a legally binding process by which corporations and individuals can challenge: new government initiatives will be challengeable by lawsuits if a company or private individual feels they restrict their trade or investment

- government programs and regulations if they “restrict or impair” investment;
- regulations in one province that are different from those in another;
- the establishment of new, stricter regulations;
- initiatives by one province with which the other province does not agree.



TILMA does not fully apply to existing local government policies until after a two-year transition period, but as soon as the agreement

comes into force, new government initiatives will be open to challenge by lawsuits if a company or private individual feels they restrict their trade or investment. Since all local government regulations in some way restrict investment, everything will be up for grabs. Government “entities” covered by TILMA, and therefore vulnerable to private lawsuits, include regional, local, district or other forms of municipal government as well as school boards.

Changing the rules: So far, Alberta and B.C. are the only two signatories, but TILMA has a far wider fan club, with Ontario and Saskatchewan suggesting they are about to sign on, and certain U.S. states drooling at the possibility.

At the most recent meeting of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER), a bi-national association of Canadian and American businesses with heavy involvement from the oil and gas sector, representatives from north-western U.S. states alongside B.C. and Alberta officials committed to explore the possibility of “expanding the TILMA concept throughout the PNWER region.”

The U.S. Trade Representative frequently complains about the Canadian Wheat Board and other agricultural policies. Entry to TILMA would give U.S. companies the legal means to dismantle or rewrite these policies, as well as any other provincial or municipal government rules they didn’t like.

Like these U.S. states, Industry Minister Maxime Bernier is clearly enamoured with TILMA. “The Alberta-B.C. agreement is a very good one,” he told a Senate committee looking into

interprovincial trade barriers. “I hope that the other provinces will jump in. That will help us to improve the Agreement on [Internal] Trade at a federal level.”

The AIT had been trying to create a national TILMA-like agreement since 1995, but had little success until B.C. and Alberta’s free trade pact rejuvenated the discussion.

Unfortunately, a larger, national legal framework for TILMA, with U.S. participation, would give U.S. companies the same rights as Canadians to sue local governments, formalizing a process of policy harmonization and deep integration that so far has no legal backing. Such an arrangement would require Canadian and U.S. regulations on everything, including health care and the environment, to be harmonized throughout the free-trade area, hastening a process of deep integration with the U.S. that Canadians have not had a chance to debate in public or in the House of Commons.

Dangerous consequences: So why did Alberta and B.C. sign an agreement that radically shifts the balance of power in favour of corporate interests and that could ultimately legalize a process of deep integration with the U.S.? And why did they sign it without even consulting with the public or elected representatives first? These are questions that demand answers before TILMA goes into effect this April. The consequences to public health and the environment, and the danger that TILMA will lead us quickly toward economic integration with the United States, are severe. Let’s not let this agreement pass without a fight.

For more information about TILMA, including research, action tools and upcoming events, please visit www.canadians.org/DI/issues/TILMA/. *Stuart Trew is a Communications Administrator for The Council of Canadians.*

A Dynamic Partnership: Tipitapa, Nicaragua and Victoria, B.C.

Jan Firstbrook

Tipitapa is a huge sprawling urban and rural community of 140,000 residents located east of the capital, Managua. Since the defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, there has been a tremendous reduction in funding for health, education, and infrastructure. Although the Sandinista mayor, Norman Cordoba, tries to improve the lives of the poor, the municipality is saddled with huge debts and few resources for social programs.

Victoria is supporting 2 initiatives to create a better future for the residents. The City of Victoria has a formal partnership with the city of Tipitapa through a Municipal Partnership Program. Victoria is providing advice and expertise to develop a solid waste management system and will assist with funding applications to obtain financial backing for this project to eliminate the environmental and health threats that are associated with open air burning and toxic waste dumping.

The growing rate of illiteracy as a result of cuts in the last decade concerns Cordoba: many children did not attend primary school. The new Sandinista government will start to fund public schools as financial constraints allow, the focus is on family members and wage earners who are illiterate. Cordoba believes that literacy is essential to increase the participation of the poor and marginalized and to create an equal and just society. (cont. from page 1)

The municipality has implemented a successful literacy program using local volunteers and the Cuban program, *Yo, Si Puedo*. Using these teaching materials and audiovisual equipment, adults are taught to read and write in just 5 hours a week over a 3 month period.

Local volunteers are ready to go out in the barrios and rural areas but they need our financial support to fund supplies, audiovisual equipment and repairs, and travel expenses. If you are interested in assisting with fundraising for the literacy campaign: please contact Jan: janfirstbrook@hotmail.com

Did you know? There are approximately 1000 homeless people in Victoria?

***** ACTION*****

The Committee to End Homelessness

in Victoria

February 20th, the committee put on a Budget Day BBQ at the War Memorial to keep the issues of homelessness before the community and the government. On same day, the Homeless Marathon highlighted the dire situation of homelessness in BC as community and committee members flooded the airways from our province.

Our committee meets every 7pm Wednesday, at Silver Threads to monitor the homeless situation. Our main impetus has been monitoring the operation of the cold weather protocols in city shelters and keeping

homelessness on the public agenda by meeting with local councillors, MPs and MLAs and organizing public actions. In addition, we welcome the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy Committee; we work to gain representation of the homeless community in this process. **Contact:** <dalessio@uvic.ca>

MOTHERS DAY: THE REAL MEANING

Mother's Day originally started after the USA Civil War, as a protest to the carnage of that war, by women who had lost their sons and called on mothers and women to act to prevent their sons from killing other mothers' children. It was celebrated as a **DAY for PEACE** in this spirit for 70 years. Then the floral industry petitioned to have the day declared a day when children and society honoured mothers by buying them flowers and other gifts. It was de-politicized and became a sentimental, commercial holiday. Recently many women and peace groups are making this day into an active day for peace again.



MOTHERS DAY: THE REAL ACTION

Don't buy flowers! Buy a living tree for \$6 !

Support this action to help win peace and justice in Palestine.

THE ONE MILLION TREES PROJECT IN PALESTINE: The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature. Amman, Jordan. www.apnature.org

Did you know that Israel has uprooted & destroyed more than 1 million trees in Palestine? This Nature group calls on us to buy replacement trees; it will plant them & continue to raise awareness about the occupation & destruction of Palestine. The trees can be designated in the name of your mother or any mothers you choose to honour in celebration of the real meaning of this day. (Trees can be bought at other times as well.) Local collection of names & funds contact: bbcf@bbcf.ca or follow information on www.apnature.org *Photo of Razan Zuayter, Director of APN, taken at the World Social Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007. TW*

Miraflor Nature Reserve, Nicaragua

by Jan Firstbrook

Imagine a cloud forest high in the hills of northern Nicaragua where people still live a traditional, hard working existence with the spirit of co-operation and Sandinista ideals. The farmers are trying to preserve their pristine environment which provides food for their families and organic products to sell, within a protected nature reserve surrounded by orchids, exotic birds, and oak forests covered in Spanish moss. Miraflor is a protected landscape of communities without any phone or cell phone connections, no electricity except from solar power and very few vehicles.

Only rough paths & a boulder strewn road to Esteli, the nearest town are used for transportation.



Agricultural co-ops formed in this region after the Sandinista revolution in 1979. Fighting between American backed Contras and the Sandinistas in the hills of Miraflor continued on for years in the 80's , creating havoc as co-op members were targeted and killed by the Contras, houses and seed storage warehouses were destroyed and farms neglected while men fought. The history of the struggle is still present in the memories of the people and in their determination to earn a living while protecting

the land. *Children in Miraflor. Photo: Jan Firstbrook*

To provide some extra income the union of agricultural co-operatives has developed an eco-tourism project that provides the opportunity for visitors to share in the rural lifestyle , living in the same type of housing, - basic cement block homes, with a latrine, cold water showers, and if available, a few hours of light from solar panels. Youth are trained as eco-guides to take visitors to the orchid nursery, organic farms, the lookout, waterfalls, and forests with butterflies and rare birds. To communicate about ecology, bird identification, etc. and for customer service, English is important for guides.

The Nest Trust promotes sustainable tourism in Miraflor and helps volunteer English teachers. Practical teaching materials have been developed to meet community needs. Miraflor is preserving land, livelihood and co-operative traditions while developing eco-tourism opportunities for youth and additional income for farmers. More information about the eco-tourism program is found at www.miraflor-uca.com. Volunteer opportunities and English curriculum information is outlined at www.nesttrust.org

Jan Firstbrook, a member of Victoria CASC, visited Nicaragua in 2007

Canadian Forces Recruitment: TO BIG WHEELS, JUST SAY “NO”

Jane Brett

Friends expressed “surprise” when they saw me sitting behind the Canadian Forces Recruitment table at UVic’s Job Fair on February 8th. Initially the CF recruiter referred to my constant shadowing from the side-lines by saying I was his “doppelganger (A ‘complete opposite’ or ‘evil twin’ which may haunt.) for the day,” but after some discussion about the war, he offered me a

seat at the table. From “our table,” it was easy to hand out my leaflets (see below in box) at the very same time he offered his.

Thinking of enlisting?

Ask yourself: MIGHT I be ordered to commit atrocities or war crimes, or carry out policies against my own religion & conscience? IS IT POSSIBLE I might take part in deeds that I may regret for the rest of my life?

The former-peacekeeping Sgt. detailed hefty signing bonuses (e.g., \$40,000 ++ for doctors), but there weren't many takers while I was there. When a very keen student handed in a completed application, I followed him, horrified and curious:

Q. Why are you enlisting?

A. I just graduated with an engineering degree in aeronautics, but job opportunities have suddenly evaporated. The US Patriot Act precludes workers from certain Asian countries.

Q. Why does that affect you, as a Canadian? A. Big aeronautical companies operating in Canada —Boeing, Bombardier, Lockheed—won't hire people who appear to be from certain countries. They won't be able to work on any U.S. projects where the Canadian company is the successful bidder. So there's nowhere else but the forces for me to go with my degree to earn the 'big bucks'.

Q. No, no, there are surely lots of good-paying, civilian jobs where talented, young engineers like you are needed. What you really can't afford to do is to get involved in the kind of wars that are going on in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A. Look, I don't know anything about politics. I know I won't be in combat. Canada is well-known for its peacekeeping and I'll only be doing things like repairing or changing the wheels on the planes.

Q. Isn't that what they said in Germany? I asked, as he turned to leave (but at least he was reading the leaflet).

The recruiter had deflected my questions about the Afghan mission by saying, “You'll have to wait and talk to those returning.” But surely we both already know enough to be extremely concerned about how this Canadian war is being fought:

- In 1991 there were 1,169 Canadian peacekeepers, compared to only 56 in 2006. Canadians are being told that we are no longer peacekeeping because “there is no peace to keep,” yet:
- Worldwide, the number of UN peacekeepers has risen from 10,801 to 66,786 in the same time period. **READ**: Steve Staples “Marching Orders,” a 2006 report commissioned by the Council of Canadians.
- In October 2001, Human Rights Watch & the UN condemned the US for using cluster bombs in Afghanistan [Shaker Qala village]. While we take great pride in the Ottawa Convention on Land-mines, ironically, our new recruits continue to soldier alongside the US, a country noted for developing, using and supplying cluster bombs.
- **READ**: the section on Chile and cluster bombs in Alan Friedman's Spider's Web: The Secret History of How the White House Illegally Armed Iraq.
- Zainum Bhadshah showed slides in January of cluster bombs in Afghanistan which resemble yellow tetra packs of food! Of the 1,200 cluster bombs known to be dropped by the US, 10 to 22% remain unexploded (in addition to the 10 million land mines from previous wars). Some reports say 70% of Afghanistan is covered with cluster bombs.
- **ACTION**: Write to Defense Minister Gordon O'Connor, the man who thought torture wasn't happening. Maybe he thinks cluster bombs aren't happening, either. Although we signed the final declaration last month at the Cluster Munitions Conference in Oslo, Canada was seen by some to 'drag its feet'. Why? Just because the US didn't come / didn't sign? How does our government “defend” this split personality?

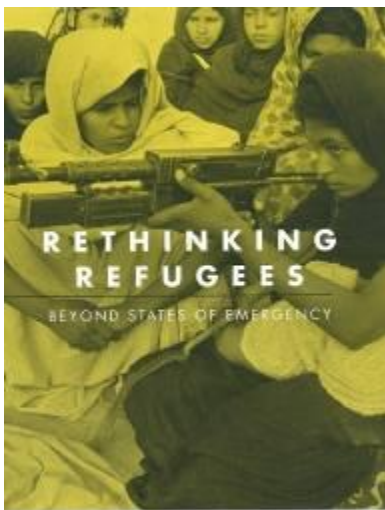
• **READ** M.P. Borys Worzesnewskyj's questions to Michel Fortier, Minister, Public Works & Government Services Minister regarding enforcing Canada's Charter of Rights & sovereignty into a code of conduct for military supply contracts:
<http://cmte.parl.gc.ca/Content/HOC/committee/391/oggoevidence/ev2706324/oggoev36-e.htm>

Book reviews

GEMMA Meg Tilly. Syren Book Company. 2006 Minneapolis, USA

This is a harrowing, but believable novel by the actor Meg Tilly who grew up in British Columbia. Although it is a novel, Tilly says she suffered abuse from men her mother knew in her childhood; this novel is based on some of her experiences Childhood sexual abuse by close family members and friends is one of the last taboo subjects in our society. Tilly captures the feelings and thoughts of the trapped child as well as the mentality of the brutes who abuse children. Somehow in the twisted mind of Gemma's captor and rapist, he actually thinks he loves and cares for her. That is truly the scariest part of the book and made me think about the justification for war in Afghanistan where we are killing and impoverishing women because we want to "free" them. Her captor similarly thinks he is doing her a favour and that she will welcome him when he returns (from jail).

This twisted mentality results in more violence at the personal and political level and a societal denial that individuals and societies cannot be saved by force. We have to recognize in our own community that power abuse is common, widespread and tolerated – just as it is on a global level.
TW



RETHINKING REFUGEES: Beyond States of Emergency.
Peter Nyers. 2006. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. New York USA & London, UK

"When refugees take flight from violence and persecution, their human life is stripped bare, with all political qualifiers (presence, voice, agency) erased from their identity." P.124

This rarely questioned truism is where Nyers begins his intense and challenging text on the political reality and the real people whom we label as *Refugees*. Look at the cover: a seemingly traditional photograph of young females from an unidentified African or Asian region. But a second look at the classic pose of the central figure with a baby on her lap reveals her gaze firmly fixed down the sights of a gun instead of looking soulfully into the camera. The refugee has become an agent of her own destiny, not just an object of our pity. Nyers writes that '...my position is that humanitarianism has always been an

inherently political concept.'

The structures that cause and promote violence and generate refugees are rarely opposed or revealed. Thus the refugee phenomenon is seen as a non-political occurrence; yet to even operate in a limited way, agencies must recognize and cooperate with sovereign states, including those whose violence results in refugees. This aid can be seen as violent if it is seen as legitimizing and supporting violent regimes and appearing to maybe seemingly cynical observers that so-called humanitarianism is just another hierarchical business opportunity.

In order to be an authentic refugee in the UN Refugee Convention, the refugee must have a well-founded fear of persecution, we think right away we are dealing with a fearful person whom we

are rescuing; already by accepting this definition we have disempowered her & denied her a sense of full humanity.

Refugees won't play the victim any longer. Private persecution, mainly against women in a state that supports patriarchal values, must, as feminists insist, be recognized as persecution that gives women that right to claim asylum. The importance of humanity is gradually being recognized as states, institutions and agencies fail to serve people and instead reinforce the violence of the status quo of powerful elites. TW

Cumberland Miners' Memorial

(held in June every year)

“Power concedes nothing without a demand.....The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they suppress.” Fredrick Douglass, quoted on Miners' Memorial Day programme.

The 22nd Annual Miners Day Memorial starts June 22 Friday night with a community musical event, continues all day Saturday 24th with grave visits, talks and more music & more. This wonderful event commemorates the death of Ginger Goodwin and all those who died in the service of coal and celebrates contemporary workers. **Fun & informative!**



For information contact: Cumberland Museum at 250 336 -2445.

More than 300 lives were lost in the years of mine operation. Cumberland also has a special place in Canadian labour history; it was there that the anti-war union organizer, Albert ‘Ginger’ Goodwin, was hunted down and killed by the Dominion Police in 1918. *(Ginger Goodwin photo courtesy of Cumberland Museum)*
