



## Calum MacKenzie's View From The Shore:

### Food Security

**Under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules** businesses must be accorded the least restrictive environment in which to conduct their affairs. Canada has signed on to the WTO agreements and therefore is bound by those rules. Exceptions to the rules are rare even when the rules are in direct conflict with previous Canadian law. If a company operates in Canada and Haiti, and Haiti has the less restrictive business rules, then that's what Canadians have to live with.

**You may well be asking how this can even happen in a democracy** and therein lies the rub. The WTO rules were not part of any political party's platform, were not discussed or debated in Parliament, and did not even come to a vote. It seems that so many of the decisions which affect us everyday bypass the democratic filters, (the NGOs, the Committees, the caucus, the cabinet, the House, the Senate), that such discussion and debate mandate. So how is Canada involved in the WTO subterfuge? Decisions are made in secret without transparency and those decisions are closely guarded for as long as possible. What we have in effect, is government by corporate boardroom or cabals in which decisions by un-elected directors trump national laws.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Canada is a member of what's known as the Quad.** This small group of nations; the EU (or UK), the USA, Japan and Canada meet in secret in what's known as the Green Room.<sup>3</sup> Their representatives decide on trade rules for the world body and when the details are hammered out the rest of the 150 plus members of the WTO are asked to sign on. Dissent is frowned on. Dissenting nations have coercion, sanctions, threats and even violence to look forward to.<sup>4,5</sup>

As with every other major international body the will of the USA reigns supreme at the WTO and, as in the 190 member UN, the will of the 189 other sovereign nations must bend to the will of the US. Dissent will not be tolerated. How democratic! How does this affect things in sunny downtown Your Town? Well let's take just one example from the thousands out there

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<sup>1</sup> - Barlow, Maude *Too Close For Comfort : Canada's Future Within Fortress North America*, McClelland & Stewart 2005, ISBN 0771010885, [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0771010885/qid=1143134735/sr=1-4/ref=sr\\_1\\_4/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0771010885/qid=1143134735/sr=1-4/ref=sr_1_4/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books)

<sup>2</sup> - Churchill, Ward *Reflections on the Justice of Roosting Chickens : Consequences of American Conquest and Carnage*, AK Press 2003, ISBN 1902593790, [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1902593790/qid=1143134916/sr=2-1/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_1/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1902593790/qid=1143134916/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books)

<sup>3</sup> - Barlow, Maude *Too Close For Comfort : Canada's Future Within Fortress North America*

<sup>4</sup> - McQuaig, Linda *It's the Crude, Dude: War, Big Oil and the Fight for the Planet*, Anchor Canada 2005, ISBN 0385660111, [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0385660111/qid=1143135081/sr=2-1/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_1/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0385660111/qid=1143135081/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books)

<sup>5</sup> - Shiva, Vandana *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, South End Press 2000, ISBN 0896086070, [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0896086070/qid=1143135451/sr=2-1/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_1/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0896086070/qid=1143135451/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/002-0142588-3648028?v=glance&s=books)

that are affected by the WTO rules and Canada's role in destroying democracy. Let's take the example of food security.

If we knew where our food came from, how it was grown, under what conditions, and by whom, our minds would be set at rest. We would feel more secure. If we knew how our food had been altered, what pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers were used and remain as residue, perhaps that would help. Was the food genetically altered to form new patented organisms? Was the genetically altered food adequately tested by independent sources to ensure that it is safe. Were animals, fish and birds medically treated, dosed with antibiotics or growth hormones, to combat disease or enhance growth? Was the food tested repeatedly for safety and healthful benefits? Was the food labeled accurately to reflect all of the above concerns. In effect, we need to know what was done to our food at every stage in its development so that we can arrive at a knowledgeable assessment of what we feed our families. What a great dollop of commonsense that is!

**Apart from the health and safety effects** to be considered for the human consumption of food, there is another wider effect on animals, other plants, and the environment in which we all co-exist. Part of our testing should cater to ensuring that our business activities do no harm to our traveling companions. Food chains and cycles of living activity should not fall prey to the practices of the agri-business mega corporations. The common sense approach would mandate that those who endanger our planet systems -- its diversity of animal and plant species and the wholesome nature of our evolved farm practices -- should be very cautious and controlled in making the changes that are on grocery shelves.

Multi-national agri-businesses are not in favor of any of that commonsense approach. Instead it favors the "least restrictive" environment, an environment where labor, agricultural and environmental laws are lax. Although we can grow food healthier and more efficiently in Canada, off-shore we go resulting in hi-tech genetically modified foods appearing on our grocery shelves without adequate and lengthy testing for safety. The types of herbicides insecticides and fertilizers used are often a secret. The origin of the food is unknown. Labeling does not spell out allergens or other information required for good food decision making unless it is mandated. Could we become allergic to the foods, immune to the antibiotics, or ill because of animal growth hormones? Who knows what the long term effects are?

**The most recent call in the food industry and others is for "once only" testing.**<sup>6</sup> As our food inspectorate is but a shadow of its former efficient self we can't really expect too much in-depth testing over a long period of time. As our agricultural research establishments have also been gutted to 20% of their former strength that avenue is rapidly closing.<sup>7</sup> If we rely on USDA testing we could be setting ourselves up for a fall. We hear of whistleblowers getting fired and their careers smeared for going public. Because of these situations food testing is a crap shoot in which government takes the word of the agri-business

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<sup>6</sup> - <http://www.ndp.ca/page/1596>  
<http://www.vivelecanada.ca/article.php/20050524133436320>  
[http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/ftaa/1016nafta\\_plus\\_talks.htm](http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/ftaa/1016nafta_plus_talks.htm)  
<http://www.counterpunch.org/ryan03012006.html>  
<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/index.cfm?act=news&call=626&pa=B6FD9D58&do=Article>  
[http://www.canadians.org/browse\\_categories.htm?COC\\_token=23@@@698b8fe989c26d3c5c354e61f2be48c5&step=2&catid=310&iscat=1](http://www.canadians.org/browse_categories.htm?COC_token=23@@@698b8fe989c26d3c5c354e61f2be48c5&step=2&catid=310&iscat=1)

<sup>7</sup> - <http://archives.foodsafetynetwork.ca/agnet/2001/5-2001/ag-05-25-01-01.txt>

corporations that the food is safe and healthy. There is little mandating of regulations, voluntary oversight reigns supreme, and penalties for defaults are a wimpy slap on the wrist at best.

**Testing can be diluted** to such an extent that any resemblance to the original intent of the testing is remote.<sup>8</sup> Government watchdogs have no teeth and spend their time asleep at the switch. Corporations have been reported to narrow their testing so myopically that only a very small number of factors are designed into the result. Rather than widen the scope of the tests so that a multiplicity of factors is learned and all uncertainties are clearly described, tests are often limited.

Just in case you're getting ahead of me and thinking that this is all irrelevant because you know where all your food comes from, you eat only organic or that it's all appropriately labeled, let me partially deflate that balloon. The agri-business folks saw that "Organics labeling" could make inroads because the label had a certain attraction for those who have the time to learn and like to eat healthy. The organics movement was also doing the advertising for them and so they jumped on the band wagon.<sup>9</sup> But you will recall that they own government and so the meaning behind the label has been conveniently diluted. It no longer means 7 years of chemical free soil, water and air used to grow non-GM seeds in all jurisdictions. Organic labeling can mean just what the agri-business giants want it to mean as definitions and terms are shaved of hard meaning and soft alternatives are substituted to fit. The variations from province to province and state to state are just as rife as those from nation to nation. Recall that the least restrictive environment rules.

Governments allow corporations to volunteer information and are resuming the 19th century "Laissez Faire" attitudes. But these were such a disaster they lead to economic chaos. The end result? Things that should be caught by rigor in testing slide as irrelevancies. When testing is found to have adverse effects on product those results do not see the light of day.<sup>10</sup> Corporations have even been known to make a business decision about letting the public suffer potential harm. The costs of the resulting lawsuits, settling out of court, and bad publicity becomes part of development costs and also becomes part of the product price. Some corporations know that US law will protect their foreign operations abroad and abrogate local national law in the process (the Bhopal, India disaster being a case in point).

The US did not always have extremely wealthy corporations, and many of its former Presidents had moments of brilliance. Woodrow Wilson remarked in 1912 that some corporations and individuals were becoming so rich that they could buy the government. It seems that big business in Canada has arrived at that same point in history and Canada is sliding down the same slippery slope by allowing Canadian companies to practice abroad what they are banned from doing at home (mining by Canadian companies in Indonesia, Spain and Wyoming has suffered from this trend). Governments are now agreeing to the patenting of life forms so that multi-national agri-business can move into third world countries, take patents out on native and local seeds and follow this up by forbidding the natives from using the seeds unless they are bought from the patent holder. These seeds or variations of them can be genetically engineered to sterility -- the so-called terminator seeds -- so that they can't be saved from harvest to harvest and must be bought afresh each year. What's wrong with

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<sup>8</sup> - <http://archives.foodsafetynetwork.ca/agnet/2001/5-2001/ag-05-25-01-01.txt>

<sup>9</sup> - Shiva, *Vandana Stolen Harvest*

<sup>10</sup> - Shiva, *Vandana Stolen Harvest*

this picture and what kind of callous carpetbaggers would treat illiterate human beings and impoverished farmers with such uncaring intent? Although some seed companies have recently stepped back from this practice, they have not given up the right to patent life forms.

In India the neem tree provides over 100 derivatives from its seeds, leaves, bark, roots and wood to the local populace.<sup>11,12</sup> Over the millennia this cultural stock of native pharma-care has slowly evolved as knowledge has been handed down in story and song. An American company has now patented this life form hoping to produce medicines and charge all who wish to use them. Bismati rice has similarly been patented although Indians have communally developed and freely shared 17 different strains of the food. Is this a form of theft?

Claiming that diversity robs their own plants of sunshine, the agri-business mega corps have tried to impose monocultures where multicultures have sustained millions for centuries. From Monsanto's RoundUp Ready Soybeans™ to Chiquita™ bananas, monoculture is pushing diversity out.<sup>13</sup> In its place comes higher costs, lower efficiencies, displaced farmers, multiple pollutants, and human misery.

A Himalayan tribe plants 14 different seeds randomly all at the same time in the same plots.<sup>14</sup> This diverse farming method has evolved slowly through the ages. The seeds are chosen because they give and take from the naturally fertilized soil different elements and processes. The plants also mature at different rates and are harvested at different times. Some transplanting takes place to balance the plant coverage. The result is that the farmers are self sufficient and have a ready supply of food over a long growing season; food and seeds that can be shared and stored for the out of season period. The companion plants are also pesticide and artificial fertilizer free, culturally appropriate, with no need for insecticides or herbicides. All the farmer does in season is take the weeds to compost. Some tribes in the southern Amazon have even trained insects to do their weeding for them. Every year those farmers prove the efficacy of diversity over monocultures. The imposition of monoculture would be their death knell.<sup>15</sup>

**Democracy should not allow this sort of thing to happen.** But democracy is being circumvented by the corporations who influence the folks we elect. "Oh Canada" instead of ringing out as a national anthem is becoming a cry of disdain as the commons we all cherish is sold out from under us at the altar of corporate malfeasance. Is there another side to this story, one loaded with good news? The positive answer chimes out but feebly, as the hundreds who thrive in its glow are swamped by the millions displaced from sustainable subsistence living, to the shanty town ghettos of our largest cities. And yet that chime can be amplified many times over as the wrongs which we have allowed to happen under our noses are exposed to the cleansing light of day.

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<sup>11</sup> - Shiva, *Vandana Stolen Harvest*

<sup>12</sup> Chopra, Deepak *Peace Is the Way : Bringing War and Violence to an End*, Harmony 2005, ISBN 0307236072, [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0307236072/qid=1143213571/sr=2-1/ref=sr\\_2\\_1/102-3783998-5594517?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0307236072/qid=1143213571/sr=2-1/ref=sr_2_1/102-3783998-5594517?v=glance&s=books)

<sup>13</sup> - Shiva, *Vandana Stolen Harvest*

<sup>14</sup> - Shiva, *Vandana Stolen Harvest*

<sup>15</sup> - Shiva, *Vandana Stolen Harvest*

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