

Canada: Begging for NAFTA

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A note from the authors

The never-ending so-called “NAFTA renegotiations” probably make everyone’s eyes glaze over, and for a good reason. Our political elites, whether in parliament, in business, or, most significantly, in the media, are adept at misleading and confusing Canadians about what is actually going on in this endless exercise of US bullying and Canada caving in. David and I are offering some much needed de-mystification.

Note that David’s recent articles alerting Canadians to the true nature of the so-called free trade agreements, FTA and NAFTA, and the possibilities for Canada in US president Donald Trump cancelling NAFTA outright, are on our website, www.davidorchard.com.

David’s book, **The Fight for Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism**, continues to be “must read” for everyone who wants to make sense of our history and where we are at now with the dangers of a total take-over by the US via the very “free trade” Canada has resisted for a century. (You can order it directly from us.)

We welcome your comments and questions, and will make an effort to respond to all.

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September 22, 2018

Canadians are being inundated, virtually around the clock, by calls from political and corporate quarters, faithfully reported and embellished by the media, to “save NAFTA.” If NAFTA is “killed,” we are told, Canadians will lose thousands of jobs, our standard of living will drop and our trade with the US and our access to that market will be damaged. To prevent these catastrophic results Canadians, they say, must be prepared to make major concessions, including, if necessary, sacrificing the livelihood of our dairy farmers and their well-managed industry.

Talk about not seeing the forest for the trees, in this case the tree being NAFTA! What those pleading for NAFTA seem to have forgotten, or simply don’t know, is that Canada already

has another free trade agreement with the US, which will continue to rule us even if NAFTA is gone.

The FTA came into effect in 1989 with great fanfare, including promises of “jobs, jobs, jobs,” a higher standard of living and “secure access to the largest, richest market in the world.” These promises remain unfulfilled, but Canadians paid dearly for them. Canada agreed never to screen any new American ownership coming into Canada. It granted American corporations and investors the same rights in Canada as Canadians (national treatment). Canada agreed that even if facing shortages itself it must continue to deliver to the US the same portion of any good the US was taking before the shortage — including all forms of energy. Further Canada agreed to never charge American companies or citizens more for any good, including, again, all forms of energy, than Canadians are charged. We agreed to allow the US to challenge “any measure” which could reduce benefits US corporations might expect to obtain in Canada. (Under NAFTA’s chapter 11 Canada simply gave US corporations an even more explicit right to sue us, which they have done some 45 times, overturning Canadian laws and pocketing over \$200 million in the process.)

From these give-aways to the US it is clear why US president Donald Trump has not said a bad word about the FTA and has not once threatened to get out of it! They also make it clear why Liberal leader John Turner, who fought the FTA hardest in the 1988 federal election, called the FTA “the Sale of Canada Act,” and why another former Liberal leader and prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, called it “a monstrous swindle.” What a difference it would make if our current government had listened to these predecessors, instead of rushing to a full body embrace of all things NAFTA, no matter the cost.

If NAFTA ceases to exist tomorrow, all those eager to see Canada integrated into the US economy should be well satisfied with the FTA! To make even more concessions to keep the NAFTA strait jacket would be comic if it wasn’t so dangerous and destructive to Canada’s economy and sovereignty.

In fact, Canada does not need NAFTA or the FTA, and never did. It could profitably withdraw from both with a simple six months notice. Canada, along with the USA and Mexico, is a member of the world’s largest free trade agreement and has been for many decades, something those begging for NAFTA blithely ignore or downplay. Formerly called the GATT, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a multilateral organization with 164 member states in which Canada has more allies and much more clout than trying to negotiate one-on-one bilateral trade agreements with the United States. This forum and its rules have served Canada well over the years. Canada’s access to the US market and record of solving disputes has been far better under the WTO than under the FTA or NAFTA, and Canada was able to protect its institutions and pass its own sovereign laws in a way it has not been able to under our two so-called free trade agreements.

If NAFTA comes to an end our trade with the US would continue to flow exactly as it did for years before the FTA and NAFTA existed. And our country would be free of the NAFTA provision which allows US corporations to sue Canadian governments for laws and regulations they do not like. (NAFTA gone, Canada would need to confront the fact that the FTA with its sovereignty-destroying commitments needs to be abrogated.) But for some of our politicians and opinion leaders, the prospect of Canada standing on its own two feet economically and politically is too much to handle, almost unthinkable, and therefore the pleading and begging to retain NAFTA will continue.

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*David Orchard was twice a contender for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. He is the author of *The Fight For Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism*.*

Marjaleena Repo was national organizer for Citizens Concerned About Free Trade from 1985 till 1998, campaign manager and senior advisor for David Orchard's leadership campaigns, and the Saskatchewan vice-president for the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada until its take-over in 2003 by the Reform Alliance Party.

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