

# The Corporate Takeover of Canada

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Stephen Harper recently announced that if re-elected he will begin further removing barriers to foreign investment in the airline and uranium sectors. His plan is based on proposals set forth by the Competition Review Panel. Harper stayed clear of other more controversial recommendations from the panel, such as allowing bank mergers and opening up Canada's telecommunications to further foreign investment. You can bet that if the Conservatives are able to secure a majority government, more of these recommendations will be implemented. The corporate agenda is further shaping public policy. Big business is a driving force behind the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), and deeper integration into a North American Union. Trade agreements, such as NAFTA, ultimately benefit multinational corporations at the expense of workers and the environment.

In June, the Competition Review Panel released their report, *Compete to Win*. It went well beyond its original mandate of competition and investment policy, delivering a full corporate economic plan. They called for a major overhaul in competition rules in the airline and uranium sectors, as well as broadcasting and telecommunications. The report also proposed ending the prohibition on bank mergers and called upon Canadians to adapt a more globally competitive mindset. It was welcomed by many in the business community, with some even stating that the panel didn't go far enough. Many believe that, once implemented, these recommendations will boost the standard of living and improve Canada's economy. Others have described the report as self-serving, with the purpose of creating an even more favorable climate for foreign corporations to operate inside the country.

The panel completely ignores the problems associated with globalization, and in turn offers more as the solution to Canada's economic woes. Louis Erlichman, the research director for the IMAW, said, "The Panel calls for further dismantling of Canada's virtually non-existent controls on foreign investment. Canada has long been one of the world's most open and foreign-dominated economies." He went on to say, "the Panel proposes weakening the Competition Act and the Competition Bureau to make it even easier for corporations to cut deals and fix prices." Many believe that instead of further deregulation and privatization, there needs to be more limits placed on foreign ownership.

It is through globalization that corporations have further strengthened their power and grip over our lives. In her book, *The Quick and the Dead*, bestselling author Linda McQuaig says, "The concept of Globalization was a particularly important strategy in Canada, where there was really little else to help in selling the public on the changes business wanted." NAFTA symbolizes a major move towards globalization, and it has further enabled corporations to take advantage of the lack of labor rights and environmental standards in some poorer countries. It has also granted new corporate investment rights and protections, which in some cases gives U.S. and Mexican investors more rights than Canadian citizens. Chapter

11 of NAFTA gives corporations the right to sue governments if they feel that their investments have been restricted. Corporations have used this new found power to challenge national and domestic laws, as well as governmental decisions.

In their report, the Competition Review Panel also acknowledged the SPP's progress as being too slow. The SPP has received mixed reviews, with many in the business community disappointed that their recommendations are not being implemented fast enough. The SPP is the brain child of the business elite, and it has been dominated by corporate interests. It has carried on where NAFTA left off. In June of 2006, the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC) was created, and it includes some of the top North American corporations. The NACC's function is to ensure that corporate concerns are being addressed inside the SPP framework. In April of 2008, they released their report, Meeting the Global Challenge. Perhaps sensing the demise of the SPP, the report stated, "No matter what form the partnership may take, the experience of the NACC over the past two years demonstrates the clear benefits of the close cooperation on both strategic and specific issues among North America 's business communities, as well as its governments." What ever direction deeper continental integration may take us in, rest assured that big business will have a seat at the table and will be calling the shots.

Some of the recommendations from the Compete to Win report have become key elements of the Conservatives election campaign. Only days after the election on October 14, Canada is set to enter into negotiations with the European Union in regards to deeper economic integration. Another minority government might serve Canada well, keeping the government in check. It is not just the takeover of Canada, trade deals such as NAFTA have also allowed corporations to go more global in their quest for increased profits. It is obvious that Harper fully embraces the principles of globalization, and with him as Prime Minister, the corporate takeover of Canada will only continue.

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