

Women **against** **Free Trade**

MANIFESTO

From enclosures in baby-bonus cheques to the national news, Canadians have been bombarded with promotion of Mulroney's "Free Trade" deal. The Tories tell us it's the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Let's look at the myths and realities.

Myth 1: The Mulroney trade deal is only about trade.

Reality: This deal is a Trojan Horse that will bring Reaganomics to Canada. The trade deal is more about importing a set of economic, social and political policies than it is about changing the conditions of trade. In fact, a number of important sections of the proposed deal have nothing to do with trade barriers. A closer look shows that "harmonization" means virtual economic integration with the United States. And economic integration means much more.

Let's look at what Reaganomics has done for the U.S.; a military budget of a trillion dollars and more homeless people than at any time in American history. Hardship and destitution for families facing illness as a result of no public medical insurance. A crisis in farming unparalleled since the Great Depression. A steady decline in wages and working conditions and a decimation of organized labour. Aggressive campaigns against minority and women's rights. Cutbacks in social services — forcing 22% of Americans to live below the poverty line in the richest country on earth! A shameless disregard for the environment. Vicious bullying of third world countries.

Myth 2: Health and social services will not be affected by the deal.

Reality: They will be profoundly affected. The trade deal covers a wide range of health and social services and future negotiations will add even more. The deal explicitly allows for American private sector management in hospitals, public health clinics, homes for physically disabled people and many other human services. Further, no social services are explicitly excluded from the deal. Despite Mulroney's claims that childcare is exempt, private U.S. childcare companies will continue to set up in Canada. The deal will leave Canadian medicare and unemployment insurance vulnerable to attack from American companies under unfair U.S. trade law. In the U.S., social services are more privately organized, receive less government funding per capital, and are of much poorer quality. The trade deal will exert a downward pull on our services. Private franchises in social services could spring up everywhere — "kentucky-fried daycare" anyone?

Myth 3: The Mulroney trade deal means prosperity for Canada.

Reality: Only big business stands to gain from this deal. What does access to the American market for Northern Telecom or Olympia and York really mean to ordinary Canadians? The ability of big corporations to operate even more freely in the U.S. will not create jobs here. With the millions the Tories have spent on research, they have never specified where jobs will be gained. Everyone recognizes where jobs will be lost. Employers competing directly with American corporations (many based in states with no minimum wage) will blackmail workers to accept lower wages and worse working conditions at the risk of losing their jobs. Women and minorities — already among the hardest working and lowest paid in the economy — will be most severely hit by the effects of the deal.

Because of increased emphasis on the market and less on regulation, women will lose ground. Women are already at a disadvantage in the workplace because of historical and social factors. A less regulated market always works to increase profits at the expense of the most vulnerable. Steps toward equality, such as equal pay and employment equity, have always been won through government intervention in the market place.

Even in its own terms, the deal didn't get what it promised. Canadian business was promised full access to American markets in a period of protectionism. When the dust had settled, the deal did not exempt Canada from current American trade laws or guarantee exemption from future protectionist legislation. Mulroney and Reisman gave the U.S. everything and got next to nothing in return.

Myth 4: The Mulroney trade deal is good for consumers.

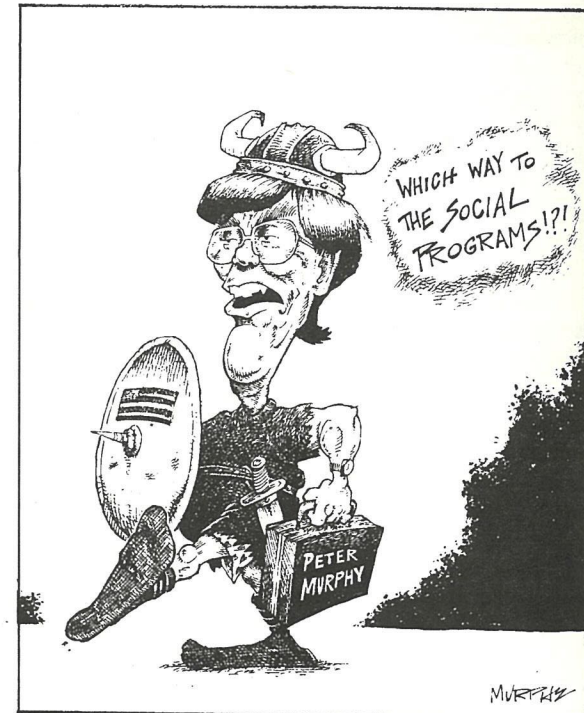
Reality: There's nothing to prove that prices will go down on either side of the border. If you're dreaming about those big bargains from Buffalo, Minneapolis or Seattle, forget it. American goods are more expensive in Canada primarily because of higher Canadian taxes and the lower value of the Canadian dollar, not because of tariffs. Duties will still be slapped on those attractive items made 50% outside the U.S. In addition, bitter experience shows that lack of domestic competition actually increases prices. Several years ago, when quotas on imported children's shows were eliminated, thousands of Canadian jobs were lost, and prices went up by 24%. Just think about those lettuce prices in the winter.

Myth 5: Canada will not lose its autonomy.

Reality: Governments' ability to make decisions about Canada's future will be severely restricted. In a number of key areas, the deal actually

restricts the ability of federal and provincial governments to make policy. For example, in energy, so vital in a country as cold and as big as ours, the federal government cannot favour Canadian regions or industry with cheaper energy prices. A little known section of the deal severely curtails any provincial or federal government initiative to make public a service that was previously in the private sector. So proposed public auto insurance, universal public childcare or denticare programs would become virtually impossible under this deal. But the road is open to privatize a series of currently public institutions such as non-university post secondary education.

Culture is not exempted from the deal. A "notwithstanding exemptions" clause ensures that no future cultural industries can develop under Canadian protection — no new public broadcasting, no protection for our smaller and non-commercial media. Decreased scrutiny of American investment will permit an even greater penetration of cultural industries by American corporations. Given the weakness of our cultural industries at present, this virtually guarantees the loss of our fragile cultural sovereignty.



The more economically and culturally dependent on the U.S. we become, the less political autonomy we actually have. The deal puts in jeopardy our potential for taking politically independent positions on world issues such as Latin America, nuclear disarmament and global ecology. We can become political hostages to American foreign policy because of our economic dependence.

Myth 6: The only alternative is the status quo.

Reality: There are alternative economic models that work much better. With Reaganism, an interventionist government channels trillions of tax dollars into unproductive, socially destructive military spending. But other governments have chosen instead to channel social wealth into productive economic strategies which create a decent life for everyone. Look at the Scandinavian countries, which have a population and economic base similar to Canada. They're not perfect, but they provide a better life for the majority of their citizens while maintaining a strong economy, full employment and an independent cultural and political presence. It's no accident that in these countries women compose half of the political leadership at all levels; and that social policies favourable to women are much more developed than those here or in the U.S. The key is to plan economic development within an overall strategy designed to meet human needs.

Trade should form only one part of a comprehensive economic plan, not determine it. With Mulroney's trade deal, the tail will be wagging the dog. Canada is already dangerously overdependent on trade. 30% of our GNP comes from trade, compared to 17% for Japan. 75% of our trade is already with the U.S. We need to plan out a thoughtful economic strategy which develops the weak links in our economy, rather than pumping more resources into an already overdeveloped dependence on trade. Because there are always social consequences to economic facts, trade, like the rest of the economy, should be planned with both social and economic goals in mind. One approach lies in the international diversification of trade as an alternative to a continental trade bloc.

Myth 7: Only business has the expertise to develop an overall economic policy.

Reality: Big business is the real "special interest group." Groups representing the women's movement, the labour movement, farmers, education and religious institutions, native people, cultural industries, the poor and seniors reflect the vast majority of the population, and they oppose the deal. 10% of Canadians control more than 51% of the total wealth of this country. They're the minority, and they support the deal. If you believe that old American chestnut "What's good for General Motors is good for the nation," then maybe you'll believe that "free trade" is good for Canada.

But if you, like most Canadians, value medical insurance, pensions, unemployment insurance, public broadcasting and subsidies to culture, equal pay for work of equal value, employment equity and almost every other social program that exists in this country today, you will want to listen to the people who fought for and won them, not to the people who fought against them.

Women and others fighting for social progress have a different agenda.

Canadians did not elect Mulroney to bring in Reaganomics. Mulroney assured us he wouldn't bring in free trade and that he wouldn't touch social services and culture. But this is what he's done. Instead of having the political courage to seek a mandate for these measures — a mandate he knows the Canadian electorate will not give him — he's sneaking these destructive policies in through the trade deal.

If Reaganism means a calculated decision to use government to increase the wealth and power of those at the top at the expense of everyone else, our agenda involves using government to help share the wealth so that everyone benefits. It means regulating the market

place to take care of the needs of the majority. It means using social wealth to create the necessities required for health and well-being. It means aiming for full employment and a reasonable standard of living for every person, whatever his or her economic, social and physical abilities. It means using government to correct historical injustices and inequalities. It means using government to protect, not destroy, our environment. We have the resources. What we need is the planning and the political will.

For centuries, women have been held back by powerful myths. But in the last 25 years, women and the men who've supported us have shattered most of those myths by organizing and speaking out. Our great-grandmothers set the example. Told they didn't understand politics, they were denied the vote. They organized, apparently against all odds, and they won "personhood" and the vote. Women were told that choice on abortion was impossible. We've just won it. Women have been told equal pay and affirmative action are pipe dreams. Our answer: We don't accept the values behind that statement. We're prepared to fight to ensure that our dreams of equality become a reality.

As women, we appeal to Canadians. Don't accept the myths. Look at the realities that underlie them.

We can defeat the trade deal and the neo-conservative agenda it camouflages. We can build a society without victims. Reject the Mulroney deal. It will affect every aspect of our lives and the lives of our children. We have the right to vote on it. Demand an election. Contact us or other groups working against the deal today. There is another way.

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