

Subject: [Seattle-ftaa] Some info on FTAA from Maude Barlow (Council for Canadians)  
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hi everyone,

i'm new to this list. i'm sheri and am very involved with the independent media center here locally and internationally. i was just recently down in brasil where i attended the world social forum. A pretty incredible experience that was. A lot of FTAA organizing going on there. And then spent some time in Sao Paolo with students from the Univ. SP who are doing significant FTAA organizing. Brasil holds a prime place in shifting the balance of this agreement.

Here's a transcript of a talk that Maude Barlow gave at the WSF. i transcribed it because i thought it was very powerful and very succinctly informative on the reasons why the FTAA is extremely bad (we all know this, but sometimes having the right information for those who don't know it can be really useful).

love sheri

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**Maude Barlow**  
**speaking at the World Social Forum Panel**  
**on "Future of Nation States"**  
**28 January 2001**

Obrigada [Thank you]. First of all I'd like to say how very thrilled I am to be here. I speak on behalf of all the Canadians from Quebec who are here and we thank the organizers very much for making this event happen. This is one of the most important gatherings we've ever had.

I guess the first thing to say when we discuss the notion of the nation state is that we have to recognize that we have very different views and experiences with the nation state that range from good to terrible. The nation state has been the cause of much suffering and we don't need to tell the people of the Americas about the role the nation states have played in imperialism.

But I think what we must recognize today in 2001 is that no matter what our histories, no matter what differences we've had politically, what different experiences we've had, almost every single one of the governments of our nation states have changed into something very similar. And they have all become a form of corporate states who are run by stateless corporations.

I think it's fair to say that with minor differences, most of our politicians and our governments now have more in common with each other than they do with the peoples from their own countries. They form a new kind of global royalty in which they answer to one set of actors, that is stateless corporations and the financial trade institutions that rule them. Now this is terrible in any case, but it is particularly terrible in a time of economic corporate globalization because really there is no other institution large enough to act as a buffer between the very cold winds of economic globalization and the rights of ordinary people around the world.

So we've lost our nation states governments at a time when perhaps we could argue that we needed them most. For those who talk about local power and local empowerment, I'm deeply in agreement. But I think we need to be realistic. We can't expect local communities to be able to function and to protect themselves against transnational capital in the absence of any kind of legislation at any kind of interim level.

In this room and around the world, we all know that our nation state governments have become corporate states, are told what to do by stateless corporations. We've therefore lost our interest in traditional politics.

In my country we just had a federal election. For the first time only one in two adult Canadians voted. It's the worst voting record since the 19th century. In Europe, the number of people involved in political parties has declined by 50% in just a decade. This is no accident. We have to be very clear that transnational corporations and global institutions have targeted the nation state and targeted its power in order to remove the nation state as a buffer between what they want and the citizens of the world.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank of course use structural adjustment to strip governments of the developing world of their capacity to deliver food security and social security to their people. What a lot of people in the South perhaps don't know, is that free trade did the exact same thing to Northern countries. NAFTA, the WTO, and other trade and investment regimes, have done the very same thing all over the world, but this time as well to the countries of the North. They implement not only restrictions on tariffs, but of course what they call non-tariff barriers which is everything that governments used to do.

To give an example, my country, Canada, has had some history of good government. We have the longest undefended border in the world with the world's biggest superpower. And much as we care for our American neighbors, we don't want to be Americans and we have fought very hard to implement what we call Ribbons of Interdependence so we could remain an independent nation state on the northern half of the North American continent.

You may or may not know is that the very first free trade agreement in the world -- and the one that became a model for all of them -- was the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement signed January 1, 1989. And then NAFTA, followed by the expansion of the GATT into the WTO. And now the push for the FTAA. Under this new regime, Canada has merged its economy almost entirely into the United States. We're losing our cultural institutions. We're losing our social programs. And we've had the highest rise in child poverty in the entire industrialized world in the 15 years since we signed that agreement.

So it's something we've lived through at a very personal level. I can tell you that it is not just the countries of the South going through this wrenching extreme of creating an entrenched underclass and an entrenched elite. What these institutions and free trade agreements do is they act as a set of constraints on what governments can continue to do or not continue to do and under what conditions. I want to say this very very strongly: **Every single time a global trade agreement overrides a country's laws protecting say the environment or labor standards or social security, the struggles of people in local communities of that country have been destroyed.**

Because -- let's face it -- none of our governments ever gave us any rights. We fought for every single right we have for struggles that came from deep within communities and workers' rights and so on. And when our governments give them up either willingly, or they are forced to by these trade agreements, they do so by destroying local struggles of their own citizens.

What global capitalism seeks is nothing less than the commodification of absolutely everything left standing in the commons. Even those areas that we used to consider sacred to life like health and education, seeds and genes, the human genome, culture, heritage, and even the air we breathe and the water we drink. Stateless transnational corporations are now scouring the world for what I call "blue gold", which is the most precious commodity any of us will ever have and that is water. And they are buying whole river systems, they are buying land for the aquifers underneath because they know people will kill for this water in the future. And in fact by the year 2025, two-thirds of the world will be without adequate water.[1]

Transnational corporations are essentially creating a seamless consumer conveyer belt to service a world in which any pretense of justice or equality has been abandoned. Or what one American calls a system of survival of the children of the fittest.

So the withering of the nation state has created the destruction of the commons, or has been the vehicle through which the destruction of the commons is taking place. The latest attack on government services comes from two sources. One of them is the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), the new Services Agreement of the WTO. The other is the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Essentially the General Agreement on Trade and Services, is mandated to restrict government action in regard to services through a set of legally binding constraints backed by WTO enforced sanctions. Its fundamental purpose is to constrain all levels of government in their delivery of services and to facilitate access to government services by transnational corporations in a multitude of areas, including (and these are just some of what they are looking at and they have identified): health care, hospital care, home care, child care, dental care, elder care, education at all levels, museums, libraries, energy, law, social assistance, architecture, electricity, water services, environmental protection services, real estate, insurance, postal services, prisons, transportation, publishing, broadcasting and hundreds of others.

All of these services are to be taken over by powerful and predatory transnational corporations using the WTO as a lever to force governments to give them up.

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is even more sweeping than the GATS. It is intended to cover all sectors and all measures affecting all services, and gives sweeping new powers to the service corporations of the hemisphere to move wherever they want and to demand equal access to government funding that is now reserved for domestic public programs. A terrible addition inside the FTAA is the dreadful power of the investment provisions of NAFTA. This makes it possible for a corporation to sue for cash compensation any government that brings in any environmental, labor, or health standard that the corporation can prove has cost it lost future profit. And they can claim for lost future profit indefinite, they can say as far into the future as they want.

The real goal of the GATS and the FTAA is to dramatically reduce or completely destroy the ability of governments anywhere to legislate or regulate on behalf of their citizens, and to complete the transformation of the role of the nation state into one totally subservient to its corporate masters. Such a transformed nation state will deploy its security forces against its

own citizens to protect and promote the private security interests of its corporations and of its private sector that are engendered in these trade agreements. One need look no further than Prague or Seattle or the upcoming battle in Quebec to see how far governments will go to protect their corporations against their people even in so called democracies.

We The People of the world deserve infinitely better than this. The nation state has become a profoundly undemocratic institution. Corporations have gained citizenship rights of unprecedented power, and we are going to have to back our nation states, our countries and our societies. We will and can and have to demand laws and standards at every level of government, from local to international, to protect our inalienable rights and those of our ailing earth.

From our nation state governments we have the absolute right to demand the protection and promotion of social security, labor standards, human rights, the environment, natural resources, a free press, cultural diversity, food security, fair trade and investment policies and the right to a full life with full environmental stewardship and protection.

The only way to democratize the state is going to be with a powerful civil society, a real participatory democracy. Not one in which we go to the polls every four years and choose between consumer brands of politics as if we're choosing between Coca-cola and Pepsi-cola and then we go away and we don't bother anybody. But a real system in which we participate with our governments.

I think if anybody questions whether the state means anything, we only have to look at the marvelous example of the city that we're in. The welcome that we've had here, I'm telling you, you wouldn't have this welcome in any community in my country and we're supposed to be a democracy. And I'm fairly ashamed of my country.

But let us say this very clearly in this room today: We are not going to get these rights back by acting nice, or by asking for them nicely. We are only going to get these rights back by becoming the most powerful civil society movement in history, and let us say this right now, we are well on our way.

We stopped the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in its tracks. APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum is on its knees. We shut down in Seattle the WTO Millennium Round. My favorite moment there was when Charlene Barshefsky, the then-US Trade Representative, who is not human, she is a genetically engineered human being. I am convinced of it. Do you know that they didn't let those people sleep. They had to work through the night. In the green room when they brought in Third World delegates to badger them, they didn't give them coffee, didn't give them water, didn't give them food. They put them in an airless room. And democracy broke out both inside and outside that wonderful Trade and Convention Center.

When they did that, I remember a delegate coming out and saying "This is no way to run the world". And you know what, we agree. That is no way to run the world. Now you have the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund going around telling the world that they are actually anti-poverty organizations. Excuse us if we're a little cynical about this. But you want to know something and we have to say this. This is what winning looks like. We have

to recognize the face of winning. We are on the verge of winning very big or losing very big in this movement of ours.

They want to privatize the world's water within the next 5 years and they are taking deliberate moves through the FTAA, through the WTO, through the World Bank, through the IMF. And with our so called nation state governments who are now corporate state governments, they are moving to privatize, commodify and own and control, all the water, every drop of water in the world. The stakes are enormously high. But we are winning. It doesn't feel like we're winning. But you have to know that when all they are talking about at Davos is what they are doing over here. We've made progress. We have something called power now. And we have to start understanding what this means and taking ourselves seriously.

There's a wonderful professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, Ursula Franklin, who says "I used to go before parliament and my provincial legislature and I'd give them the benefit of my wisdom" (and she's very wise in her knowledge and others would do the same thing). And she said "I used to think they were ill-informed but well intentioned. And either they've changed or I have, but recently I realize that actually I think they are very well-informed and bad-intentioned and they have no intention of listening to us."

So they are not going to listen to us because we're right. They are going to listen to us because we have so many people here we can hardly walk down the hall without bumping into 20 people. We are showing our strength here and let us say this. We are a movement whose time has come. We are going to stop the GATS. We are going to transform the international financial system. We are going to say the radical notion that the economy exists to serve people and communities, not the other way around. We are going to say NO to the Free Trade Area of the Americas. There can be absolutely no discussion or reform of that institution.

We will take back our nation states. The same way as we will create a democracy at every level of government. It will never be the same old nation state. It will be something new. It will have a very different face. It will have the face of the dispossessed. It will have the face of first nations. It will have the face of the young. It will have the face of the poor. It will have the face of those who have been most hurt by this inhumane system and we will not tolerate any other system.

We are a movement whose time has come. We are an unstoppable force in history. We are in fact the most important cultural and political development since the nation state in the latter half of the 19th century.

And we will not rest until we have transformed our world!

1. See the following:

- Our New Resource Crisis: Global Drinking Water, by Peter Phillips, March 2001
- IMF Forces Water Privatization on Poor Countries, by Sara Grusky, February 2001
- Soaking the poor, S.F.'s Bechtel wants the Bolivian people to pay for its bad water investment, by Daniel Zoll, 12/13/00
- The Global Water Crisis and the Commodification of the World's Water Supply, by Maude Barlow, IFG Seattle Teach-In Transcript, 11/26/99

<http://www.ratical.org/co-globalize/FoNS.html>