

PERSPECTIVES

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Free trade means Free reign



DIARY OF A MALCONTENT

MICHAEL J. KLECKNER

Well, the Summit of the Americas in Quebec, establishing the Free Trade Area of the Americas, is long over. Hey wait, did you even hear about the gig in Quebec? Maybe you did, but more likely you didn't. "Free trade" supporters tried really hard to keep it a secret. They didn't want you to know that they now rule the world.

Quebec's meeting was yet another secret tribunal to establish a global marketplace. Concerned citizens (the media usually calls them "anarchists" to make you afraid and angry) were there, but they couldn't even slightly interfere with the summit, thanks to a monstrous concrete and chain-link fence surrounding the convention center. As a result, the world plunged ever further into the dangerous, unexamined depths of globalization.

It's not that I'm blindly opposed to global commerce. It's inevitable, and it could be done right. But here's the problem: The toxic hot air conservatives huff and puff regarding "free trade" is usually technically true, and that's how they continue to lie to everyone and destroy the world.

Corporate executives have the media and the average citizen convinced that opening up trade barriers is simply about "raising everyone's standard of living." More jobs, more opportunities, everyone's happy; so goes the propaganda. And nothing could be further from the truth.

Yes, it is true that by expanding international trade, we will create new markets, sell more products and create jobs. Yes, in some countries where markets are opened, the citizens there are happy to have employment. Yes, this occasionally means things such as running water, electricity and some money to slowly build a better life.

I, and most thinking individuals, wouldn't be opposed to such scenarios. But a lot of intelligent people (oh yeah, "anarchists") are upset, because a better standard of living isn't the reason for "free-trade" pacts like the FTAA.

The real impetus for international agreements such as GATT, NAFTA, the WTO and the FTAA is to let businesses become the new world government. There's been talk in the past of expanding the United Nations' powers to eventually form an international congress. But the process is slow (people have to vote on stuff), de-

veloping countries want a lot (like to be treated fairly), and "externalities" have to be taken into account (like the environment and human rights). That doesn't please our friendly corporate executives. Businesses want new markets, lower wages, no environmental or labor standards and plenty of impoverished peasants to take advantage of, both as workers and consumers. And they want it now.

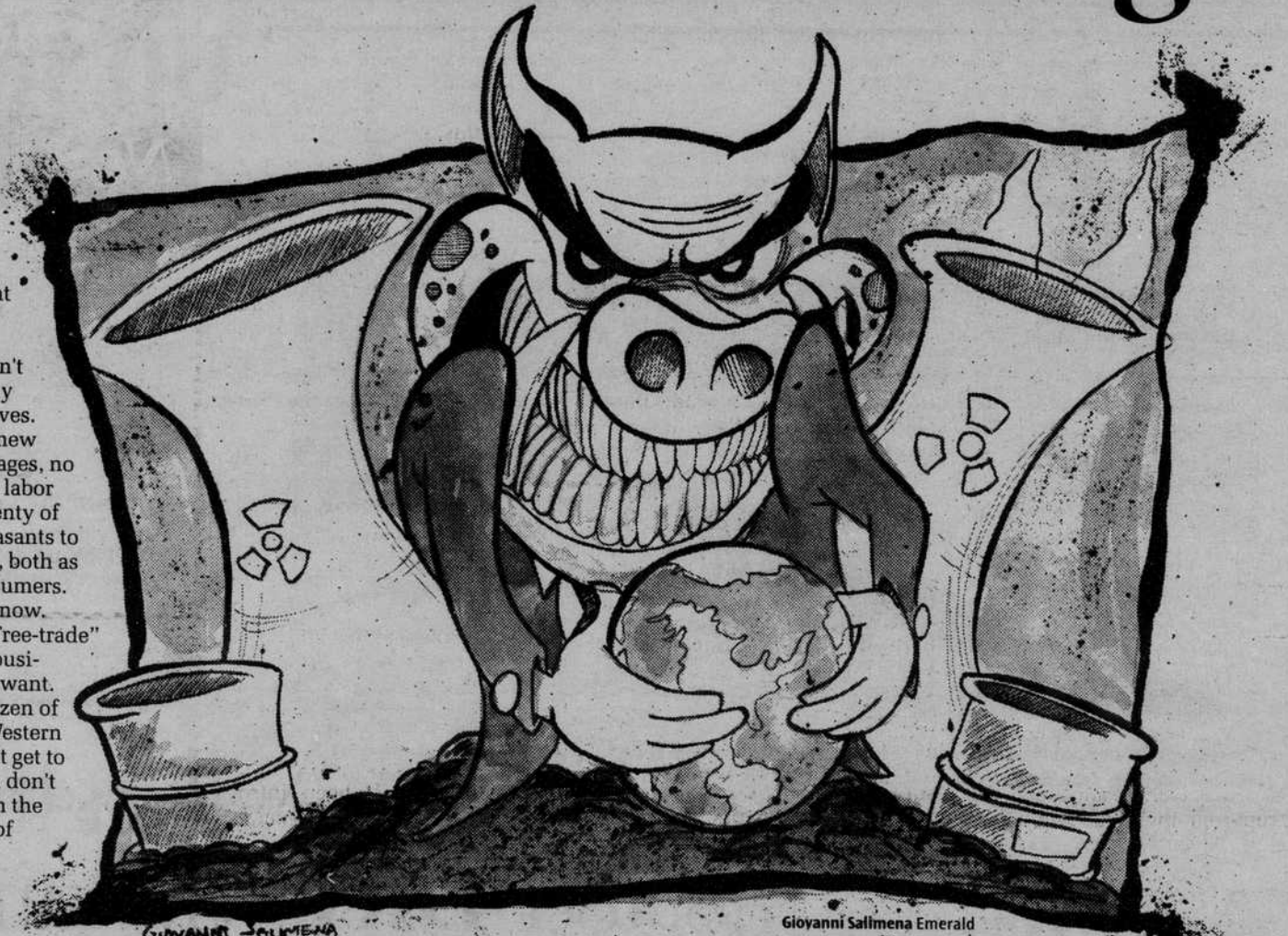
Guess what? "Free-trade" agreements give businesses what they want. And you, as a citizen of a "democratic" Western government, don't get to elect anyone, you don't have any input on the laws and — best of all — you can't even know what happens at the "legislative sessions."

The governing bodies for these "free-trade" agreements almost always meet in secret. Even the FTAA agreement itself, signed by your president (he's not, I know), George W. Bush, is secret. And these secrets allow businesses to rewrite or eliminate laws passed by your democratically elected representatives.

Here's a sample illustration: Americans, rightfully concerned about the amount of poisons released into their rivers from manufacturing, pass laws limiting emissions. Greed Incorporated, concerned about its ability to compete globally when companies in other countries don't have these restrictions, complains to the governing board of the "free-trade" agreement. The board decides that it's just not fair to tell a company not to poison the water, so it erases the law. Citizens don't vote on it, there are no public hearings. It's simply unfair, so the law is wiped away.

I am in favor of free trade. But free trade should mean we raise the standard of living around the world. Wait, isn't that what conservatives say we're doing? Then why does "free trade" eliminate environmental laws and labor standards? Why does the WTO (the FTAA will soon) decide that it's OK for companies to poison the water and exploit the workers in Third World countries?

Corporate executives who use "free trade" to lower the standard of living are callous, greedy pigs. It's the only answer. They must have higher profits, after all, and right now.



GIOVANNI SALLENA

Giovanni Sallmena Emerald

It's a shame that the media, the government and corporations keep lying to you about what "free trade" really is. It's too bad that most of you don't seem to care. Because if more responsible, caring citizens were paying attention, there could have been enough

people in Quebec to rip apart the fence of secrecy surrounding "free trade."

It's not that I like to see destruction. It's just that something must be done, or globalization will keep expanding until there's no standard of living. And when that

happens, you won't even hear about it.

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University's integrity is suffering

GUEST COMMENTARY

George Beres

"Arrogance" by an employee was the phrase the University used to justify its pursuit of women's basketball coach Jody Runge that ended with her resignation. That's an ironic choice of language. Arrogance seems better suited to describe the behavior of the University administration in a variety of areas in recent months.

First, the University succeeded in getting the Oregon University System to agree that identifying major donors to the school was no longer necessary. That got overturned by the state Legislature after many newspapers complained, citing the state's public records law. But weeks later, coziness with the governing body was revived when the OUS gave the University permission to renege on its decision to join the Worker Rights Consortium because — among other things — the WRC was going too far in seeking fairness for underpaid and mistreated workers.

Now the arbitrary behavior has spread to varsity athletics, adding to the unsettling signs of dogmatic arrogance on the campus. First it was the decision to ignore the University's academic mission by agreeing to a December date for the Civil War football game that concludes the 2001 season. The president of the University Senate protested that this broke the long-standing rule to not schedule games at the time of final examinations. It was the meek statement of a "toothless tiger," and it resulted in a not-surprising response from the office of a University vice president: "We gave the ques-

tion serious consideration." But the exception stayed in place, he explained, because the TV money and national exposure that came with the change were too tempting to turn down.

The latest example of failing University integrity came with the refusal to make public the independent review of coach Runge that was used to justify her resignation. Once again, when asked by the mass media for the report, the vice president responded directly and bluntly: "No."

When told the report had to be released because of the state public records law, the answer was that the law did not apply because the \$500,000 settlement with Runge to get her to resign came from money raised independent of the fiefdom of intercollegiate athletics. Conveniently ignored was the fact that the state of Oregon underwrites varsity athletics at Oregon (and Oregon State and Portland State) with an annual grant to each of about \$1 million. The money comes from the state's lottery revenues.

Captive accountants of the University might claim otherwise. But it is state money that made possible the massive buyout, as well as the payment of \$25,000 to the independent reviewing agency. Without seeing the results of the review, the public — whose taxes paid for the buyout and the review — has no way of knowing whether her resignation was justified, or whether it was part of a vendetta against an outspoken woman coach.

That question becomes secondary to the major issue: When did public universities in Oregon suddenly earn the special privilege of secrecy that no longer makes them accountable to the public that pays the bills?

George Beres is a former Oregon sports information director, former editor of the University of Oregon faculty newsletter and former manager of the University Speakers Bureau. Retired, he now writes on the history of college sports. He can be reached at gberes@oregon.uoregon.edu.