

# Don't Get Fooled Again: Canadian Corporate Front Groups

The advancement of the neoliberal corporate agenda and “free trade” in Canada along with the erosion of our sovereignty have not happened by accident. During the last few decades a carefully coordinated campaign led by big business interests and championed by corporate media have pushed these policies. The conclusions of bogus “studies” and reports issued by corporate dominated “think-tanks” have been uncritically and enthusiastically echoed by corporate media. This is used to give ideologically driven agendas a specious patina of academic respectability. These corporate front groups have worked relentlessly to mold government policy toward market fundamentalism but even more influential has been their role in spreading the neoliberal mythology throughout the public’s consciousness. This has been essential in lowering working Canadians’ expectations while enriching wealthy investors even further. The Canadian poor and middle classes are encouraged to believe they somehow have interests tied to the well-being of the country’s financial elite. The ultimate aim of the corporate neoliberalism being promoted by these institutions involves the rollback of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s social, labour, and environmental gains. What follows is a brief introduction of the major institutions working behind the scenes to promote this program in Canada. The eventual goal of the “free traders”, **Deep Integration** of Canada with the United States, is also examined and alternative, non-corporate Canadian public policy sources are presented.

**Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS)** Founded in 1994 with a grant from the right-wing **Donner Foundation**, this East Coast “think tank” promotes its unconditional belief that unregulated private markets always benefit society. It is the driving force behind the **Atlantica** proposed trading zone.

**C. D. Howe Institute** This Toronto based “think-tank” founded in 1973 and financed by the corporate sector has been involved in building an elite consensus and changing public opinion. Its “studies” have been used to help create the debt panic as well as to advocate radical cuts to social programs and undermine confidence in the Canada Pension Plan.

**Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE)** (formerly the **Business Council on National Issues** or **BCNI**) Formed in 1976 the Council consists of the CEOs of the 150 largest banking, manufacturing, resource, insurance, retail, telecommunications, and energy corporations in Canada (many of them American subsidiaries). It has operated behind the scenes in Ottawa since the 1980’s as a virtual shadow cabinet, influencing public policy to implement neoliberal programs favoring the interests of Canada’s corporate elite and foreign investors, with many of its papers serving as blueprints for Federal government legislation. These include privatizing Crown Corporations, energy deregulation, tax cuts for the wealthy, watering down competition legislation, and helping to create the deficit hysteria with resulting cuts to social spending. The Council has been the major player in Ottawa pushing the “free trade” agreements for the benefit of the corporate elite, working closely with Federal government departments to achieve this goal and spending millions to sell the **Free Trade Agreement** and **NAFTA** to the Canadian public.

**Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies (CISS)** Founded in 1976 and headquartered in Toronto CISS presents itself as an independent think-tank on military policy while receiving funding from **Canada’s Department of National Defence**. It organizes joint Canada-U.S. armed forces conferences pushing for closer integration between the two. CISS advocates increased military spending and other policies desired by the military establishment and our own military-industrial complex. It seeks to create a climate of fear and uncertainty among the public to push through an agenda of more armed forces funding.

**Canadian Taxpayers’ Federation** This Ottawa based organization was created in 1990 to fight social programs and combat any egalitarian government policies by attacking the taxes needed to fund them. It is run in a totally undemocratic manner with its members having no control over the Federation’s spending or policies.

**Fraser Institute** Headquartered in Vancouver and founded in 1974 this is Canada's most important corporate propaganda factory for molding public opinion. It is financed by Canada's leading businesses with more than half of the country's top one hundred most profitable corporations having contributed to it. Also prominent is funding from right-wing foundations such as the **John Dobson Foundation** and the **Donner Foundation** as well as foreign foundations. The Institute has received large grants from Exxonmobil and has published articles in its "Fraser Forum" skeptical of climate change and warning that the Kyoto Protocol on climate change will be disastrous for the Canadian economy. It has staged a presentation on why Russia shouldn't ratify the protocol. It has also campaigned against government tobacco regulation and published a book purporting to refute the link between second hand smoke and cancer by an author who received grants from the tobacco industry. Independent, outside experts have described its surveys as "methodological garbage" but they are used by the cheerleaders of **corporate libertarianism** to rationalize the programs they want to implement for their own financial gain.

The Fraser Institute campaigns for "free trade", privatization of public health and education, anti-union legislation, and has a **Law and Markets Project** advocating limits on citizens' ability to sue corporations for faulty products or pollution. In collaboration with other right-wing institutes it produced the **Economic Freedom of the World** project which equates freedom with the ability to do whatever is desired with wealth regardless of the totalitarian nature of a state.

The Fraser Institute has enjoyed funding from many corporate media conglomerates including Sterling Newspapers, Southam, Thompson Newspapers, and Standard Broadcasting. The institute produces big business friendly reports which can then be quoted by corporate media as "neutral think-tank" conclusions. Its "**Tax Freedom Day**" gimmick is used to campaign for tax cuts for the wealthy with resulting government cutbacks. The Institute's **National Media Archive**, purporting to provide an analysis of bias in Canadian televised news programs, is itself biased and distorted. The Institute claims not to engage in lobbying even though it makes presentations to politicians and packages its "studies" and conferences for them.

**National Citizens' Coalition (NCC)** Founded in 1967 this secretive organization refuses to reveal the corporations that bankroll it but is known to have an advisory board made up of corporate leaders. The Coalition publishes its yearly "**Tales from the Tax Trough**" ridiculing government social spending. Its publications proclaim public education a failure, advocate privatizing the post office and CBC, oppose government grants for research, and praise the superiority of the private American health care system to Canada's public Medicare. The Coalition has funded campaigns against the Canada Health Act and the Canadian Wheat Board. It has also challenged limits on third party political spending, allowing corporations further influence in elections, while working to undermine union influence in Canada. The NCC lobbies politicians and gives cash prizes to politicians that have advanced the neoliberal agenda as well as to journalists who promote its views. The Coalition is run in an extremely undemocratic manner and its public citizen members can't vote at or even attend its meetings. Stephen Harper is a former Coalition president.

In addition to these more general groups there are numerous manufacturing and business lobby groups influencing the Canadian and provincial governments to implement policies favorable to their particular industry. More information on the organizations described in this section can be found in:

*The Myth of the Good Corporate Citizen: Canada and Democracy in the Age of Globalization* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition by Murray Dobbin (2003)

*Global Showdown: How the New Activists Are Fighting Global Corporate Rule* by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke (2000)

*Holding the Bully's Coat: Canada and the U.S. Empire* by Linda McQuaig (2007)

# Deep Integration of Canada With the U.S.

The push for “free trade” treaties with the U.S. is only one aspect of a far wider agenda being pursued by Canadian **continentalists**. Their ultimate goal is the Deep Integration of Canada with the United States. This is presented as a necessity in the post 9/11 environment to ensure continued access for Canadian businesses to U.S. markets, but their true agenda involves decimating Canadian social, environmental, and medicare programs by harmonizing them with their vastly inferior American versions.

Several of the big business front groups discussed above have been very active in pushing this agenda. In a 2003 Washington meeting the **Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE)** president launched the **North American Security and Prosperity Initiative**. The 2005 **Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP)**, signed in Waco, Texas by the three leaders of Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, was a virtual carbon-copy of this initiative. The **C.D. Howe Institute** has published many reports supporting the Deep Integration agenda, calling it the “Big Idea”. They have promoted linking Canadian economic security to American homeland security and the establishment of a full Customs Union and Common Market between the two nations. The **Fraser Institute** pushes Deep Integration in order to harmonize Canadian social programs with declining American standards. Canadian corporate media, including the far-right **National Post**, have eagerly advocated Deep Integration as well.

Deep Integration with the U.S. has many facets. One is Canadian involvement with U.S. ballistic missile “defence” better known as “star wars”. Though the Canadian government has publicly downplayed its role in this offensive military system, there is a great deal of cooperation behind the scenes. The military aspects are further highlighted by the push, backed by the **CCCE**, for closer interoperability and integration between Canadian and U.S. forces for joint operations as well as increased military spending.

Internationally Canada is being pushed to abandon its traditional multilateralism in order to align itself more closely with U.S. unilateralism. There is also more Canadian compliance with U.S. style security procedures such as the “No-Fly” lists, surveillance, and cooperation with their **extraordinary rendition** program which involves kidnapping people and transporting them to another country for torture. The **Smart Border Accord** would harmonize our immigration, visa, and customs service with theirs.

The push for Deep Integration also involves downward harmonization of our health, environmental, pharmaceutical, and food standards to those of the U.S. by with the adoption of tested-once “**Smart Regulations**” and allowing voluntary compliance by industry.

As American supplies of oil and natural gas dwindle, Canada is increasingly viewed by the White House as America’s gas tank for both its domestic needs and its foreign military adventures. This will involve extending the control the U.S. already has over our natural resources under the **proportionality** clause of **NAFTA**. Also being eyed for negotiation is bulk export of our water which the U.S. needs to continue its own wasteful water use practices. Despite massive American deficits and economic instability Canadian continentalists are also pushing for closer currency linkage to the U.S. dollar.

The closer tying of Canada to the U.S. involves the Americanization of our social, economic, and resource policies for the sake of higher corporate profits. This sell-out of the interests of Canadian citizens represents the culmination of the process begun with the “free trade” treaties.

More information on Deep Integration can be found in:

*Too Close For Comfort: Canada’s Future Within Fortress North America* by Maude Barlow (2005)

*Zip Locking North America: Can Canada Survive Continental Integration?* by Murray Dobbin (2003)

and at [www.IntegrateThis.ca](http://www.IntegrateThis.ca)

## But Fear Not!!!

Canadians can turn to several superb non-corporate sources for public policy analysis. The **Council of Canadians**, founded in 1985 by a group of prominent Canadians including Edmonton publisher Mel Hurtig as

well as David Suzuki, Pierre Burton, Peter C. Newman, and Margaret Laurence, is this country's largest citizen's group. The Council is dedicated to fighting the erosion of Canada's social programs and independence by the "free trade" treaties and the privatization agenda. Its website is [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org) and information on the Edmonton chapter can be accessed by clicking on "Welcome" then on "chapters in action" and then on "Alberta chapters".

In Edmonton numerous public policy publications concerning Alberta are available from the **Parkland Institute** [www.ualberta.ca/parkland](http://www.ualberta.ca/parkland) and **Public Interest Alberta** [www.pialberta.org](http://www.pialberta.org) which also sponsor conferences and forums. Nationally the **Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives** [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca) provides analysis of Canadian public policy as does the **Polaris Institute** [www.polarisinstitute.org](http://www.polarisinstitute.org) . The **Pembina Institute** [www.pembina.org](http://www.pembina.org) is a source of information on energy issues.

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