

# Reviews

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**The Facts on Free Trade**, edited by Ed Finn with Duncan Cameron and John Clavert, James Lorimer & Company, Toronto, 1988; **Free Trade Free Canada**, edited by Earle Gray, Canadian Speeches, Woodville, Ontario, 1988.

The official text of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement and many of the summary documents, are complicated to the point of being virtually incomprehensible to the average reader. Scholarly studies and conferences of economists are only slightly more useful in trying to understand the nature of the treaty. It is no surprise therefore that the fate of the agreement, in Canada at least, is going to be decided on ideological, emotional and political grounds. These two little collections of essays reflect diametrically opposed opinions on this issue.

All the contributors in the collection compiled by Ed Finn are opposed to free trade. Bob White president of the Canadian Auto Workers argues that safeguards for jobs in Canada under the AutoPact have been surrendered. Bruce Wilkensen, a professor of economics at the University of Alberta sees the pact as a step toward political affiliation to the United States. Ian Scott, Attorney General of Ontario, claims the treaty is unconstitutional since it deals with some areas of purely provincial jurisdiction; Eric Kierans, a former Quebec politician dismisses it as an unnecessary step which will do nothing to meet the real problem of foreign ownership, Jeff Rose President of CUPE worries that the inevitable result will be changes in Canada's more progressive social programs.

Perhaps the most passionate essay is by professor Duncan Cameron of Ottawa University. He doubts the fundamental assumption about the

two countries working toward common policies. Considering the different size of the nations: "is the US going to adopt universal medicare, unemployment insurance, and start paying liveable pensions? Or are we going to privatize, deregulate, and undermine our public sector through tax cuts for the affluent? Is the U.S. going to start working to fight starvation and improve living conditions in the Third World? Or are we going to fight against the communist menace and work to improve access by multinational companies to Third World resources?...I am a Canadian not an American. My citizenship is important to me. I don't want to live in Canada under laws determined by U.S. decisions about which I can do nothing. I want my country to stand for something more than further co-operation with the United States."

The other side of the argument is found in the collection by Earle Gray based upon speeches by well known supporters of free trade including chief negotiator Simon Reisman, Grant Devine, Premier of Saskatchewan, Allan Gotlieb, Ambassador to the United States, novelist Mordecai Richler, artist Christopher Pratt and a several business leaders.

David Daubney MP notes that free trade is not a panacea for economic ills. It provides an opportunity to improve productivity not a guarantee. Thomas d'Aquino of the Business Council on National Issues rejects the idea of economic ties leading to political ones. "In this century there is not a single example where a high level of trade liberalization between two countries led to political integration. And furthermore there is no significant support in either Canada and the United States for a common market or a political union."

Gerald Regan a former Premier of Nova Scotia and later a federal Trade Minister says that the pressure to compete in the United States under a free trade system will not force us to dismantle our social programs. "In recent years tariffs with the United States have been reduced by 85 per cent. That increasing dependence on the United States has not eroded the social security system. Indeed during those years the Unemployment Insurance system was expanded and extra billing for medical services banned. If the removal of 85 percent of the barriers has left our social system intact, why should a dismantling of the remaining 15 percent cause such a change? The answer, of course is that it will not and that such claims are unmitigated nonsense and scare tactics...I am afraid that the opposition of many organizations and many people is related to the fact that they do not like the United States. I am as Canadian as anyone in this country, and I do not see the question of strengthening our country by having better access to the American market as in any way diminishing my Canadianism."

Most Canadian opinion probably lies somewhere between the two extremes but works like these, distasteful as they may be to the other side, will help the vast majority of parliamentarians and electors decide exactly where they fit. It is interesting that both proponents and opponents of free trade assume an election or referendum would support their position. There will, of course, be a federal election very soon and free trade will be one of the main issues. Yet the positions outlined in these two books are so fundamentally opposed that it is difficult to imagine anyone changing his mind over something as simple as an election.

Gary Levy