

Acting for Justice

The Water Crisis

If we use purchased bottled water at home or in our workplace, we can learn where it comes from: the company that sells it (and its parent company,) from whom it was purchased, under what arrangement, and whether the local community was really involved in the sale. We might also ask ourselves why we choose to pay extra for the bottled water, and what effect this decision has on our concern for the public water supply that is to meet the needs of all the community.

Free Trade Agreements

The Central America Free Trade Agreement will be submitted for approval to Congress. It is important that our Congressional delegations realize that their constituents are aware of the significance of this agreement as well as the pending Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. A telephone call to their offices, requesting to speak to the staff person for these issues, will put us in contact with the right persons. By calling those persons regularly we can establish a relationship that will convince them of the seriousness of our concerns.

PLAN PUEBLA PANAMA

The Bank Information Center, an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization provides information on the projects, policies and practices of the World Bank and other Multilateral Development Banks. Projects connected with Plan Puebla Panama are reported on this web site: www.bicusa.org/lac/PPP.htm

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CREA is a faith-based independent 501(c)3 organization.



"Believing that the earth is home to all, CREA facilitates analysis of human, social and economic policies from the perspective of their effects on human lives, beginning with the lives of those who are poor."

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"The true success of globalization will be measured by the extent that it enables every person to enjoy the basic goods of food and housing, of education and employment, of peace and social progress, of economic development and justice.

"This goal cannot be achieved without guidance from the international community and adequate regulation on the part of the worldwide political establishment.

"...now is the time to work together for a new constitutional organization of the human family, an organization that would be in a position to meet the demands of a globalized world."

John Paul II. Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. May 2003



Starting Points

Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc. Hartford, CT

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KEEPING OUR BALANCE IN A SHIFTING WORLD

As world citizens today, we face challenges from globalization that previous generations could not begin to imagine. Technological advances have resulted in dizzying shifts of production, distribution, communication and financial systems. Once-secure jobs are lost as out-sourcing sends them elsewhere or automation replaces them. Jobs found often offer less pay and fewer benefits. Wealth has increasingly concentrated and the gap between rich and poor individuals and countries has widened precipitously. Environmental degradation continues. Security issues abound.

It is increasingly difficult to live a life that is at the same time faithful to individual and family responsibilities and engaged in global issues. The advice given by a CREA prayer partner in the side bar on this page is welcome as a goal to strive for. But we need all the help we can get to practice it.

It is easier, we may think, to block out all that is happening on the world scene, and just concentrate on ourselves. The reality is that we cannot escape the consequences of these global shifts. We can be passive in the face of them, or we can be active participants in shaping the future of our human family and our planet.

We live in a world where power has concentrated in the control of a few major countries, and the major transnational corporations within them that are not really linked solely to one nation. This power comes from having money, with its ability to bribe or intimidate or to control media. It comes from control over natural resources or the willingness of the many thousands of citizens willing to work for very low wages because they have no other viable options. It comes from military strength or ideological mind control. Our country is one of these major powers, and it defines as "national interests" the interests of major US-based corporations.

When the US government uses its power on a global level to set policies that exclude and/or diminish other countries or peoples, we all face the economic and personal consequences of increased threats to our security.

Protests on a spectrum of levels, including the trade negotiation impasses, are signs that those who are excluded, deprived and/or alienated are organizing and using the options available to them to counter the overwhelming economic and military strength of countries or corporate structures that hold power over them.

The personal, familial and global meet here. Global circumstances reach into our daily lives and affect the well-being of our families. Engaging in activities to create more just national policies is essential if we are to safeguard our individual future and that of our families.

Living Life to the Fullest

Starting points - those solid convictions and webs of relationship that guide our thinking and acting - often begin with one's own family and community.

However, as we grow in awareness of our global interconnectedness, these starting points stretch out in concern to deprived families and communities around the world.

This extended concern has a "down" side. Awareness of the devastation of wars, natural disasters, on-going economic injustices and ecological degradation — all can stress and paralyze us.

A CREA Prayer Partner offers a simple, refreshing perspective and renewed hope, even as she herself battles cancer.

***"Work for peace and justice
then live life to the fullest.
Be happy in your calling."***

This is her Christmas message. May it be our refrain and touchstone in the year ahead.

WHO HAS ACCESS ? WHO IS LEFT OUT?

These simple questions are very important in analyzing systems.

The questions underlie the decades-long effort to reform the US campaign finance system that has provided to wealthy contributors access to and influence over legislative and executive decisions.

The recent Supreme Court decision up-holding the constitutionality of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 has been a welcome recognition of the danger of such a system to our democratic process.

While individuals and groups will no doubt seek to find ways to circumvent the intent of the Act, it is a public statement on the importance of equal access to decision-makers.

In any system, those who have access to and influence over decision-making can ensure that legal frameworks will be established that work for their own benefit.

We see this in the national and international economic system. Citizen input on labor, environment, and indigenous rights is severely limited. There is no real access for these voices in the processes that develop, interpret and enforce the system.

Equal access is essential to for the Common Good, the basis for lasting peace and security. We must insist on it.

UP-DATES ON TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

Trade agreements increasingly affect every aspect of our lives. While interest often focuses on the crucial issue of job loss or job creation, other ramifications are also very important. Standards for environmental protection, labor rights, control over local resources such as water, provision of health services and education, and surrender of judiciary rights in trade disputes to trade panels — these are some of the places in our lives where “trade agreements” are reaching. It is crucial that world citizens monitor trade negotiations and insist upon full access to their development and ratification.

For up-to-date and comprehensive information on trade negotiations, CREA recommends the website of the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development: www.ictsd.org. The Center publishes a free newsletter via e-mail, *BRIDGES Weekly Trade News Digest*.

Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)



Craft Cooperative Members. El Salvador. Fair Trade products offer an alternative to the “Free Trade” approach of current trade deals.

CAFTA negotiations were completed for a Free Trade Agreement between the US, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala. The final text of the agreement will be available at an unspecified time in January. According to the US trade representative, the agreement opens up all services in these countries to US businesses, while including some US concessions.

Opposition to CAFTA has been strong. Small farmers in Central America fear the influx of US subsidized agribusinesses. US sugar and textile industries, particularly in the southern states, fear the loss of current protective policies. Congressional vote on the agreement will be complicated in an election year.

Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA)

Thirty-four countries in the Americas were represented in the November FTAA Ministerial meeting in Miami. The FTAA calls for the opening up of all services to free trade unless specifically designated as exempt. Recent changes in the draft treaty allow for bilateral and regional trade agreements among the members so long as they do not go further than the WTO. Protestors in Miami reported instances of excessive police force, in a show of police force that was funded from Iraq appropriations.

See: www.ftaa-alca.org/Ministerials/Miami/declaration_e.asp

World Trade Organization (WTO)

No substantial progress has occurred since the collapse of the Cancún ministerial meeting. Invited delegates have met in small “green room” meetings, a much-criticized exclusive and non-transparent process. No breakthrough happened at the December General Council meeting. The reason for the impasse is refusal of the US, the European Union and Japan to lower their agricultural subsidies.

These subsidies encourage “dumping” at below-cost prices, drive local producers out of business and keep poor agricultural countries from earning their way out of poverty.

THE WORLD'S WATER: IS IT FOR SALE?

Efforts are intensifying to address the global water crisis. The crisis is multi-dimensional and daunting. It stretches from global ecological deforestation and industrial pollution to the quality and quantity of the water coming -or not coming - out of a household or community water pipe. It is a problem of health, sanitation, nutrition and life—human and planetary.

How to deal with the crisis is the subject of global governmental conferences on strategies and finances, congressional hearings and legislation, judiciary decisions, academic seminars, local initiatives...and global water companies' strategic planning.

On the local as well as the national and international level there are competent and dedicated individuals who are putting their time and expertise into meeting this crisis. Many are public servants who have served for years on commissions dealing with the water problems of their communities or of the world. The presence of these persons is a source of hope for all of us.

The basic questions are: *Who owns the Earth's water? Who can sell or buy it?* National water laws usually determine water rights, which often date from centuries ago.

Plan Puebla Panama (PPP)

Plan Puebla Panama is an inter-governmental agreement dating from 2000 to create infrastructure for transportation, energy and telecommunication connections between and among the nine southern states of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama. Mexico's legalization of land privatization and the take-over of indigenous communities' land is key to this expansion. Local communities, left out of the planning, have vigorously opposed the PPP as a plan to commercially exploit the region's rich natural resources in a new form of colonization.

The PPP calls for Pacific and Atlantic highway corridors with complementary connections, improvement of main ports, and construction of dams and power plants. Some projects are in progress. Agricultural issues were recently incorporated into the plan. Notwithstanding its claims for “sustainable development,” the PPP is clearly about the infrastructure and legal framework to facilitate global trade and profitable investment.

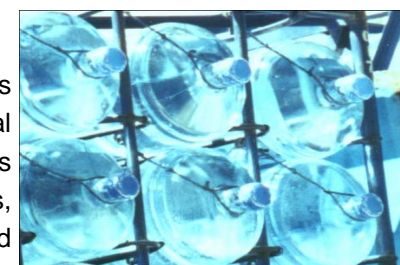
Sale, lease, sharing or concessions may include water, the water source, the purification/distribution system, or the water resources management.

Concessions can be mutually beneficial when ownership and control of water resources remain within the community through a strong regulatory and monitoring system. Expertise in contract negotiations is essential.

However, when the water resource is sold outright to investor-owned companies, community control is lost. Sales lead to the consolidation of control by international water companies. In turn, these companies gain increased influence in governmental policy-making.

The consequences of privatization are felt in projects around the world. Dramatic increases in the price of water and water services follow. Services improve for those able to pay. For those unable to pay, shut-offs and disconnections occur, with disastrous health consequences.

For an excellent and balanced resource on these issues see: www.pacinst.org/reports/new_economy_of_water.pdf



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JOHN PAUL II ON GLOBALIZATION

“The processes by which capital, goods, information, technology and knowledge are exchanged and circulate throughout the world today often elude the traditional mechanisms of regulatory control put in place by national governments and international agencies.

“Special interests and the demands of the market frequently predominate over concern for the common good.

“This tends to leave the weaker members of society without adequate protection and can subject entire peoples and cultures to a formidable struggle for survival....

“All of this is far-removed from the concept of an ethically responsible globalization capable of treating all peoples as equal partners and not as passive instruments.

“Accordingly there can be little doubt of the need for guidelines that will place globalization firmly at the service of authentic human development ...

“This does not mean creating a ‘global super-State’, but continuing the processes already underway to increase democratic participation and promote political transparency and accountability.”

Excerpts from the Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. May 2003