

Posted by Joan Russow
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From thw archives EROSION OF THE PUBLIC TRUST THROUGH
FUNDAMENTALISM, CORPORATISM, AND MILITARISM
Joan Russow

By

August 2000

To the editor of the Globe and Mail

Stockwell Day and the Canadian Alliance through their policies imbued with fundamentalism, corporatism and militarism will undermine the international public trust at a time when it is essential for Canada to play a leadership role in the international community.

In 1995, I wrote a book called the Charter of Obligations which compiled international obligations, commitments and expectations related to promoting the "Public Trust". This book was a content analysis of statements from the following documents: (i) international obligations incurred through the UN Charter, conventions, treaties and covenants; (ii) international commitments made through UN conference action plans, and (iii) expectations created through General Assembly resolutions. Out of this work, emerged the notion of the "Politics of Public Trust".

The following are the major components of the Politics of Public Trust:

(a) Promoting and fully guaranteeing respect for human rights including labour rights, rights of indigenous peoples, women's rights, the human right to be free from all forms of discrimination, the human right to unadulterated food and water to housing and to universally accessible publicly funded not for profit health care, education and social services,

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(b) Enabling socially equitable and environmentally sound employment, working towards an economy based upon sound equitable, ecological, and social principles, instituting fair and just transition programs for affected workers and communities; and implementing the shift from "free" to fair trade,

(c) Achieving a state of peace, justice and security; through general disarmament, arms and budget reduction, and programs for prevention of conflict and for non-violent resolution of conflict,

(d) furthering global structures that respect the rule of international law; social justice, human rights, social cohesion, equal opportunity, and equitable distribution of resources,

(e) Ensuring the preservation and protection of the environment, respecting the inherent worth of nature beyond human purpose, upholding the inalienable right of all life forms and natural processes, invoking the precautionary principle, reducing the ecological footprint and moving away from the current model of overconsumptive development,

(f) Developing community-based democracy with local decision-making within a framework of public trust principles

There is a fundamental distinction between international agreements that further the public trust as outlined above, and international agreements and actions that promote vested interests and undermine the public trust. In contrast to the Politics of Public Trust is the Politics of Vested

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Interests - not only corporate vested interests, but also fundamentalist-based and military-based interests;]

International trade agreements such as NAFTA and the emerging Free Trade Agreements of America (FTAA), the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATs), the Agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and organizations such as OECD, APEC and WTO are instruments that have led to deregulation, voluntary compliance, privatization, social injustice, and economic inequity. They, too, have been undermining, continue to undermine or will undermine the public trust.

In addition, the intrusion, in many cases, at the international level of fundamentalism, corporatism and militarism, into the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and civil society movements at the United Nations has had the effect of weakening the international resolve to further the public trust and ensure the implementation of the principles formerly enunciated at the international level.

For example, fundamentalist groups at international conferences have continued to undermine any movement to extend the listed grounds of discrimination beyond those listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, listed grounds on which there must not be discrimination, and at the end of the list they included the expression "other status" to ensure the inclusion of future grounds as they arose. The expression "other status" would justify the inclusion of "sexual orientation", "gender identity" and "form of family". At recent meetings of the United Nations, including Habitat II in Istanbul, and Beijing +5 (women's Conference) in New York, fundamentalist groups received accreditation as NGOs and lobbied for regressive measures that would lead to widespread intolerance and discrimination. Similarly, the fundamentalists at the UN have attempted to undermine women's reproductive rights which were clearly enunciated at the International Conference on Population and Development, and at the UN Conference on Women: Equality, Development and Peace.

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Corporations lobby to undermine the public trust not only in their own capacity, but as members infiltrating NGOs or as corporate front groups acquiring accreditation to the UN as NGOS. Their involvement has led to the weakening of international resolve to implement the precautionary principle and other environmental measures. Since 1972, at the United Nations Conference on Humans and the Environment, the precautionary principle has emerged as a well-founded principle of international customary law. This principle could be paraphrased as: where there is a threat to environment [biodiversity] or human health, the lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent the threat. At the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, this principle was included in the Rio Declaration, as well as in the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Corporations and corporate front groups have, however, been attending sessions of the United Nations and attempting to push business as usual with "a cleanup technology" --deregulation coupled with voluntary compliance in relation to toxic, hazardous, atomic, biotech--genetically engineered foods-- production and waste and thus disregarding the precautionary principle.

NATO, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) AND Pro-military governments and groups have also proceeded to undermine the public trust. In particular, they have undermined the undertaking through General Assembly resolutions in the 1980s, to reduce the military budget and transfer the "peace dividend" into social programs particularly in the developing countries; they have undermined the commitment made at the Stockholm conference on Humans and the Environment in 1972, to end the production of nuclear arms, and the undertaking through a 1975 General Assembly resolution to ensure that the use of Scientific and Technological Progress would be in the Interest of Peace

The furtherance of the public trust has now been confined to simple rhetoric: It is time to translate the rhetoric of public trust into concerted action. It is time to move Canada from the Politics of Vested Interest to the Politics of Public Trust.

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