

**The FTAA and the WTO: 15
Principles of the Meta-Program
for Global Corporate Rule***

By John McMurtry

The “Free Trade Area of the Americas” (FTAA) is the latest major campaign for the occupation of the planet by the global corporate system. Like its predecessors, it will not respond to resistance, or move beyond dictation of more of the same. This is because its program is structured to be life-blind. Only the rights of non-living corporations are recognized. Only further extension of these corporate rights is in fact implemented — whatever the latest propaganda about “consulting civil society,” or the crocodile tears about “losing efforts” in Paris and Seattle. All the new public relations packaging means is that the propaganda about “inevitable change” and “global prosperity” has failed, and so it is time to calm the people by agreeing with their concerns, and carry on instituting and enforcing the program just as before.

The world, however, has woken up to the global corporate coup d'état, and people are taking to the streets, as was seen last April in Quebec City. Yet the corporate media continues to block out the life-and-death issues at stake, focuses on the salable spectacle of a large public confrontation, blames and trivializes the thousands of opponents who are assaulted for putting themselves on the line, and returns to selling other images and distractions once the violence entertainment is over.

Meanwhile the deepest and most systemic threats to civil and planetary life the world has ever faced will persist and increase. Behind the unfolding disasters of regional economies and planetary ecosystems

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melting down, the threat is driven by an underlying meta-program, in terms of which every decision, every policy, every regulation and implementation is demanded and instituted by servant governments. The meta-principles constituting this mind-set are robotic, much like the mind-set of a fanatic cult. But because they are presupposed by the corporate party and its media and political servants as the given order of the new world, they are never exposed as a deranged program of mind. Only fragments and partial themes are discerned, not the underlying structure as a dictatorial whole. The invisible prison of this agenda for world rule still conforms to the following meta-principles.

1. The ultimate subject and sovereign ruler of the world is the transnational corporation, operating by collective prescription and enforcement through the World Trade Organization (WTO) in concert with its prototype the NAFTA, its European collaborator, the EU, and such derivative regional instruments as the APEC, the (still-stalled) MAI, the FTAA, and so on. Together these constitute the hierarchical formation of the planet's new rule by extra-parliamentary and transnational fiat.

2. Individual transnational corporations are the moving parts of this global corporate system. They are non-living aggregates of dominant private stock-holders who, as individual persons, are made legally immune by "acts of incorporation" from any liability for corporate harms done to societies, to other individuals, and to the environment, as well as from accumulated corporate debts or offenses against national and international law. This is the legal armor around the agents of the global corporate system which affords them with unaccountable impunity for whatever damage or crime they impose on individuals, societies or environments around the world.

3. Transnational corporations acting in concert through the WTO and its related supranational constructs, prescribe to, and are represented by, well-financed national government parties which act in these matters solely on behalf of transnational corporate access to foreign markets, labor, and resources, with no barriers. This private corporate rule over governments everywhere is evident from the general facts that no binding regulation yet protects any right but that of transnational corporate investors, and not one article of any already signed international covenant or treaty protecting human rights, labor or the environment is binding on any part of any one of these unprecedentedly enforced "agreements." Indeed, the Kyoto Treaty on climate-altering gases, the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting chemicals and emissions, and the Basel Convention on transboundary pollutants, as well as the entire body of established solemn international agreements

and covenants on human and labor rights, have been consistently overridden by transnational corporate practices or the explicit judgments of WTO trade panels.

4. All such treaties and agreements obliging compliance with transnational corporate rights are proposed, negotiated and finalized behind closed doors and wide perimeters of armed force, with police pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets, shackles, harassment or surveillance for those who publicly protest. All these agreements, moreover, rule out any other public participation in, or appeal against, their decrees by anyone except corporate or state representatives, and adjudicate all disputes in secret before unelected authorities and tribunals, with no public or elected observers of these proceedings permitted, and with no record of their proceedings published for public view. Yet publics across the world are obliged to pay all the costs of negotiating, instituting and enforcing these absolutist prescriptions to the world's nations, and are also forced to pay all the fines and trade penalties imposed on their own elected governments for legislating democratic or environmentally protective policies which are deemed to conflict with this unaccountable transnational regulatory regime. This Orwellian arrangement is known as "investor-state dispute resolution."

5. All executive authorities *within* individual corporate bodies are all the while bound by the "fiduciary duty" to maximize monetized returns to their corporate stockholders (including in particular these authorities themselves) as the overriding obligation of decisions and actions, thereby compelling them by corporate charter prescription to minimize all expenditures associated with protecting human and non-human life by worker pay, social benefits or environmental regulation. In this way, it becomes a violation of legally binding corporate morality for its operations to take account of the life interests of employees, surrounding communities and environments, or even the future life of the world ahead of shareholders' continuous maximization of increased money profit.

6. The system's universal principle of "rationality" is, in consequence, to *externalize* all costs onto other individuals, societies and environments so that no form of human existence or responsibility such as "citizen" or "person" or "respector of other life" is recognized by the corporate calculus or the corporation's state servants. Only self-maximizing "profitable enterprises" and their "consumers" exist to the mindset. This form of life is then everywhere prescribed as "inevitable" for all peoples, and is proclaimed by its agents to offer societies across the world "no alternative."

7. “Consumers,” in turn, are not co-extensive with human beings or even the majority of human beings. This is because only humans with *sufficient money-demand* to purchase corporate products are recognized by this global system as possessing any right to access *any* good — from food and water to housing, health-care and whatever else can be privatized for profit. What can be “privatized,” or in reality, corporatized for profit, is accordingly assumed to include ever more of the conditions of planetary existence without any limit. Genetic structures, the body’s most basic means of life, the elements of nature, and publicly funded knowledge are all now being rapidly disassembled, restructured and appropriated by transnational corporations for their maximum private control and profit.

8. Any *alternative* mode for production or distribution of any priceable good — socially owned or controlled, publicly subsidized or assisted domestically, self-sufficient or co-operative, or declared without genetic modification or corporate additive — is made illegal under transnational trade regulations. If any society or government is resistant, its economy is denounced through state finance and trade offices and global mass media as “non-competitive,” “protectionist,” “monopolist,” or “communist,” and attacked on the ground by every means available to the global corporate system, including transnational trade embargo and armed invasion in abrogation of international criminal law. This is the true and grave meaning of “global market freedom” in the corporate system.

9. Consumers and investors with sufficient money-demand to exchange within the global market are, in fact, the *only* bearers of freedoms recognized by this system, and are axiomatically assumed to have no upper limit to their commodity consumption or their demand acquisition, even if an increasing majority of their fellow citizens or humanity have few or no means of existence. This is the “*non-satiety*” principle of neo-classical economics. It is also the unstated meaning of “equality of opportunity” in global market doctrine and practice — the equality of money demand for those who have it, and no-one else.

10. There is within the global corporate system no requirement of any kind, theoretical or practical, to recognize any *life need* of any individual (e.g., nourishing food) or society (e.g., non-toxic air) as rightful, or as a priority, or as an issue of choice within this system, however massive and extreme the gap between life-deprivation and over-consumption grows. A few hundred “investors” exponentially increase their money demand to more than the total income of the majority of the world’s population. Their “investments” irreversibly strip the world’s ecosystems yet no policy is even mooted by the UN to regulate

this planetary disaster. The UN Secretary-General, on the contrary, instituted earlier this year a UN “Global Compact” to require all UN agencies to enter into “corporate partnership” with the world’s richest transnational corporations.

11. Whatever pollution, degradation, overloading, exhaustion or destruction of local or planetary ecosystems occurs, and however irreversibly devastating in consequences to human and biodiverse life these damages from corporate extractions, effluents, and commodities are, there is *not one binding article in any transnational trade treaty or agreement* (excepting intra-European) which protects or seeks to protect any human or environmental life condition or good. All “scarcities” thus arising are assumed, with no scientific evidence to substantiate the assumption, to be correctable by market price mechanisms alone. This is why the U.S. Congress refuses to comply with the Kyoto Treaty until it makes all pollution abatement measures conform to a system of salable pollution credits — which have never reduced pollution, but which accord instituted corporate rights to pollute which can be sold as new and free equity, and which can be profited from at another, new level of the global market.

12. However many millions or billions of society’s or the world’s human population are misemployed, underemployed or starvation-waged with not enough to live on, and however life-destructive and chronically debilitating their hours and conditions of work are — a majority of the world altogether — there is no principle, norm or standard in neo-classical market theory or global market practice which recognizes or can recognize any of these depredations of human life *as an issue or a problem*. On the contrary, this life-blind paradigm can only compute these strippings of most of the world’s people as a new “flexibility of labor supply” and a multiple “opportunity to reduce the costs of labor” by exercise of new transnational corporate rights to produce in the lowest-cost zones of the world and sell in the highest-scale markets with no “barriers to trade.”

13. Any public or government intervention in the presupposition and implementation of any and all of the above principles in any way is attacked as “an interference in the free market.” Any prior cultural, historical, or democratic achievement or institution limiting the systematically life-destructive effects of their unrestricted operation is deplored as “a distortion” or “impediment to market competition,” and targeted for elimination by transnational trade and investment instruments. This is a cumulative and always advancing line of demand by endless transnational regulatory “agreements,” and it moves across national borders and domains of life like a sustained military campaign

in its relentless uniformity of prescriptions to target populations, and its blanket denials of the destructive effects which follow wherever its occupying forces usurp evolved ways of life.

14. No *autonomy* of domestic markets in any good or service, strategic use of any natural resource or necessity, protected public utility or social sector, product-safety, quality or licensing standard, and local procurement practice or grant is consistent with the defined principles of this transnational market regime. All have been and continuously are, therefore, slated for challenge and irreversible elimination by trade prescription or scheduled regulatory assimilation. This is a pattern everywhere documentable, but concealed by corporately financed politicians, the corporate media, and former corporate employees who negotiate the agreements. What remains constant through the cumulative momentum and volume of trade and investment decrees is that every article of tens of thousands is constructed to guarantee that dominantly transnational corporations can exploit and increasingly control domestic economies and public sectors across the world with no curtailing limit permissible in law.

15. Local, national and global *management of the money-demand drivewheels of this system is over 95 percent controlled by for-profit corporate financial and banking institutions* which have covertly appropriated control over almost all government bond issues and investor and consumer lines of credit from government currency creations, national bank loans and state statutory reserves. With no gold or other non-paper standard remaining to control it, corporate bank and financial leveraging has become effectively limitless, with central bank interest-rate increases in the new regime applied only to decrease workers' rising wages and social-sector spending. This is the always *hidden* underside of the system's propelling domestic and transnational force, why covert financial deregulation of money-demand supply is the secret to its every advance, and why no deep limit can be drawn against world occupation by corporate financial chicanery until the creation of money demand is constitutionally re-appropriated by public authority as its essential basis of sovereignty and investment in the common interest.

Together these underlying principles of the global market system constitute its fixed and largely unseen meta-structure of perception, understanding and judgment in accordance with which all its policy formation and enforced regulation of societies and economies across the world proceed. There is no principle of "the free market," "investment," "competition," "comparative advantage," "efficiency," "fiscal responsibility," "labor flexibility," "inflation control," "growth,"

“sustainability,” “social welfare,” “national prosperity,” “justice,” “civil society participation,” “poverty reduction,” “democracy,” or other old or new slogan promulgated by global market institutions and advocates that does not conform to all 15 of the principles stated above, in doctrine and effect. Whenever it is claimed otherwise, *ask for the evidence* from any “free trade agreement” on the planet. The response will always be silence, diversion to another topic, and, if the question is pursued publicly, surveillance by the police.

However well-placed its hirelings, this mind-locked creed is corporately self-driven and self-referential, and threatens to usurp every level of social and ecological life condition still existing. Given its invasionary past and history, we should not be surprised. Like every Pharaoh of the past, it will topple — the more totalitarian, the more complete the collapse. But remember who advocates for this regime now, for they are agents of the corporate occupation of all of the world’s societies and ecosystems by decreed financial and market mechanisms never electorally agreed to by any people on earth.

