

To Maine Citizens Trade Policy Commission
Public Hearing, 3 February 2005
Statement of Victor Skorapa, Jr., Harpswell

Vital services and basic utilities belong in the public sector. That has been the norm in the U.S. People take this for granted. The general public is only dimly aware of the Free Trade controversy although the NAFTA effect on manufacturing in Maine has resulted in some catching up on Free Trade awareness.

The less affluent are obviously more dependent on public services. In Central America 90% of civil society is made up of poor people and the population is much more aware of the Free Trade issue. There have been huge public demonstrations in opposition to CAFTA, the Central America Free Trade Agreement.

The existence of public services and utilities is contrary to the philosophy of trade and investment liberalization, which favors, as fair game, their acquisition by private-for-profit corporations. This changes the focus of the operators of these services from public benefit to owner-shareholder benefit invariably resulting in rise in the cost of service (often becoming out-of-reach for the poor) and deterioration of the quality of service.

In El Salvador there have been numerous publicly supported strikes by health care providers and employees striving to preserve their public health care system and protesting privatization of public utilities.

Free Trade Agreements are complex treaties having enormous influence on people's lives. They have been negotiated in secret by government trade experts (most often temporarily shifted from corporate to government service) and corporate trade officers, with no input from civil society.

It would seem that in a democracy it should be obligatory that some government entity explain the implications of Free Trade Treaties to the people whose lives they will profoundly effect, before they come up for a vote in Congress.

How many constituent calls, letters and e-mails does it take to balance the direct access in Washington by corporate lobbyists?

P.S. When the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet system collapsed, I thought: Harrah!
Capitalism won!

But, if US trade policy and outsourcing represent the normal evolution of capitalism, the people didn't really win.