

# Democratizing World Trade & Investment

by Dave Lewit

Like the British empire before it, the global corporate empire is all about exploitation of the Earth's resources for the benefit of transnational elites — wealthy industrialists, bankers, politicians, generals, administrators — with trickle-down to useful citizens. That exploitation requires a working system based either on widely shared values and norms, or on controls — police, military, legal, and informational.

A system was set up rationally by our Founding Fathers: a republic based on the mechanistic sciences and individualistic morality of 18th Century Europe. Among these was the budding science of economics viewed through the lens of high-energy, mechanistic, mass-production and shipping of goods with more emphasis on gentlemen's investment than on the concerns of craftsmen, homemakers, farmers, and laborers.

Democracy — the meaningful voice of all the people — was left out of the economic discussion. Throughout American history ordinary people have had to struggle for what the maverick Thomas Paine had preached during and after the Revolution — the right to basic income, progressive taxation, elimination of the death penalty, ending of slavery, universal right to vote, and so on. Today the democratic challenge is to transform the Empire by slowing and redirecting its murderous expansion, which is mindless of the irreversible ecological damage it is causing as well as its drain of resources and civil rights, which we need for social reconstruction.

In 1996, the Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy (BCA), together with the North Bridge AfD chapter, began thinking about this social reconstruction with a large public forum on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which neoliberal trade and treasury ministers of the capitalist powers secretly proposed as an “economic constitution of the world.” NAFTA, which resulted in the loss of American small and medium-sized manufacturing firms and hundreds of thousands of jobs, while strengthening giant corporations and banks and weakening government, served as a model for the MAI. NAFTA and similar “free” trade agreements promote the deregulation and privatization of industries like pharmaceuticals, food, telecommunications, and finance.

AfD's forum on the MAI, with arguments by AfD's Ronnie Dugger, Public Citizen's Lori Wallach, and many others including a Treasury

Department negotiator and Congress member John Tierney, helped put MAI on a path for defection and disintegration within two years.

Next BCA brought together 14 citizens from diverse walks of life to produce a democratic alternative to MAI — A Common

Agreement on Investment and Society (CAIS). Now being updated, it will hopefully serve as a model for many groups around the world to completely reverse the efforts of neoliberals in Western governments to corporatize the world through “free” trade agreements.

CAIS, with its 25 articles and over 100 provisions, adds “society” to international economics. It creates and integrates five new world institutions: primarily a network of Local System Organizations; as well as a democratic World Economic Parliament; a technical and financial agency; a decentralized University of Enterprise; an economic and environmental Court; and a revived (formerly UN), strengthened Center on Transnational Corporations to ensure corporate subordination to social needs. CAIS is not take-it-or-leave-it, but a stimulus for scores of local forums to energize the development of a truly democratic, participatory and adaptive world economic system.

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## A Common Agreement on Investment and Society

Preamble

WE, AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD, in order to ensure the integrity of the earth and all its inhabitants, to foster the creative and cooperative capabilities of all people, to protect and encourage local economies, to sharpen the productive and adaptive functions and accountability of business organizations as well as public and civic organizations in democratic society, to balance local and international development and trade, to promote fair trade and investment practices, and to ensure that all people share fairly in the fruits of human labor and natural bounty as well as in necessary economic and political effort, do establish this common agreement on investment for all countries.

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Read the full CAIS document at [www.thealliancefordemocracy.org/bigdocs/CAIS2\\_6.1.html#24](http://www.thealliancefordemocracy.org/bigdocs/CAIS2_6.1.html#24)