

Armchair **ACTIVIST**

April 2001



Take Action Against the Free Trade Area of the Americas

by Robert Bartle

The mobilization to take action against the Free Trade Area of the Americas is in full swing. What's at stake here is life. I'm not kidding you. When World Trade agreements can exist that overrule any labor, environmental, and health law in the name of profit we are all in trouble.

And though we are in trouble at present with the WTO and NAFTA, apparently these acronyms are not enough. No, our captains of industry are even greedier than this. Those who like corporate-managed trade (not "free" trade) will love the misnamed Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Here is an agreement that's going to extend NAFTA's infamous Chapter 11. This allows a corporation to sue governments for lost or potential profits. Every case using Chapter 11 has dealt either with environmental laws or sovereignty issues and guess who won every time? Corporations. See case of Metclad vs Mexico, Sun Belt Inc. vs Canada, and so on.

It will also incorporate the WTO's rule that one government can levy trade sanctions against another if it finds an environmental law or consumer protection law to be a non-tariff trade barrier blocking the free flow of capital and goods. None of the people heading the dispute panels deciding these cases or the heads of these trade agreements are voted in by the public. Have you even heard of them?

The meeting, to be held in Quebec, is already facing huge anticipated protest. The government is passing draconian laws, banning leaflets about the largest police security operation in the history of Canada, building an 8 km wall around the inner city of Quebec City to "protect the delegates" and keep us out, and banning wearing any type of scarf or bandana 3 weeks prior to the Summit of the Americas. These un-elected corporate chieftains will attempt to slash democracy, environmental protections and labor rights out of existence in the name of free trade. And we will be there too, April 20-22. We will rise up! Destroy! Imagine! And create a free and egalitarian society in the face of the FTAA all over the Western Hemisphere.

For more info on the FTAA go to these web sites:

www.stopftaa.org, a20.org, tradewatch.org, quebec2001.org, vermontactionnetwork.org

Upcoming events in Ann Arbor and vicinity that resist the FTAA in April:

April 1, 10am-5pm: Nonviolence Training: with an emphasis on taking Direct Action. The trainer will be Sheri Wander of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice.
Where: TBA. *For more info:* Call 663-1870.

April 4: There will be two vigils. One organized by SOLE for sweatshop laborers.
Time and Place: TBA.

The second is organized by the Interfaith Council in commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King and his work around economic justice.
Where: Depot Town under the clock.
Time: 7:30pm

April 16: Tax day and national call-in day to elected officials about your opposition to FAST TRACK authority for Mr. Bush and to the FTAA. Look for spontaneous guerilla theatre and banner hangs on this day in and around Ann Arbor.

April 20 5pm: CRITICAL MASS/PARADE meet State St. and N. University a little before 5pm to prepare. This is a regional action throughout Michigan: Traverse City, Lansing, Marquette and more. Get on the bike! Bring costumes, banners, signs, noise makers, mindfulness... This will also be a tour of some of our favorite corporations: Starbucks, TCF, Citigroup affiliates, BP/Amoco (potential Arctic Wildlife Refuge plunderers). *Please join us!*

April 21 Noon: Detroit's Labor Notes is organizing a march to the tunnel and then inviting activists to join their conference. The two workshops after the march will be dealing specifically with what we do Beyond Quebec. The facilitator for one of the workshops is from Argentina and helped organize there to stop a Structural Adjustment program of the IMF. The March starts at the Cobo Center and ends with a rally and speakers at Hart Plaza near the tunnel. Contact Labornotes.org, (313) 842-6262 for more details.

Some other ways to Resist and Create alternatives to FTAA:

Go door-to-door in your neighborhood or to the mall with information on FTAA. Contact Robert if you want to do this with others: rocktheboat1@hotmail.com

Drink Fair Trade coffee!

Join the Critical Mass ride!

Living Wage Victory

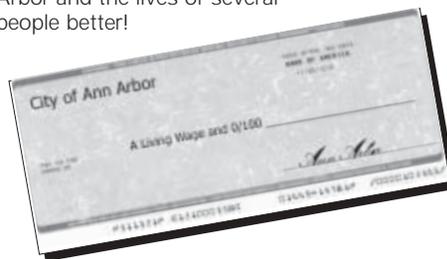
Congratulations Ann Arbor! You are now among the growing number of cities that can call themselves a living wage city!!!

On March 5th City Council approved an ordinance that allows workers to make a fair and decent living.

This goes to show that a dedicated group of citizens can make their voices heard.

Members of Washtenaw Coalition for a Living Wage deserve credit for their years of dedication working on this issue. Because of their hard work many social service agency employees, materials recycling facility (MRF) workers, parking lot attendants and other employees of city vendors will soon receive a living wage.

So thanks to all the people at Washtenaw County for a Living Wage! You've made Ann Arbor and the lives of several people better!



Upcoming Event You Should Attend

Critical Mass

by Joel Heeres

What: Critical mass is a group bike ride in which bicyclists ride together as one giant amoebic entity to state to all of society "we're not blocking traffic, we are traffic!"

When: Friday, April 20th: 5:00pm

Where: The intersection of State St. and North University.

Why: There are many different reasons why people ride in the critical mass; here are a few:

- To increase awareness of bicyclists sharing the road with cars
- To show that bicycles are a viable alternative to cars
- The pollution caused by automobiles is a major contributor to global warming
- Roads and highways disrupt local ecosystems, destroying habitats for many species
- Oil production is responsible for massive ecological damage
- Bikes are fun to ride, and good for you
- Critical Mass is a community builder
- The majority of daily commutes are well within biking distance
- Bikes are less expensive than cars
- Bikes do not need gas
- Critical Mass is right here!



CRIME NOTES

Snidely Creditors Tie Damsels to Tracks

The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) is currently challenging the ethics of a new bill the Republicans are pushing through Congress, a bill threatening to make it harder and costlier to file for bankruptcy. Though not an actual court case, the ramifications of the AAML's lobbying efforts will be immense. Bush and his Congressional sycophants, under pressure mainly from large credit card companies, propose that a citizen who declares bankruptcy will not be able to have his/her childcare debts take priority over his/her credit card debts. Instead, a person who has declared bankruptcy must try to ration his/her earnings between child care, alimony, and debts to creditors. This bill has attained its force due to the millions of dollars credit card companies invested in the Bush campaign to insure that they maintain their hold on the wallets of America's working class. The AAML, among other public interest groups, is lobbying to keep this bill from passing so that poor single moms, the chief victims of this bill, will be able to put the welfare of their children above the welfare of big business.

Flesh-Eating Subway Virus Released, Contained

Earlier this month big business reared its head again in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. The issue: Sandwiches. John and Dave Chetcuti's Atom's Vegan Cafè opened last fall in a Grosse Pointe mall several doors from Subway. The building's landlord, Fisher Road Properties, signed a contract years ago with Subway agreeing to prohibit any store to open in the vicinity that had a menu that would compete with Subway's menu. When Atom's opened the franchise, owners of the Grosse Pointe Subway decided to file suit because the Vegan Cafè was offering sandwiches and soup, items that Subway was also selling, in non-vegan form. The Subway Corporation as well as Fisher Road Properties took the Chetcuti's to court, hoping to run them out of business. On March 12 the case was settled and the Chetcuti's will be allowed to operate Atom's Vegan Cafè without threat from their neighboring Subway.

Authorities Rescue Victim By Paying Off Perps

In an interesting twist, the first plaintiff in this Worker's Compensation case, Kevin Gilbert, joined forces with his employers to file suit against Michigan's Second Injury Fund. This fund was established for injured employees who work more than one job. Its role is to pay the Workman's Compensation wages on behalf of the "non-injury" employer. Gilbert sustained his injury while working at Rodney and Ronald Kerber's farm business, but Gilbert was also employed elsewhere. Michigan law states that a worker that has been hurt on one job must receive compensation from all of his employers. The case is complicated by the fact that the Kerbers were paying Gilbert under the table, making it impossible for the Internal Revenue Service to determine how much the Kerbers should compensate their injured employee. Because there were no documents asserting Gilbert's employment with the Kerbers or any record of the wages he earned there, in the eyes of the law, the Kerbers had no responsibility to pay Worker's Compensation. Rather, the Second Injury Fund was responsible for compensating Gilbert. In an ironic interpretation of employment law, the Michigan Court of Appeals decided on behalf of Gilbert and the Kerbers that the Second Injury Fund must compensate Gilbert for lost wages because the Kerbers nullified their responsibility as employers by paying Gilbert under the table.

With contributions by:

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Tantre Farm, located west of Chelsea, grows a diverse assortment of fruits and produce

Vegetarians, Revisited

by Margot Ford McMillan

It's happened again. One of my dear friends has told me that, if you love the planet, forget about driving less or living in a smaller home. If you're a real environmentalist, he said, you've got to be a vegetarian.

I applaud my friend's dedication. I applaud anyone's dedication to food issues, and their willingness to follow commitment with action. With fast food stores on every corner and grocery stores loaded with cheap factory fare on every aisle, it's hard to commit to any kind of healthy diet. I would never ask vegetarians to give up their commitment. But there's more to the story.

Francis Moore Lappe's book *Diet for a Small Planet* launched vegetarianism into American mainstream thinking. John Robbins followed with *Diet for a New America*, and other books on sustainable living have gotten in line. The benefits of a vegetarian diet almost made environmental sense when foods of all kinds came from the nearby countryside.

But today most food, animal and vegetable, doesn't come from the nearby countryside. For much of the year, November to April, we buy our veggies from far away, grown under conditions we would barely believe. These fruits and vegetables - fresh, canned or frozen - have been raised on former rain forests, at the expense of local people, and sprayed with chemicals unimaginable.

Our veggies are sprayed with petrochemicals to nourish them, then sprayed with -icides to protect them from predators. They're sprayed to keep them from overripening during shipment, then sprayed to ripen.

People have suffered to raise our vegetables. People have been put off their land so that corporations can plant giant fields of tomatoes, potatoes, corn, bananas, coffee, sugar and other crops. People have been sprayed with pesticides along with the crops. And people have been forced to work under slave conditions in the fields for our veggies. And now industrial foods have become Frankenfoods, with genetic alterations that may affect all the plants on the planet.

Put bluntly, if you think of food as an environmental issue or a social justice issue, eating vegetarian isn't going to solve anything unless you put another screen on your decision making. Vegetarian or meat eater, if you want to know how your food is raised, you need to buy from local farmers you can talk to.

If you don't take that step, you are supporting the same industry that confines animals, ravages land, and cares absolutely nothing about you except that your money adds to their bottom line.

Corporate foods which use animal products depend on huge numbers of animals, raised in steel buildings as big as football fields. No sunshine. No fresh air. If you drink milk or eat eggs from the grocery store or fast-food place, you're just like a meat-eater supporting the industry.

The corporate animals are dosed with antibiotics, sprayed with insecticides, and given every kind of growth chemical science can come up with. Male milk calves and worn-out cows, by-products of milk production, go to slaughter. Worn-out egg layers, by-products of egg production, go to slaughter.

But maybe you're vegan. If you buy veggies from a big producer, you're still supporting the meat industry. Here's why: Waste from animal factories is a necessary part of the veggie industry. The waste, or "nutrient," sometimes is composted, sometimes not. Sometimes it's pumped to lagoons and left to rot.

The stuff is used by organic growers as well as conventional growers. If you don't believe me, ask the certifiers for a copy of their standards. Waste from animal factories is spread on organic fields to produce wheat, popcorn, soybeans and other foods.

The huge producers say they're only doing what family farms have done all along. Even old McDonald grew gardens with the manure from his cluck-cluck, moo-moo, oink-oink and so forth.

That's true. Small farmer Old McDonald saw plants and animals as two sides of the cycle of life. Without plants, animals die. Without animals, plant diversity dies. Grazing animals distribute manure and seeds all over their pastures. But Old McDonald was a small farmer, not a corporation.

Many small farmers combine plant and animal raising to restore land burned out by industrial methods. The goal is to have only the number of animals that the land can sustain, and that animal manure can nourish. The factory places have thousands of animals in one place or hundreds of acres of one vegetable crop. This destroys nature's balance.

If you want to consider your food choices as environmentally sound (*and who doesn't?*) you need to get to know farmers who are working hard to raise food and to stay on the land. Use these winter months to organize a farmer's market or delivery system on your church or school parking lot. Make it a rule that producers market sustainably-raised foods from your region.

If you're committed to environmental issues, ask to visit the farms where your food is grown. Offer to buy an entire year's worth of produce in return for an explanation of everything the farmer does with his or her land. Those who farm sustainably are glad to tell you how we do things and why. And we need your consumer dollars to stay on our farms.

Margot Ford McMillan farms and teaches English at a college in Fulton, Mo.

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This article was originally published in *The Progressive Populist*.

Where can you buy local produce?

Farmers Market

Featuring locally grown produce, flowers, shrubs, plants, jams, jellies, baked goods, grains, fruit, eggs, dairy products, homemade clothing and apparel, toys, jewelry, home decorations, furniture, dried flowers, pottery, candles... and more!

All in an open-air atmosphere.

Hours of Operation:

May 1 - Dec 24
 7:00am - 3:00pm, Wednesdays & Saturdays

Jan 1 - Apr 30
 8:00am - 3:00pm, Saturdays only

In historic Kerrytown in downtown Ann Arbor.
 Call (734) 994-FARM.



Local apple lover and Washtenaw Community College Student Canaan Albright plays with some locally grown produce

Photo: Steve Herrick

Tantre Farm

Tantre Farm, located west of Chelsea, south of old US 12, has been in operation for 8 years. For the upcoming season, Tantre Farm is forming a Community-Supported Agriculture farm (CSA) of 10-20 members with distribution at the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market. Shares will consist of weekly harvest of diverse and heirloom fruits and produce from late May through November. Initial share price will be \$600. For information call Richard Andres at (734) 475-4323.

Box Elder Farm

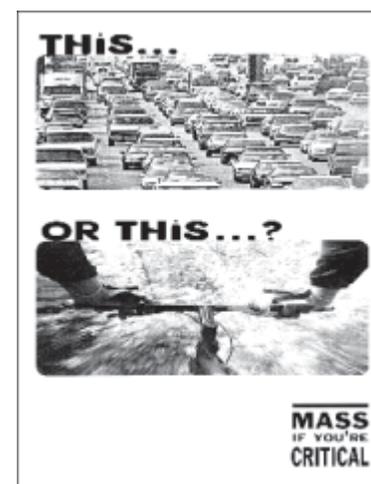
Box Elder Farm is a 70-acre farm located in Ypsilanti that has been in operation for 7 years. The Box Elder Farm CSA delivers their shares to a central spot in Ann Arbor one day a week. About ten percent of members drive to the farm to pick up their shares. Along with weekly shares, members receive a short newsletter with a calendar and recipes. In the Box Elder CSA, members pay each week when they pick up their produce, rather than in a lump-sum payment. For more information call Peggy Wilson at (734) 483-7752.

Community Farm of Ann Arbor

One of the oldest CSA's in the United States was formed in Ann Arbor in 1986. Each week, members come out either Wednesday or Saturday to pick up their shares. Pick up usually begins in late May/early June and ends in November. Members are required to volunteer 15 hours of their time for the farm over the entire season. There are currently over 120 member families in CFAA. For information on the Community Farm of Ann Arbor call (734) 433-0261.

Remember... Critical Mass!

Friday, April 20th: 5:00pm



Hope to see you there...

Thanks for reading!

If you would like to contribute to or have any feedback for The Armchair Activist we would love to hear from you! Simply email Joe at: jsexauer@umich.edu

