

about how the rules of the international trading system really affect developing countries and how they might be reshaped to better foster development.

Some groups see trade policy as undermining Canada's autonomy in essential areas such as health care, public education, culture or environmental protection. They claim that trade and investment policy is depriving governments in Canada of the right to regulate in the public interest, and they call for vigorous reassertion of that right. In particular, some demand that many of the trade rules in the NAFTA not be duplicated or extended to future trade agreements, such as the FTAA. When the federal government makes the case for a balanced and liberal trade and investment policy, the wary and sometimes explicit reaction of some of these groups is that it is biased in favour of business—that it has not, in fact, struck an appropriate balance.

Many environmentalists in NGOs, intergovernmental environmental bodies, academe and some foreign governments are also wary of the impact of the WTO's strong dispute settlement system on international environmental agreements. In the public eye, this is a battle of absolutes: the WTO (and therefore Canadian trade policy) is seen as imposing a "business first" approach that relegates international environmental agreements to second place wherever there is a policy or legal conflict; the way around this is to reverse the hierarchy and ensure that the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) rank higher, in international public policy, than those of the WTO to the extent of any conflict. At another level, however, the picture presented by environmental experts inside and outside government is far more nuanced. For example, how does one assess whether an MEA's effectiveness has been impaired, or whether there is a chill on new environmental negotiation or domestic regulation, when in fact no MEA has ever been challenged in the GATT or WTO? The challenges that have arisen concern a limited number of unilateral measures restricting trade (or, in the case of NAFTA's Chapter 11, investment). Most trade measures to further environmental ends have not, in fact, been challenged; for instance, countries practising a government-