

## editorial

# Oligarchs and Conservatives: notes from an immigrant

by Marco Fonseca

I left Guatemala in 1985 without really knowing what I was embarking upon and ended up in Canada. A few years later I have come to find myself in the middle of what might be said to be one of the greatest crises in Canada's history.

I left a country where millions of people are starving to death in great part because a handful of oligarchs and soldiers consider themselves the final judges of what's good and bad for the country. In their judgement, they are following the wisdom and advice of the world's business and finance institutions.

Those people believe the future does not lie in the hands of concrete, living human beings and their real needs but, rather, in the direction in which the world market might want to take us. Of course, that entity known as "the market" is certainly not some kind of invisible hand producing good things like progress or development out of the atomistic interaction of countless individuals, as the oligarchs and soldiers would have us believe. Rather, it is the subtle disguise of capital in its endless pursuit of more capital regardless of human and ecological life. Those values are at the root of my home country's underdevelopment, dependency and endemic repression. But for those who rule the country I left a few years ago the monopoly of people, goods, capital and services is just common sense, their sense. It has led to war.

To my surprise, when I came to this country I realized that those behind the Conservative project of "change" in many instances had the same values and ideas as those behind the most reactionary soldiers of my country. In fact, in many instances they are exactly the same.

Just as the oligarchs and soldiers of my home country have recently enshrined in "their constitution" their own privileges, the Conservatives of this country want to do exactly the same now. They want to petrify in constitutional law what has been the somewhat limited "customary law" of big business in this country for generations.

If industries find it too restrictive in one place they will be able to freely move to another (something many people cannot do); if any province wants to alter local or provincial economic policy they will not be able to do so (something the provinces could make use of in case of questionable business practices); if polluters want to keep polluting this planet they will certainly be able to do so because they will do it on their Private Property.

Meanwhile, some of the most fundamental rights of the people of Canada are clearly being left out of the constitutional debate. I am talking about medicare, education, housing and so on.

Where I came from the realization that we did not have anything to lose but a whole bunch of chains has led the people to wage a bitter and awful war for more than thirty years and they are still fighting.

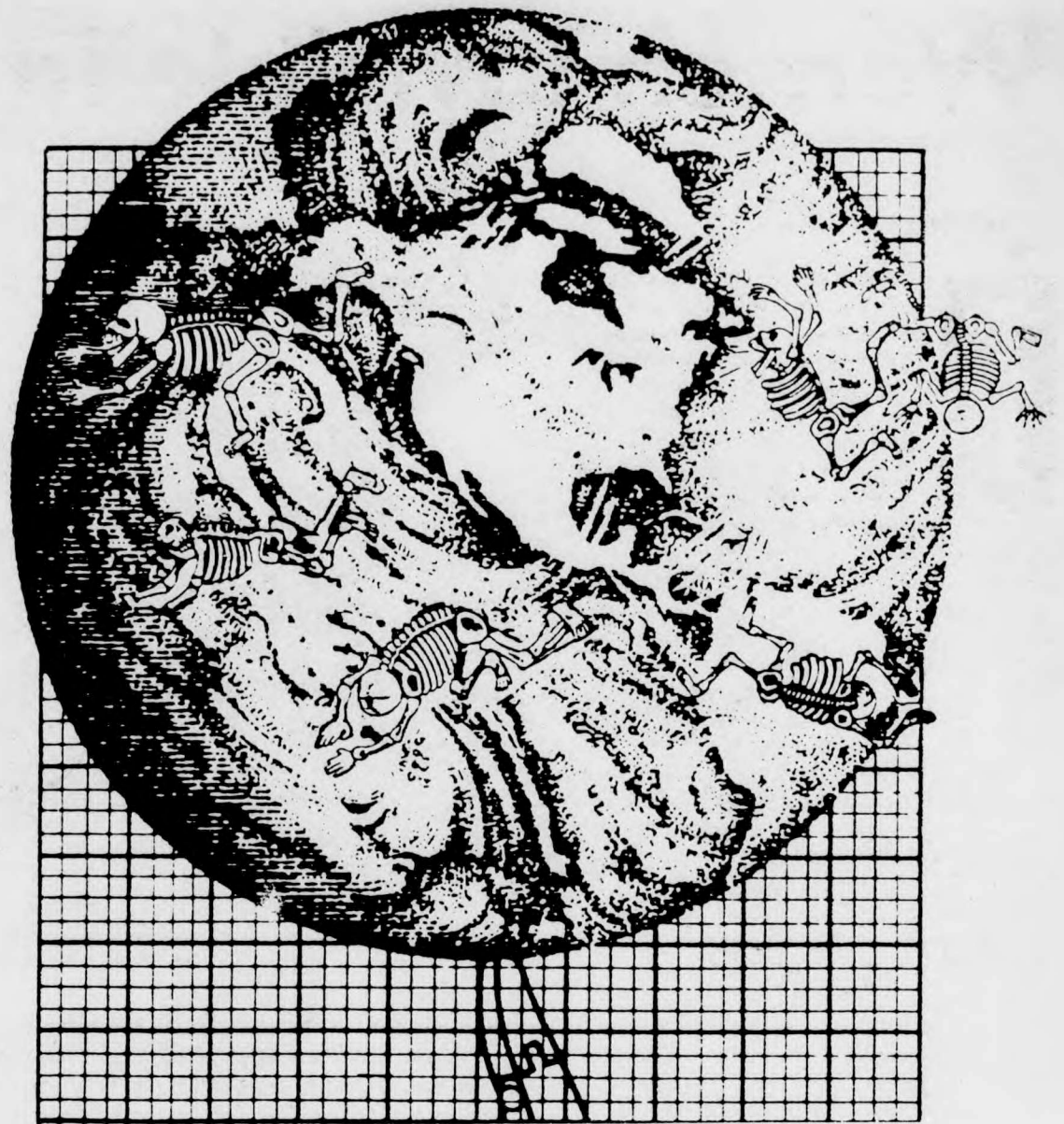
Natives in both countries have been fighting for almost 500 years to get rid of their own chains. Unfortunately, although non-Native Canadians have a lot to lose, I have not found the same spirit for "real justice" either in English or French Canada except in a very few people. I have been able to see some of the efforts being made in this country towards equality and fairness, but it seems as if those efforts are being overshadowed by the Conservative agenda setting the fundamental course of the nation.

The world is certainly changing, but does it have to change in the present direction? After the economic crusade in the Gulf War the world elites — to which the Canadian establishment can be properly said to belong — came up not with a new idea but with a renewed one: the so-called New World Order.

In reality, however, it seems to me to be nothing but a renewed attempt to universalize what the Conservatives and oligarchs are doing in my two countries. It is in fact the Old World Order revitalized by a U.S. president used to working in the shadows of imperial geopolitics and economic interests and enthusiastically embraced by Canada's Conservatives (present in many political parties, but especially in the one in power).

They call it "external challenges of globalization and technological change." But at the heart of this whole process is the absence of restrictions to the freedom of industry and its unrestricted growth. It is the world order of transnational corporations.

I had to leave Guatemala because physical and social life became almost impossible. And now life is also becoming impossible for some of us in this country and it is just getting worse for many others. Does it have to be that way? I believe it does not. But I also believe that unless people begin to realize that life is much more than just owning things, much more than just consuming things, and much more than just producing more things it will be almost impossible to change direction.



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