

government-imposed barriers. Environmental regulators, on the other hand, assume that the pie may already be too big and that activities which promote economic growth are dangerous to the long-term ecological health of the planet. Their task is to find policies and programs that will decrease pressure on a fragile biosphere and reverse such damage as has already been done, even if that goal may at times require compromises. If such policies and programs result in barriers to trade, it is a price worth paying: Antoine St. Pierre summarizes the potential for conflict between these competing values as follows:

... free-trade advocates contend that many environmental regulations are thinly disguised non-tariff barriers to trade. At the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, environmentalists lobby for environmental measures regardless of cost to industries and consumers. They also distrust the harmonization of policies brought about by trade agreements because it tends to reduce environmental standards to a lowest common denominator and to limit the range of actions available to governments in implementing environmental preservation policies.³

From the start, therefore, there seems to exist a basic suspicion between the two groups of specialists which might hinder their capacity to compromise and find common ground. Such suspicion is, of course, not unique. Competition regulators, for example, find international rules about dumping irrational and at odds with their efforts to promote competition. Industrial policy specialists, interested in promoting higher levels of private sector research and development, are uncomfortable with international rules aimed at curbing the ability of governments to provide various incentives. Banking regulators worry that an open trade regime will compromise their ability to maintain fiduciary standards.

Public discussion of the apparent conflict between environmental goals and trade goals provides an excellent example of the extent to which such discussion is often misinformed and even wrong. False assertions and questionable conclusions are often reflected and magnified by the popular media, more because they are sensational than because they are right. Sober and careful analysis is unlikely to gain similar widespread attention because it is often the painstaking work of experts and not readily accessible to generalists.

As a result, there has developed a high degree of public conflict and controversy around the trade/environment interface, largely due to inadequate discussions between those who passionately espouse environmental causes and those interested in promoting trade and related economic issues. Debate about the North American free-trade agreement illustrates the extent to which the issues involved have become misunderstood and thus easy prey for those interested in sterile confrontation and protectionist solutions. The level of conflict apparent during that debate suggests the need both for more research and for more informed public discussion.

³ Antoine St. Pierre, *Impact of Environmental Measures on International Trade*, Report 76-91-E (Ottawa, Conference Board of Canada, 1991), p. 3.