

**Canadian Political Economy and Civil Society Mobilizing  
Against Continental Integration, 1988-2004**

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## **Canadian Political Economy and Civil Society Mobilizing Against Continental Integration, 1988-2004**

“We’re launching the attack folks—and if we have our way, it will be on the same scale or bigger than past movements opposing the MAI and free trade.” Susan Thompson  
Founder and Editor Vive le Canada

“Canadians could be headed for another great debate on integration with the United States...the potential benefits are elusive, while the pitfalls are significant...” Marc Lee  
Economist, CCPA

It has been over 15 years since an unprecedented coalition of civil society groups mobilized across Canada against the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA). Since that divisive debate and federal election in 1988, subsequent federal Progressive Conservative, and then, Liberal governments have built on the free trade accord with the U.S. by joining the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Interestingly, in 2004 and unlike any other time since 1988, civil society groups again seem poised to engage in a major campaign against proposals that would deepen continental integration. The fight to prevent the feared Americanization of Canada, moreover, has gained greater salience in Canada in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the U.S. and the ongoing U.S. war in Iraq. In the wake of years of dramatic and disruptive civil society protests against other neoliberal policies and institutions favored by the Liberal party, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), it seems reasonable to assume that any serious move in Canada to adopt new integration proposals would feed this civil society resistance and spark a massive and contentious political response by organizations opposed to deep integration.

Students of social movements and contentious politics would do well to include Canadian case studies in their analyses, as there is much to gain analytically from a country that has been a virtual laboratory for innovative forms of domestic and transnationally-oriented collective action over the past 15 years. Contentious politics includes a broad range of types of sustained collective action that fluctuate over time including social movements, coalitions, violent protests, campaigns, petitions and other examples of claims-making. A substantial part of the contentious collective activity undertaken by aggrieved actors is marked by non-institutionalized forms of interaction with political elites, opponents, institutions and the state (Tarrow 1996). Canada is certainly not immune to waves of contentious political action that target trade and investment policies, institutions and summit gatherings of international elites. As Canadian politicians, bureaucrats and trade policy experts have come grudgingly to acknowledge, it no longer makes sense nor is it politically practical to ignore the spread of such contentious protests, or more specifically civic demands for greater inclusion in trade debates and the negotiation processes (Macdonald 2000; Stairs 2000).

During the 1988 debate over the CUSFTA, for example, a self-described “popular sector” (Cameron and Drache 1985) coalition of womens, Aboriginal, labour, environmental, student, senior, anti-poverty, church and other social justice groups

exploited strengths in numbers, leadership and expertise to mount an effective public educational and parliamentary protest campaign against the CUSFTA. Civil society groups not only had significant political leverage over political parties at that time, but developed strategies to exploit these institutional political opportunities. Throughout the 1990s, from the NAFTA debate, to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) summit in Vancouver, the FTAA Summit of the Americas in Quebec City and the G8 meeting in Kanaskas, Canada has both produced a high percentage of activists engaged in contentious politics against neoliberalism, and has been host to dramatic clashes between contending actors and state authorities intent on enmeshing Canada further in trade and investment liberalization schemes (Barlow and Clarke 2001; Chang 2001; Smythe 2001; 2003).

This paper adopts a political process approach for assessing the mobilization potential of these civil society groups currently gearing up for a protest campaign against deep integration. It analyses the various groups positioned for and against deep integration, and in turn looks at how both the more informal, extraparliamentary environment, and the formal institutional environment of party politics, is structuring the potential for the emergence of an effective campaign against deep integration. The discussion that follows also falls squarely within the concerns of the new Canadian political economy tradition,<sup>1</sup> asking how the adoption of a neoliberal governing policy agenda has “unsettled” some of the dominant patterns of collective action and resistance that have unfolded across Canada over the past 15 years. Specifically, the strategic options facing civil society groups today across Canada are constrained by political circumstances and a time period that paradoxically looks at once similar and yet markedly different than the supportive environment for political protest that faced groups in 1988. In fact, this paper concludes that despite almost uncanny parallels between the 1988 and 2004 integration debates, civil society groups in Canada currently lack crucial political leverage to generate the sorts of political influence so effectively applied during the anti-CUSFTA campaign.

Civil society can be understood as that “arena of organized political activity between the private sphere (the household and the firm) and the formal political institutions of governance (the parliament, political parties, the judiciary, etc)” (Macdonald 1994).<sup>2</sup> The focus in this paper in particular is on those popular sector civil society organizations who have been mobilizing across Canada to promote social or political changes through a variety of types of national and transnational collective action. On the surface the political environment appears to have become much more favorable to civil society intervention. Moreover, Canadian activists and civic groups have over the past 15 years of opposing neoliberal globalization initiatives, become innovative practitioners of new tactical repertoires of reeducating and mobilizing constituencies. However, despite a record of notable advances in political protest strategies and action, there is little record of a change in political power relations across Canada. What civil society groups lack then, are reliable political allies and sustained links to state power. A fundamental reorientation in Canada’s political-economy, marked by the political delegitimation of economic nationalism, has reduced the mobilization potential for civil

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the “Introduction” to Clement and Vosko eds. *Changing Canada: Political Economy as Transformation* (2003).

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Draimin and Plewes (1994).

society groups and presents significant challenges for groups that hope to effectively counter deep integration initiatives.

A social movement approach offers a useful conceptual frame for appreciating the changing political context in Canada for civil society mobilization. Specifically, one of the conceptual tools most often applied to studying social movement dynamics is relevant here: how changes in state political opportunities shape contentious political behavior. Canadian civil society groups face a paradoxical political context in 2004 for mobilizing against deep integration. With the possibility of a competitive federal election for the first time since 1988, civil society groups ostensibly have a chance to make inroads in opposing deep integration in a much more unpredictable and destabilized political environment. Yet, the shift in Canada from a nationalist to a continentalist political economy over the past 15 years has removed formal political opportunities while undermining the legitimacy of the once historically effective economic nationalist collective action frame in Canada.

In short, this paper argues that national politics still matters in considerations of contentious civic politics. It has become increasingly common to connect unfolding contentious activity to rapidly evolving international trends, such as the ongoing transnational political processes linked to the neoliberal globalization of the world economy (Smith and Johnston 2002; Ayres 2003). And indeed, more broadly there is a growing body of research that attests to the growth in transnational civic activity which over the past 15 years in particular has revolved around a host of international social change goals and campaigns (Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Khagram, Riker and Sikkink 2002). However, despite questionable claims of declining state sovereignty and power under conditions of neoliberal globalization, the state still retains the potential to shape and constrain a considerable amount of contentious political behavior. National political processes including the machinations of political parties, political elites and parliamentary institutional structures, still strongly affect the fortunes of political protest movements. It is the declining capacity for Canadian civil society groups to exert leverage over national political processes and state power more generally over the past 15 years that is the most important condition affecting the declining possibilities for an effective national mobilization campaign against deep integration.

### **Conceptualizing the Lines of Division of the Deep Integration Debate**

One of the key concerns of students of contentious politics is answering the question of why and how protest movements emerge and successfully pursue social change goals. The so-called political process paradigm has become one of the most widely recognized approaches to tackling this question, with its focus on the political context of opportunities available for collective action (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1998). Specifically, a prime source of an emergent protest movement's capacity to successfully pursue goals relies on the movement's relationship with important actors and institutions within the political environment. In addition, a high degree of group organization and the ready availability of organizational resources within an aggravated community—conceptualized as so-called mobilizing structures—is central to a successful mobilization campaign. Protest movements rely on skilled leaders and organizers who pool together existing resources and exploit what political opportunities may be available to enhance the mobilization potential of a protest

campaign. Finally, the mediating role activist interpretations, or what are called framing processes, play in a supportive role in influencing a movement's trajectory. Framing is "meaning work": an active and contentious process where actors are engaged in producing and disseminating meanings that differ from and may in fact challenge socio-political conditions (Benford and Snow 2000).

The prime source of the capacity for Canadian civil society actors to mobilize a protest movement against deep integration lies the political context of collaborating and competing organizations and institutions in both the formal and informal sphere of Canadian politics. The extra-parliamentary or informal sphere of civil society activity can be conceptualized within the multi-organizational field in which is entrenched the deep integration debate. The multi-organizational field of a protest movement has both supportive and opposing sectors (Klandermans 1990). The supportive organizations constitute an alliance system which attracts movement recruits, provides resources and draws enabling actors to assist in the protest campaign (Klandermans 1992). A multi-organizational field also contains a conflict system with representatives and allies of the challenged political system, opposing organizations and institutions arrayed against the goals of the protest movement. The boundaries between these two systems remain fluid and may change over time, with the collaboration and competition between civil society organizations affecting the movement's capacity to mobilize resources and exploit opportunities within the political system.

The multi-organizational field construct can be used as a template for clarifying the positions of organizations and institutions aligned on opposing and supportive sides of the deep integration debate. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S., and the immediate aftermath, are the major reasons for the heightened public attention given in Canada to the topic of deepening North American integration. There were overtures to pursue a "NAFTA plus" from Mexican President Vicente Fox before the attacks, and Canada's business community already had been focusing on the issue (d'Aquino and Stewart-Patterson 2001). The temporary shutdown of the Canada-U.S. border shocked the Liberal government into moving more quickly on the issue of the already growing integration of the North American economies. In fact, the issue of the significant reorientation of Canada's economy, especially after the implementation of CUSFTA, while unmistakable, was something Jean Chrétien's Liberals had successfully kept off of the political agenda. The shifting orientation of the economy from east-west to north-south lines, the dramatic increase in trade as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and particularly the rising percentage of exports to the U.S.—approaching nearly 90 percent on the eve of the terrorist attacks—presented the Liberals with a politically sensitive challenge, but one that forced itself to the top of the government's agenda as a potential economic crisis after September 11.

Proposals that call for a deepening of the Canada-U.S., if not North American (including Mexico) relationship are of surprising variety. Some proposals argue along more limited economic lines, foreseeing the desirability of the adoption of a common currency (Courchene and Harris 1999), a customs union (Goldfarb 2003) or what is tantamount to a common market. Other proposals broaden this perspective beyond the economic, calling for a "strategic bargain" or "big idea" (Dobson 2002; Hart and Dymond 2001), which might include the broader harmonization of taxes, duties and regulations, a common labour market, and the construction of a continental security

perimeter, including the shared coordination of land, sea and air defense. Still other scenarios call for a European Union style set of political institutions to enhance the drive towards the development of a North American community (Pastor 2001; Kopstein 2004). Reflecting an awareness of the issues increased potency, Parliament has also become more active, issuing comprehensive reports on the future of North American integration and Canada's place within it (Canada 2002; Canada 2003). Overshadowing all of these proposals and of direct concern to all of those groups lined up on either side of this issue is the obvious asymmetry of power across the continent.

### **The Informal Political Context for Civil Society Mobilization**

Fully cognizant of the economic and political power the U.S. wields across North America, supporters and opponents of deep integration with the U.S. have arrayed themselves across a multi-organizational field of popular sector and business groups, think tanks, academic research centers, media outlets and other publication venues. Moreover, the contours of this multi-organizational field bear a strong resemblance to the sorts of societal divisions that marked the 1988 debate over the CUSFTA. Groups and institutions in support of deep integration proposals include prominent Canadian business group, as well as market-friendly think tanks and academics, most of which have been strongly influential in lobbying for trade and investment liberalization throughout the 1990s (Carroll and Shaw 2001). The most high profile group lobbying the Liberal government to pursue deep integration is the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE). The CCCE, led by president Thomas d'Aquino, has mobilized its financial and business network resources to encourage both the Liberal government as well as U.S. business officials to take seriously proposals for deepening integration between Canada and the U.S. The CCCE, formerly the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI) was a group also led by Thomas d'Aquino that spearheaded the pro-CUSFTA coalition of Canadian business groups in 1988. Other business-friendly groups in the forefront of pushing deep integration have included the Canadian Association of Manufacturers and Exporters, the Conference Board of Canada, and such think tanks as the Institute for Research on Public Policy, the C.D. Howe Institute and the Fraser Institute.

For years both before and after September 11, 2001, the CCCE had lobbied for more thoughtful attention to the issue of Canada's growing economic dependence—and vulnerability—to the U.S., and more generally to the increased interdependence of production across the continent. In April 2004, the CCCE issued a position paper entitled, *New Frontiers: Building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada-United States Partnership in North America*, which advocates a comprehensive approach to deep integration. The CCCE is advocating reform to Canada's political, economic and defense relationship with the U.S., including harmonizing external tariffs, developing common trade negotiation policies, and joint defense planning, including missile defense (McKenna 2004). The CCCE is also supporting the development of a cross-border alliance between Canadian and U.S. business groups including the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters and the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers. An April 2004 meeting in Washington, DC, timed to coincide with the release of the CCCE's position paper, and a week before Prime Minister Martin visited President Bush, brought together leading business and government officials from Canada and the U.S. to strategize around deep integration policy proposals. These types of meetings are important venues for pooling together existing leadership and resources to advance the proposals and as d'Aquino noted are part

of a longer-term effort to build a “coalition around a set of ideas” among business and political leaders in both Canada and the U.S. (Ibid).

Proponents of deep integration have also held conferences and published research reports to advance deep integration proposals. The Montreal-based Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) has released a number of studies that try to make a strong case for deep integration (Hart 2004, Kesselman 2004; Schwanen 2004). The IRPP has also organized a number of conferences such as the April 2004 Ottawa conference, “North American Integration: Migration, Trade, and Security.” This conference attracted Canadian, U.S. and Mexican academics and policy experts to circulate new ideas on institution-building and policy harmonization across the continent. Newspaper editorial pages also have proven to be fertile ground for picking up opinion pieces by a number of the author’s of the research studies published by the IRPP or presented at the conferences.

Those opposed to deep integration, grouped in an alliance system of civil society organizations and institutions, clearly see this debate in similar terms to the fight over the CUSFTA. In fact, deep integration connotes for most groups opposed to it the potential for policy harmonization many feared might happen with the implementation of the CUSFTA. The alliance system for the protest movement consists of a variety of mobilizing structures that have a recent history in Canada of providing financial and human resources as well as policy and research advice and expertise towards critiquing proposals that advocate Canadian participation in policies that promote trade or investment liberalization. Many of the groups now actively opposing deep integration participated in the Pro-Canada Network (PCN) campaign against the CUSFTA in 1988. The Council of Canadians (COC) is one of the most prominent organizations engaged in campaigns against trade and investment liberalization, and was one of the founding member organizations of the PCN. Initially representing the nationalist wing of the PCN in the CUSFTA debate, the COC throughout the 1990s evolved to adopt a variety of new tactics that emphasized increasingly transnational strategies, more direct action and sophisticated exploitation of newly emerging Internet technologies. A “nationalist grouping with global reach,” as one keen observer has noted, the COC has over 100,000 members, a larger membership than any other political party in Canada (Watkins 2003: 15).

In 1994, for instance, the COC issued a new mission statement called the “Citizen’s Agenda for Canada,” which reflected a change in COC strategy (Council of Canadians 1995). After having witnessed the federal Liberal party reverse policy and embrace the CUSFTA and NAFTA, the COC shifted tactics by deemphasizing lobbying federal and provincial governments and began to seek instead to develop stronger transnationalist ties and target multinational corporations and neoliberal policy initiatives and institutions. This was an important tactical shift, where the COC emphasized its non-partisan stance and disavowed any formal links with political parties, including the federal or provincial New Democratic Party. Subsequent COC annual meetings and conferences included workshops, lectures, strategy sessions and teach-ins challenging “corporate rule” and attempting to reinvigorate grassroots democracy across Canada (Gibb-Carsley 1997). As the COC approaches its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005, it has continued to broaden its strategic focus, with its National Chairperson, Maude Barlow arguing that, “we’re much less of a nationalist body now...we’re more involved in issues of popular sovereignty and global democracy” (Piatkowski 2004).

The campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1997-98 was a decisive moment for not only the COC but for many other Canadian civil society groups, including the Polaris Institute, that were increasingly experimenting both with new Internet technologies and with developing new international solidarities with civil society groups in other countries (Ayres 1999; Smith 2001). It is now well known that Canadian groups in particular played a lead role in opposing the MAI—a treaty designed to promote a more globally deregulated environment for investment (Smith and Smythe 2000). The COC mobilized an education campaign through participation in both a domestic anti-MAI coalition with other Canadian civil society groups and also participated in a transnational coalition of international NGOs skilled in spreading information critical about the MAI over the Internet. This campaign set the tone for the pattern of civil society contention that would unfold over the next several years. Domestic protests against GMO foods, the possibility of bulk water exports or NAFTA’s Chapter 11 investor-state provision,<sup>3</sup> were complemented by continued engagement in international campaigns that featured direct action against the WTO meetings in Seattle and Cancun and the FTAA meetings in Quebec City and Miami.<sup>4</sup>

This sort of long-term experience in mobilizing resources and networking between civil society groups has created a template for activism against deep integration. The Council of Canadians, for instance, has promised to put together “a network of groups from all across Canada to fight the Americanization of Canada.”<sup>5</sup> The fear is that in their angst over maintaining secure access to the U.S. market, the Liberal party and its supporters who back deep integration will forfeit in exchange Canadian sovereign control over future economic, cultural or foreign policy making. Certainly, the logic implied by a deep integration proposal does suggest a project of economic integration that extends beyond the mere removal of trade barriers to include mechanisms for eliminating the burden that national regulations impose on international commerce, investment and even labor mobility. For opponents of deep integration, national regulation translates into any number of Canadian policy prerogatives, including Canada’s national health care system, its multilateral foreign policy tradition, and its capacity to reject participation in the U.S. national missile defense system.

In March 2004, the COC launched a cross-country “Colony or Country?” tour, featuring Maude Barlow, as well as several other prominent popular sector activists, policy experts and academics. The seven-city tour began in Vancouver on March 8 and continued through Edmonton, Saskatoon, Fredericton, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto. Drawing large crowds of several hundred people at each stop, the tour served both educational and strategic purposes. Tour participants presented their case against deep integration during the meetings, which included the release of the COC’s *The Canada We Want*<sup>6</sup> a 26 page report that critiques deep integration and presents alternatives for strengthening Canadian sovereignty and democracy (Barlow 2004). Strategically, the tour provided an opportunity to connect with sympathetic activists, educators and civil

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<sup>3</sup> See the Council of Canadians website for current and past issues of *Canadian Perspectives*, which documents many of these campaigns at [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org).

<sup>4</sup> For insights on civil society engagement in Seattle and Quebec City for example, see the *Studies in Political Economy* forums “Assessing Seattle” (Volume 62, Summer 2000) and “Considering the Quebec Summit” (Volume 66 Autumn 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Accessed on the Council of Canadians website at [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org).

<sup>6</sup> This document can be downloaded from the Council of Canadians website at [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org).

society groups in different locales across Canada. Activist strategy meetings were held on each stop of the tour, and activists prepared the groundwork for making deep integration the main issue in the upcoming federal election. The tour was also frequently covered in local media outlets, covered by webcasts and publicized on the COC website and through COC emails from its campaign update listservs (McNulty 2004; Wiwa 2004).

In addition to the COC's strategic education tour, the COC has spearheaded the "Our Canada Project" launched in late March 2004. In reality a cross-sectoral network modeled after the successful anti-CUSFTA Pro-Canada Network coalition-building strategy, this project is comprised of over two dozen organizations including some of the more high profile women's, labor, environmental, anti-poverty and social justice organizations.<sup>7</sup> The Our Canada Project has targeted the anticipated upcoming federal election as a watershed, with participating organizations agitating that it provides Canadians with a choice to embrace either closer, and perhaps irreversible relations with the U.S., or a reassertion of Canadian independence and sovereignty.

Those civil society organizations involved in the new Our Canada Project network are also backed by a looser network of ideologically supportive enabling actors and institutions that provide depth to the anti-deep integration alliance system. There is obvious overlap and collaboration between such think tanks as the Ottawa-based Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the York University Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) and the Edmonton-based Parkland Institute. These research centers provide an important research and expertise infrastructure for civil society groups, disseminating research publications that challenge business and other academic proposals in support of deep integration. Some of the researchers and academics at these centers are also active in different civil society organizations opposed to deep integration.

The CCPA has for the past 15 years been the most productive source on the Canadian progressive left for research reports critical of CUSFTA, the NAFTA, and other neoliberal domestic and foreign policy initiatives undertaken by the Canadian government. Recent representative publications include: *From Deep Integration to Reclaiming Sovereignty: Managing Canada-U.S. Economic Relations Under NAFTA* (Campbell 2003), *From Leap of Faith to Hard Landing: Fifteen Years of 'Free Trade'* (Jackson 2003a) and *Why the 'Big Idea' is a Bad Idea: a Critical Perspective on Deeper Economic Integration with the United States* (Jackson 2003b). The CCPA and CERLAC also co-hosted a teach-in and conference on "Canada, Free Trade and Deep Integration in North America: Revitalizing Democracy, Upholding the Public Good" at York University in Toronto, October 2003. This conference brought together many of those

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<sup>7</sup> Organizations participating in the Our Canada Project include ACTRA Toronto Performers and ACTRA National, Canadian Auto Workers, Canadian Conference of the Arts, Canadian Council for Refugees, Canadian Federation of Students, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, Canadian Health Coalition, Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Centre for Social Justice, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, The Council of Canadians, David Suzuki Foundation, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace Canada, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, National Anti-Poverty Organization, National Association of Women and the Law, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, Peacefund Canada, Physicians for Global Survival (Canada), Polaris Institute and United Steelworkers, District 6.

same researchers and academics again active in civil society work to present papers and to circulate ideas on how to rebuff the initiative and advantages business groups seemed to have in promoting the deep integration agenda. Other popular-sector oriented magazines, such as *Canadian Dimension*, *Briarpatch* and *This Magazine*, have also begun to run more regular critiques of deep integration proposals. For example, *Canadian Dimension* over the past several years has featured forums and debates on how to protect and promote Canadian national sovereignty, including strategic discussions about the wisdom of transnational versus national mobilization strategies.<sup>8</sup>

The ready availability of the Internet as a strategic education and mobilization tool undoubtedly marks one of the most significant differences from the 1988 anti-CUSFTA campaign and the current campaign against deep integration. In 1988, one of the most important instruments for the anti-CUSFTA protest movement was the *What's the Big Deal* comic book. A highly readable and accessible popular sector critique of the CUSFTA, the comic book was credited with better informing the Canadian public on the nuances of the proposed CUSFTA in comparison to the then governing Progressive Conservative's more economically technical brochures. The comic book was also seen as a key strategic intervention that helped to move public opinion against the proposed CUSFTA during the 1988 federal election campaign. Yet, the book was costly to produce and needed to be physically inserted into over a million copies of some of the more widely read major metropolitan newspapers across Canada.

In contrast, the sophisticated websites of such active anti-deep integration groups as the COC, the Polaris Institute, the CCPA and Vive le Canada, contain an enormous amount of readily accessible information to educate citizens about issues. These websites also provide updates on current campaigns through listserv membership via email, and provide strategic links to other collaborating organizations and domestic and international campaigns. Thus, the COC's *The Canada We Want* is now immediately accessible, costs the COC little to provide, and can be distributed countless times. The website Vive le Canada (<http://www.vivelecanada.ca/>), moreover, is another example of the sort of accessible discussion and strategy tool not available during the CUSFTA campaign. This website provides a forum for discussion, publishes news and sends listserv emails on topics related generally to threats to Canadian sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> This electronic infrastructure, then, provides a crucial informal mobilizing structure to complement the leaders, organizations and physical resources of anti-deep integration groups.

### **The Formal Political Context for Civil Society Mobilization**

The political process paradigm expects that a successful protest campaign must link organizational innovations, strategic entrepreneurial actions and tactical shifts in the protest repertoires to political contextual factors. Clearly, again, within the informal political field, civil society actors opposed to deep integration are exploiting available opportunities for contentious action that are being provided by the dense, collaborative organizational and electronic mobilizing structure arrayed against deep integration.

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<sup>8</sup> For a good example see the "Focus on Sovereignty" in the November/December 2002 issue of *Canadian Dimension* with attention to the articles by James Laxer, Murray Dobbin and Stephen Clarkson.

<sup>9</sup> According to its website, "the mission of Vive le Canada is to involve Canadians in grassroots efforts to protect and improve Canadian sovereignties and democracy in the era of corporate globalization and U.S. empire, especially using existing and emerging communications tools." Accessed at <http://www.vivelecanada.ca/>.

However, the political process paradigm directs attention not only to the informal political sphere, but especially as well to the formal political environment of institutionalized party and parliamentary politics. The relationships struck between insurgent protest groups and key actors within political institutions of the state has been shown to strongly influence a protest movement's success (McAdam 1982; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Rochon 1988). In short, it matters when protest actors have access to formal manifestations of political power, and choose to focus their strategies in part on exploiting political opportunities and institutional resources.

This was certainly the conducive situation facing civil society groups in 1988 as they undertook a protest campaign against the CUSFTA. The political environment in Canada had by the time of that federal election—viewed ultimately as a referendum on the CUSFTA—produced what are generally considered some of the most supportive opportunities for collective action: the existence of supportive political elites and parties; electoral instability with the potential for popular political realignment; and divisions among political elites (Tarrow 1989). There had been a great deal of instability in the public opinion polls leading up to the 1988 federal election. At that time, the Canadian public not only exhibited increasingly uncertain views on the proposed CUSFTA, but wavered between supporting one of the two federal opposition parties at that time, the Liberals and the NDP. This unstable and unpredictable environment created opportunities for the PCN-led protest campaign against the CUSFTA as the Liberal Party in particular, seeking political advantage and electoral gains, adopted a strong anti-CUSFTA stance in the House of Commons and the Senate. Moreover, the CUSFTA enabling legislation was ultimately delayed in the Senate, where the Liberals still held a majority, forcing then Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to call an election to settle the CUSFTA debate.

What was most striking about the anti-CUSFTA protest movement at this time, moreover, was that those organizations working through the PCN consciously adopted a parliamentary protest campaign to complement the wider efforts of movement actors to educate the public against the accord (Ayres 1998). PCN-affiliated groups found willing allies and supporters in both the NDP and Liberal Parties, and frequently collaborated with the opposition parties by providing research and educational tools during the strategy sessions attended by both civil society groups and Liberal and NDP House of Commons caucus members. The crucial goal of forcing the CUSFTA into the election was therefore accomplished both through a several-year process of cross-sectoral organizing and educating in the informal political field, as well as through direct, concrete connections to the formal political process. Civil society groups at once recognized and took decisions that strategically capitalized on the emerging political and institutional resources for a successful mobilization campaign against the CUSFTA. Arguably only the split between the anti-CUSFTA NDP and the Liberal Party, in the final popular vote results, salvaged the CUSFTA as well as a second consecutive Progressive Conservative majority government.

On the surface, nearly 15 years later, there have emerged parallels between the destabilized political environment that supported the anti-CUSFTA campaign, and the political situation facing civil society groups mobilizing against deep integration. On the one hand, the governing Liberal Party under Prime Minister Paul Martin appears more badly divided internally than at anytime since the late 1980s debate over the CUSFTA.

At that time, in the several years leading up to the eventual November 1988 federal election, the then opposition Liberals struggled over internal strife between more traditional nationalist caucus-members critical of the proposed free trade deal with the U.S., and more business-friendly members who backed the deal. Anti-CUSFTA civil society groups were able to exploit these divisions: by the summer of 1987 the balance of forces in the Liberal caucus had shifted in favor of anti-CUSFTA members, and Liberal leader John Turner announced in the House of Commons that he would tear up the deal if elected to lead a majority government.

Over the past several years, another major division has emerged within the now governing Liberals that again has arguably been shaped by tensions in the Canada-U.S. relationship. The long-running feud between Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, while in part shaped by ego and clashing political ambitions, also in more recent years had been shaped by a sense that Jean Chrétien as Prime Minister was nurturing an unnecessarily antagonistic posture towards the U.S. during the Republican Administration of George W. Bush. In particular, Canada's refusal to join the U.S. in a "coalition of the willing" as part of a U.S.-led preemptive attack on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, worried many Liberal insiders, including members of Chrétien's caucus. Canada's lack of support for the Iraq invasion seemed to cap a string of contentious policy debates since the terrorist attacks on the U.S., which led many Liberals disenchanted with Chrétien's tenure as Prime Minister to believe Canadian business with the U.S. was suffering under Chrétien's more nationalist approach.

The rise of Paul Martin to the leadership of the federal Liberal Party and then the position of Prime Minister, has not ended these debates. Rather, an ugly feud has continued throughout the winter and spring of 2004, as the Martin Liberal's have alienated remnants of Chrétien's caucus and senior ministers. The bruising nomination battle lost by Sheila Copps and the decision by former Chrétien senior minister John Manley not to run for reelection are but a few examples (Tuck 2004). As a result, there has developed an impression that the new Martin government is too conservative, too business-friendly, and too quick to move to mend relations with the U.S., while eager to marginalize those nationalist, social-left Liberals associated with the former Chrétien era. These divisions certainly provide at least the potential for civil society groups opposed to deep integration to exploit this left-right divide in the Liberal Party in the hopes of influencing any future decision by Martin to pursue deeper ties with the U.S.

These simmering debates within the Liberal Party have become more relevant, moreover, in the face of a newly resurgent NDP led by charismatic leader Jack Layton. Having developed a smart, opportunistic approach to campaigning, Layton's NDP appears poised to win its largest number of seats since the NDP won 43 seats in the House of Commons with 20 percent of the popular vote in the 1988 election. Moreover, an important part of Layton's election campaign strategy has been to reach out to former and currently disaffected left-Liberals such as Sheila Copps and Lloyd Axworthy. These moves, while unsuccessful at actually encouraging a party switch by any high profile Liberal, have nonetheless focused intense public and media pressure on the Martin Liberals, as they struggle to fight off the appearance of having moved ideologically too far to the right. This political instability—with realignment returning to Canadian politics after over a decade and with ridings suddenly newly competitive again—has created an opportunity for civil society groups to strategically exploit. In addition, the

rise of the NDP—the traditional political ally of the social-justice and nationalist left civil society constituency in Canada—has created another potential political opportunity structure. Its emergence creates the potential for influential action on the part of a key viable parliamentary party ally that could be expected to vocalize opposition to deep integration proposals.

Of course, the most significant reason for increased political instability and potential political realignment is the emergence of a united Conservative Party out of the former Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative Parties. Suddenly, the governing Liberals face the prospect of a competitive election and must more carefully consider the implications of policy decisions with the NDP ready to take support from the left, while the Conservatives clearly appear poised to erode Liberal support in more conservative-leaning ridings from the right. Contributing to this newly resurgent electoral instability is the impact of the Quebec sponsorship scandal, as Canadian voters, especially in Quebec, have soured on a party that appears corrupt after too long in power without a viable opposition. This voter volatility and the lack of overriding issues driving the Liberals to call an election, could be a recipe for deep integration to become a prominent factor during the election campaign (MacGregor 2004).

This growing political instability and accompanying Liberal electoral vulnerability is taking place within a public opinion context of increased Canadian antipathy towards the administration of U.S. President Bush and of a more conservative-leaning U.S. political culture more generally. Canadian public opinion has historically more frequently supported political parties that maintain an arms-length relationship from the U.S. Politicians have found it wise to be realistic about the importance of the U.S. market for the Canadian economy, but always cognizant of the need to safeguard Canada's sovereign policy-making capacity in the face of this asymmetrical relationship. However, the controversial 2000 election of George W. Bush to the presidency and his marked shift to the right in his domestic and foreign policies, has alienated broad swaths of the Canadian public. There is deep dislike for the Bush Administration's unilateral foreign policy, and its contempt for the United Nations and other multilateral initiatives to address global challenges such as global warming, international crime and ethic cleansing. On the domestic side, Bush's overt courting of evangelical Christians, his disdain for government regulations including environmental protection and his near single-minded pursuit of deep, regressive tax cuts as the cornerstone of his economic policy, have also clashed with broader Canadian public support for social spending and public medicare.

Recent polls and studies, in fact, demonstrate that Canadians have become increasingly suspicious of U.S. policies under Bush and are diverging from the increasingly conservative U.S. political culture as well. Canadians generally understand the importance of the Canada-U.S. economic relationship for their overall economic well-being, and look for an improvement in at least the level of caustic dialogue that had developed during the latter part of Prime Minister Chrétien's tenure. Yet, the widespread sympathy Canadians expressed for the U.S. after the September 2001 terrorist attacks has all but dissipated. A December 2003 *Macleans* public opinion poll found that 75 percent of Canadians believe that Canada was correct in staying out of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, while a now famous February 2004 *Macleans* magazine cover featured a picture of President Bush and the heading "Canadians to Bush: Hope You Lose, Eh" (Gatehouse

2004). An April Ipsos-Reid poll showed 82 percent of Canadians agreeing with the statement that Bush “is not necessarily a friend of Canada,” while only 39 percent wanted Canada and the U.S. to have friendlier relations.<sup>10</sup> The spring 2003 *Dialogue on Foreign Policy*, an Internet survey of Canadian opinion on foreign policy issues undertaken at the request of Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham, showed substantial public support for Canada’s tradition of multilateral engagement in world affairs (Canada 2003b). Finally, well-known author and Environics pollster Michael Adams, has also documented what he calls the long-evolving split in Canadian-U.S. values. In both his award-winning book, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* and in a recent article in the *Walrus*, entitled “Continental Drift,” Adams discussed the further estrangement of Canadians from the U.S. under President Bush (Adams 2003; 2004).

Certainly, the more unpredictable political environment, with a Canadian public wary of Bush Administration policy initiatives, has created a political opportunity for civil society groups to advance their campaign against deep integration. The “electoral needs” of political parties—especially in the context of increased voter instability—have been consistently shown to increase the propensity for political elites to become more receptive to the critical voices of insurgents (Tarrow 1989; Ayres 1998). And in fact, the Council of Canadians has been quick to exploit this unpredictable political context, commissioning a series of Ipsos-Reid public opinion polls that suggest that there is little room for the Liberals to compromise on public policy issues that symbolize Canadian sovereignty. The results of a March 31 poll, for instance, were released under the title “Canadians views on the Future of Canada-U.S. Relations: Canadians Support Policy Independence from the U.S.” The poll showed that on a number of policy issues frequently bundled into pro-deep integration proposals—U.S. missile defense, energy, environmental, health and safety standards and regulations—large majorities of Canadians prefer that their government retain the capacity to set standards and maintain regulations that enhance Canadian independence from the U.S. even if such moves limit cross-border trade opportunities. These polls have been followed by additional Ipsos-Reid studies, also commissioned by the COC, which show in an April 6 study that majorities of Canadians reject private sector funding of key public sector areas, while a May 6 poll suggested that majorities oppose the Canadian government from getting further entangled in international trade agreements that would expose Canada’s public services to foreign competition, or enhance the capacity for foreign corporations to directly sue the Canadian government if public policies limit profit making.<sup>11</sup>

These polls point to the potential vulnerability of the Liberals on the topic of deep integration, and on the wider subject of Canada-U.S. relations. With a backdrop of electoral volatility where national polls through spring 2004 show soft support for the Liberals, and with majority government not guaranteed, Canadian voters are potentially ready to be influenced by appeals to anti-deep integration sentiment. Speaking on the COC-commissioned poll on the topic of Canada-U.S. relations, Maude Barlow remarked, “this poll is a wake-up call to all politicians to listen to the values of Canadians and reject

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<sup>10</sup> “Eight in Ten Canadians (82%): Bush No Friend of Canada, Doesn’t Really Know Canadian Issues,” <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=2196>.

<sup>11</sup> “Canadians’ Views on Future Canada-US Relations,” <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=2104> and “Canadians’ Views on Public-Private Partnerships,” <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=2116>

the growing corporate lobby push for deeper integration with the U.S...in that sense the next federal election will be a real test for democracy” (Piatkowski 2004). This, in short, is the increasingly destabilized political backdrop in which the network of civil society groups have launched their “Our Canada Project” campaign against deep integration. It is also the perception of ongoing political realignment and deepening political divisions accompanied by this growing electoral vulnerability that would appear to have shifted the structure of political opportunities across Canada in favor of anti-deep integration voices.

### **The Constraints of the New Canadian Political Economy**

Despite the recent emergence of apparently favorable political conditions for civic contention, there have been major shifts in Canada’s political economy over the past 15 years that have placed significant constraints on the mobilization potential of a successful protest campaign against deep integration. The emergence and consolidation of a new governing paradigm—a neoliberal governing policy framework (Bradford 1999)—has encouraged a radical reorientation of Canada’s economy towards a continentalist direction. Neoliberalism--the political elevation of market principles over the public sector and social market approaches to political economy—has become the dominant governing policy paradigm shaping domestic and international economic priorities for successive Canadian governments of different political stripes since the early 1980s. For Canada, the shift from a Keynesian to a neoliberal governing paradigm occurred on two fronts: as a national policy convergence that domestically prioritized privatization, decentralization, fiscal restraint, debt and deficit reduction (Brodie and Trimble 2003) combined with a complementary embrace of trade and investment liberalization in international economic policy.

In fact, critics and supporters alike of this transformation, which has firmly situated Canada within a continental economic regime, rarely dispute some of the core indicators of this shift (Hart 2001; Clarkson 2002; McBride 2001). This realignment of Canada’s political economy has undercut economic nationalism both as a political force and as a policy option, and has most notably accentuated a north-south orientation for economic activity. The demise of this post-war Keynesian, economic nationalist Canadian political economy has resulted in a Canada that is less a national economic community and more a set of cross border regional communities buttressed by those 80 percent of Canadians who live in core urban centers near the U.S. border. Beginning with initiatives undertaken by the Mulroney Progressive Conservatives, this political economy shift has been accelerated by the dismantling of the Federal Investment Review Agency and the National Energy Program, the reduction of government spending, the replacement of the manufacturer’s sales tax with the Goods and Services Tax and the deregulation of sectors of the economy (Hart 2002). Other benchmarks of this governing policy convergence around neoliberalism include the Mulroney era embrace of the CUSFTA in 1988 and ultimately the NAFTA negotiations in the early 1990s. Thus, by 1993, monetarism and trade and investment liberalization had become the hallmark of the new neoliberal Canadian political economy.

However, what really marked the sustainability of this political economy shift and at the same time has significantly constrained the political opportunities for effective civil society mobilization, was the Liberal Party embrace of the neoliberal policy paradigm following the 1993 federal election. As political opportunists, but also still affected by a sizeable holdover of Trudeau-era economic nationalists, the Liberal Party under John

Turner had opposed the CUSFTA and evolved into a crucial political ally for insurgent civil society groups opposed to the accord. However, in the effort to compete for the same economic policy space as the Progressive Conservatives and the emergent Reform Party, the Liberals under Jean Chrétien quickly repositioned themselves in 1993 in a post-election conversion to the neoliberal governance paradigm (Bradford 2004: 244). The Liberal Party throughout the remainder of the 1990s, moreover, became vocal and internationally recognized proponents of neoliberal trade and investment accords, through their support of NAFTA, the MAI, the WTO and the FTAA, while at the same time adept practitioners of fiscal constraint and debt and deficit reduction (Lewis 2003). The dramatic budget of Finance Minister Paul Martin in 1995 began a record of budget cuts that cut spending on social programs such as medicare and unemployment insurance and spending on federal transfer payments.<sup>12</sup>

This convergence to the discipline of neoliberalism dramatically affected the political terrain for civil society mobilization, shrinking creative governing policy options, and reducing the number of available political allies and political connections to those popular sector civil society groups most negatively affected by the neoliberal policy turn. The 1988 anti-CUSFTA protest movement had enjoyed a complex and fruitful relationship between various political elites in the Liberal and New Democratic Parties and in Parliamentary institutions. At that time the PCN exploited the opportunity to work through two, admittedly antagonistic political vehicles, to promote anti-CUSFTA debates in Parliament and amongst the wider public. The 1993 Liberal policy shift that stabilized neoliberalism as the most accepted governing policy framework significantly undermined the political leverage that had been available to civil society groups opposed to domestic and international manifestations of neoliberalism. Contributing to this constricted structure of political opportunity was the withering away of the NDP throughout the 1990s as it became an ineffective and near irrelevant force on both the federal and provincial levels.

The vacuum on the Canadian political left throughout the 1990s was met by a calculated and strategic rejection of formal political parties and political relationships by some of the most active and prominent groups opposed to neoliberalism. Increasingly, civil society groups adopted more confrontationalist and extraparliamentary collective action styles, developing a strategic orientation that sought out transnational solidarity and international collaboration. Again, groups, such as the COC, the Polaris Institute and Common Frontiers, became internationally recognized for their effective public education campaigns and international strategizing against the MAI, the WTO and the FTAA. Yet, at the same time, by the end of the 1990s, the parallel development of Canada's deeper entrenchment in a continental economic regime was becoming more apparent.

The north-south orientation of Canada's economy by the end of the 1990s was epitomized by both a huge increase in the importance of trade to Canada's economy and in particular of the concentration of Canada's exports to the U.S. The exports of goods and services, by the end of the decade accounted for 46 percent of Canada's GDP—an increase from 28 percent from ten years earlier. International trade outpaced inter-provincial trade, with over 80 percent of Canada's exports dependent on the U.S. market. With less civil society work directed towards national political alternatives—the brief

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<sup>12</sup> As Bradford (2004) notes, federal program spending as a percentage of the economy shrunk by 3.9 percent, dropping to 12.7 percent, the lowest point since 1949-50.

debate within the NDP and popular sector groups over the grassroots and more anti-globalization New Policy Initiative a notable exception—neoliberalism became entrenched as not only the dominant governing policy paradigm, but also the reigning hegemonic frame shaping Canadian public opinion on the proper role and goals of government.

In fact, public opinion polls taken over the past several years consistently show a Canadian public much more satisfied with international trade agreements, such as the CUSFTA and the NAFTA than at the time these accords were negotiated. What has been termed the “permissive consensus” on trade agreements—where Canadians are willing to defer to governments on trade liberalization—seems to have taken hold of public opinion as sizeable pluralities of Canadians support both globalization and further efforts by the Canadian government to secure international trade agreements (Mendelsohn, Wolfe and Parkin 2001). The general trend in Canadian public opinion reflects both growing acceptance of previous trade agreements, as well as support for the negotiation of new trade agreements, such as the FTAA, with other countries. This public acceptance arguably reflects Canadian public recognition of the growing importance of trade for Canada’s economy throughout the 1990s, both as a growing percentage of Canada’s GDP and in its relationship to the job growth linked to Canada’s growing export sector.

However, this permissive consensus has also been constructed in the context of an unrivaled hegemonic frame that has supported the dominant market discourse and neoliberal domestic and international trade policy of the past decade. There has been no significant viable political party lending voice to an alternative governing policy framework in Parliament since the 1993 federal election. During most of that time, the NDP struggled to maintain official status in the House of Commons, as well as to hold onto a dwindling percentage of public support. The Liberals, again, by the end of the decade, had embraced the neoliberal policy framework and provided few other alternative economic ideas beyond deficit reduction and international trade and investment liberalization. After 10 years of NAFTA and 15 years of CUSFTA, then, continental economic integration had pushed Canada beyond the point where the traditional economic nationalist-continentalist divide could provide the sort of powerful guide for collective action as in the past (Gabriel and Macdonald 2003). The transformation in Canada’s political economy—its production and trade orientation, the political repositioning of major political parties, and the trends in public opinion—had created a much more constrained institutional political opportunity structure for mobilizing against deeper integration.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the political constraints facing civil society groups, there remain reasons to doubt the eventual realization of any deep integration initiative. Canadians remain deeply disenchanted by both Bush Administration policies and by the more ideologically conservative U.S. political culture. Public opinion polling again suggests that Canadians have become increasingly more tolerant and accepting on cultural and social issues that are otherwise starkly dividing the electorate in the U.S. In addition, the Canadian government’s recent refusal under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to join the U.S. in the invasion of Iraq, has contributed to the development of a post-free trade Canadian social and political nationalism that still puts constraints on the ability of a Canadian government of any political stripe to overextend itself in efforts to improve relations with

the U.S. At the same time, those polls indicating Canadian public support for continued trade liberalization also indicate that Canadians remain “allergic” to proposals that too overtly promote greater policy integration or harmonization with the U.S.<sup>13</sup> It is the nature and direction of trade and investment liberalization and continental integration that are open to continued debate, not the continued unfolding reality of globalization and more internationally integrated national economies.<sup>14</sup> Finally, there are good reasons to doubt whether the U.S. Congress has any appetite for deep integration proposals, which promise to reduce U.S. political sovereignty and eliminate those frequently employed anti-dumping and countervailing congressional trade remedies.

Nonetheless, this newfound nationalism in the wake of continental free trade is arguably a weaker version of the economic nationalist model that structured decades of collective action and resistance to U.S. policies and business influence. The branding of Canada as a socially and politically different country from the U.S. provides but a thin mask for the dramatically increased dependence and vulnerability of Canada to the U.S. market and the uncertainties of U.S. politics and political opinion.<sup>15</sup> There have been some recent attempts by left-intellectuals and civil society groups in Canada to stimulate debates about sovereignty and national political action, but the old nationalist collective action frame lends little to these debates as it did much more forcefully in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as Mel Watkins has argued, “the failure to stop the trade agreements and the continuing neoliberal trend toward a ‘hollowing out’ of liberal-democratic politics ultimately raised questions about the relevancy of a left-nationalist political economy and a left-nationalist politics in a rapidly globalizing world” (Watkins 2003: 85). This partly explains the reluctance of civil society groups such as the Council of Canadians to get involved with partisan politics, the sense of civic alienation from Parliamentary politics, and the increased attraction of strategies that focus more on enhancing popular democracy and the decentralization and diffusion of collective action strategies from the local to the global level (Falconer 2001; Conway 2004).

The transformation in the Canadian political economy of the past two decades is the result of contentious political and ideological struggles. This continental economic reorientation has in turn shaped a more hostile terrain for civil society mobilization against neoliberalism generally and deep integration more specifically. Despite notable achievements in cross-sectoral coalition building and in developing international networks and solidarities against neoliberal globalization policies and institutions, national political campaigns within civil society have been less effective since the CUSFTA debate. The early returns of current efforts to mobilize a protest movement against deep integration are similar to those lessons learned after the CUSFTA campaign of 1988: national politics still matters and state political opportunities still support and in turn can constrain effective civil society mobilizations. Organizational innovations and new developments in transnational civic campaigns have not substituted for concrete

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<sup>13</sup> As quoted from Liberal pollster Michael Marzolini in endnote 1, chapter 1 Hart (2002: 452).

<sup>14</sup> The tendency for the Canadian public to differentiate between international trade and deepening North American integration is highlighted in Mendelsohn, Wolfe and Parkin (2001) and Parkin (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Naomi Klein is especially accurate on this point (2003).

<sup>16</sup> See for example the *Canadian Dimension* forum on sovereignty in Canada, beginning in the July/August 2002 issue and running sporadically throughout 2003.

state-level political connections and formal political leverage for effective and successful campaigns of contentious collective action.

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