

Alberta's Impact on the World



Does Alberta have any impact beyond its own borders? You bet it does. Ontario and now B.C. copy Klein's policies of slash and burn: cut funding to education and health, make the addicted and unbalanced work for welfare, downsize the civil service, privatize, leave the roads and infrastructure to decay—BUT DON'T RUN A DEFICIT.

We can measure Alberta's impact on the United States in the \$51-billion worth of exports, mostly oil and gas, we send them. We buy products from Mexico, the U.K., Japan and Germany—all over the world (total imports \$12-billion) but mainly from the United States (\$9-billion).

With less than 10 per cent of Canada's population, Alberta accounts for 15 per cent of our country's international trade.

The Alberta government justifies many policies with the argument that they enable Albertans to compete in the globalized world. Little five-year-olds sit in front of computers at school because our provincial government has mandated technology training from kindergarten to Grade 12 in order for Albertans "to become more globally competitive."

The G8 summit in Kananaskis and anti-globalization protests have made us more aware of the world and our place in it. But what is "globalization"? Recently Naomi Klein defined it as "the vague notion that whatever is good for business will eventually be good for us all." She was speaking in Calgary at the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership Symposium—titled "Community Values in an Age of Globalization."

Globalization means the greater connectedness of the world through instant Internet communication and e-mail, the free movement of capital, the liberalization of trade and the consequent rise in power of the

WTO, the World Bank and the IMF which can override national governments. Globalization means that all of us are affected by everything. We are all connected. For every \$5-a-barrel rise in crude oil prices, the world's economy contracts by 0.3 per cent. Globalization also means that nowadays whether we intend it or not, our actions have an impact on the world.

Why is there such protest against "globalization"? Because it undermines the sovereignty of the nation state and the authority of citizens. It pits business values (if that's not an oxymoron) against democratic values. It ignores social justice. Business can locate wherever in the world labour is cheap and raw materials plentiful. Globalization enables transnational corporations to sidestep the "civic envelope"—labour laws, minimum wage, protections for workers, health care, etc.—that within the nation state constrain the raw profit motive of market capitalism.

According to Benjamin Barber, keynote speaker at the Chumir Symposium, protest is futile. Globalization is here to stay. The old nation state boundaries are more and more irrelevant. They don't keep investment capital in, and they don't keep disease or crime or suicide bombing terrorists out. Barber says we must extend the civic envelope to the international level, insist on adherence to global principles of corporate social responsibility and strengthen world government through organizations like the United Nations.

Another way to look at how we affect the world is to focus on individuals. In this issue we look at the international reach of Albertans in the arts, space science, animal research, sport, business and media. A significant impact is made by Albertans out there in the world making a difference in various ways.

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