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**Who Are The "Protectionists" In The Global Economy?  
Solidarity America  
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There never has been really free trade.

We're told by our government, its politicians, and Corporate America that there is such a thing as "free trade" and we have to do everything in our power to protect the "free" part in our new global enterprise.

We're also told that, if we question the purposes or structure of the global economy, we're threatening the free trade that has developed in recent decades. Trade won't be as free, if we start to set any limits on the transnational corporations that seem to rule the world.

Ever since humans have been able to shoulder a pack and walk long distances, ever since they have loaded a beast of burden with goods, and ever since a dugout canoe or sailing ship could reach other peoples, there has been trade. That never would change. We always would have trade in that sense. But, there came a time when trade was taken over by kings, armies, and trading companies.

Since then, the terms of trade have been set by those with the biggest guns. In that sense, there never has been truly free trade.

In the 21st Century, the terms of trade have been set by those not only with the biggest guns, but with the biggest economies. There are "instruments" of trade and foreign policy that are just as good—even better—than the size of the guns. They include the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

However, they alone don't ensure that large profits will be made by the corporations that sit astride the world.

There are other things and they protect the efforts of the companies that go forth into

the world to engage in “free” trade.

A brief look at some of the things that protect the profits that come into the country reveals that they are from multiple sources and are things that pass across national frontiers easily—usually, without a hitch and possibly without even a cursory inspection.

- Money flows easily and freely across those frontiers. Whatever funding is needed for the new enterprise will find its way into the proper local or regional banks. The money will be protected by both the U.S. government and the host country.
- Raw materials will either be shipped in or taken from the host country.
- Components and parts flow freely for whatever product is to be made.
- Diplomacy from the U.S. Departments of State and Commerce is freely put to use in the host country. The political and economic elites in the host country freely give their support to the budding enterprise and they are rewarded for it.
- Police and military assistance are provided freely by the host nation. If necessary, armies or military assistance will be sent in to protect American property and lives.
- Probably as important as anything, in “free” trade, the products that come into the U.S. from other countries may not even warrant a casual look, let alone inspection, and that includes food, no matter what the food contains or how it was grown. That’s what free trade is about.
- There are private organizations to assist corporations, such as American-style Chambers of Commerce set up in the host country, where governments of both nations eagerly assist in these endeavors, just as the various levels of government do in the U.S.

Elaborate structures like the IMF and the World Bank have been set up, so that what is done in developing countries always will appear to be business as usual.

And, these structures long ago became functions of the government that, for many years, have been viewed—along with many national and international aid programs to assist in the “development” of poorer nations—as the silent partners of corporations that spread out across the globe to bring their fortunes back to the homeland.

All of this is free to the recipient companies. Wars for oil and other resources also are free for the corporations that benefit from the largesse of the American people in money and blood, but officials and the press don’t usually speak of such gifts in those terms. Usually, it’s expressed in terms of “freedom” and “liberty” for citizens, but mostly, it’s just free services to the private enterprises.

As a people, we protect the rights of the global entrepreneurs to make profits. It’s protectionism, but it’s the kind that is acceptable to the powers-that-be.

For decades, these corporations have sought the lowest-wage countries to relocate their plants and factories. The people have had to accept as little as 2 percent of the pay of American workers, while their own country’s resources and even cultures have been used up or altered forever.

Unions and progressive organizations have pointed out over many years that workers rights—human rights—are not being respected. They point out, too, that ongoing

damage to the environment of the host nation is ignored. But these are the kinds of issues that are derided as "protectionism," an effort to bring the jobs back to America or level the playing field to encourage companies to keep the jobs at home.

The question is who are the greater protectionists? Are they those who provide everything for free to the corporations or those who fight to raise the standards of working men and women everywhere? Chances are that you will find the "rights" people hooted off the stage by big investors, politicians, people who live on stock coupons, and the punditry.

Everything is free, except the workers. How, then, can free trade truly be free? If everything is free except the workers, trade isn't free.

Trade will only be free when the workers in the nations that are party to a trade agreement can choose the country in which they will make their living.

If the people—the workers—are not free to move among the countries that are signatories to a given trade agreement, then it's not a free trade agreement. It must be called something else. And the idea of protectionism as an epithet against those who strive for freedom and equality for the people needs to die the death that it long ago deserved.


Then again, maybe this is all a moot point, since the economic meltdown that the world is experiencing may change everything, to the extent that much of what we have become accustomed to will have to be rebuilt and the people will have a chance to build it in a form that serves the needs of all the people, rather than filling the counting houses of the few. We'll see.


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**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, John Funciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funciello.

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