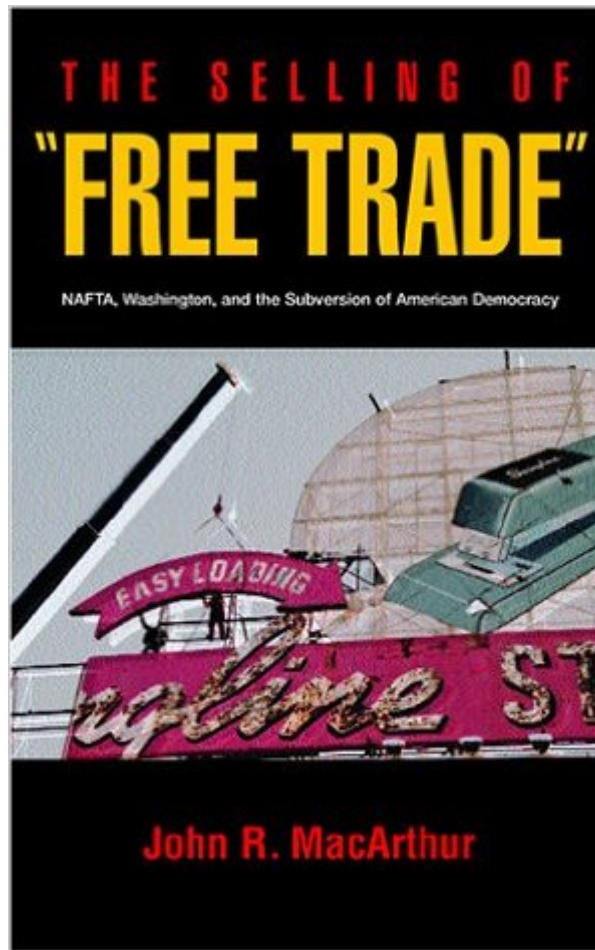


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The Selling Of "Free Trade": NAFTA, Washington, And The Subversion Of American Democracy



Synopsis

The Selling of "Free Trade" shows how Washington works to accomplish political or economic goals, even when confronted with widespread popular opposition. John R. MacArthur chronicles the brutal and expensive campaign in 1993 that led to passage of the poorly understood, highly controversial law creating the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

MacArthur begins his book from the venerable Swingline Staple Company of Queens, NY, with profiles of employees, union activists, owners over the last 30 years. Not so long a period, but starting at a time when a lattice of low technology manufacturing still ringed the great metropolis and bustled in the lower regions of Manhattan. They provided a modest but sustaining salary and a route to the ladders of American society for generations of immigrants. By the end of that period those societal understandings had given way to a much different order. Swingline moved its operations to the dollar an hour wages and shanty towns of Nogales, Mexico, channeling back product to an American market they were no longer willing to support with their payroll. The author exposes the shell (or shill) game that took over the debate of North American Free Trade. Politicians as diverse as Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton cynically assured the electorate that open trade heralded an era of unequalled prosperity and opportunity, propelled by such vacant aphorisms as the 'information economy' or the 'new realities' of global business. The agenda was marketed as 'inevitable'. The neoliberal lobby managed to bamboozle a skeptical public and buy the political establishment. By

1994 this well financed machine had bribed or bullied its way to passage of NAFTA in all three countries. A full-scale reorganization of continental industry ensued, with an attendant labour disenfranchisement, deindustrialization and currency sabotage. The corrupt Salinas regime exemplified the motives of the Free Traders. Mexico's acceptance of their wealthy northern neighbors' largesse of 'investment' was extorted in part by their inability to pay the usurious loans of the IMF and foreign banks.

This book had no recommendations, no dust jacket, and no introduction to the qualifications of the author. The only reason I picked it up out of the library was because I am currently a student of International Business and Global Economics. Our group assignment is to pursue a debate upon free trade in general, for the opposition. For its treatment of trade theory, especially Smith and Ricardo, I thought MacArthur picked up a salient point...why in the modern world of technology and global trade are thinking individuals (for example...academics?) silently allowing a group of self-interested multi-national corporations to devour and destroy what took western societies, not just capitalists, hundreds of years to attain? Namely, a worker-protected environment, minimum wage laws, and government regulations to prevent exploitation of labour? Vanishing due to greed. The same old greed that could be scientifically theorized upon more than two hundred years ago, during the ages of mercantilism and comparative advantage. Why no new theories on how to maintain worker rights? MacArthur identifies the players in American politics, the benefits assumed and trade among all dealers in the free trade debate, and spends as much time as is necessary to capture the attention of the reader. Canada and Mexico are mere pawns here in a game the Americans play much better than many nations. Thus clear causes and effects of the support of free trade in these other nations should be reviewed in numerous other texts. The points he picks up the best include the clauses in chapter eleven preventing privatisation of Mexican-held American assets, the collusion of the mass media, the deification of Salinas, etc.

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