

Canadian activists demand transparency in FTAA negotiations, 2000-2001

- [included innovative organizational forms/communication forms](#) [1]

Timing

November

2000

to:

April 7,

2001

Location and Goals

Country:

Canada

Location City/State/Province:

Ottawa, Ontario

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Goals:

“That the Canadian government publish the integral version of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as it stands at this stage of the negotiations. We demand that, on March 20th at noon at the latest, the Canadian government:

"-Make available across the country 5,000 copies of the draft text of the accord in French, 10,000 copies in English, 1,000 copies in Spanish and 500 copies in Portuguese;

"-Put the four versions of this document on the Internet, with monthly updates” (Operation SalAMI, Joint Declaration...).

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing
- 050. Teach-ins
- 168. Nonviolent raids
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction

Segment Length:

Approximately 26 days

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Citizens and anti-globalization activists drawn from a diverse pool of people opposed to corporate globalization

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Activist Philippe Duhamel; Operation SalAMI

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Solidarity Network; Canadian Federation of Students; Council of Canadians; National Action Committee on the Status of Women; Polaris Institute; Canadian Union of Public Employees; Operation 2000; Canadian Auto Workers; Fédération des femmes de Québec; Association of the Families of the Disappeared; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Sierra Club of Canada; L'Association pour un contrat mondial de l'eau; Canadian Religious Conference; Canadian Association of University Teachers; International Socialist Organization; various other unions, church groups, and student groups. The total number of allied organizations is in the dozens. Most of these groups provided aid with the April 1 teach-in or members for the main action on April 2, but did not guide the strategic direction of the action.

Involvement of social elites:

New Democratic Party Members of Parliament Alexa McDonough and Svend Robinson

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Sympathetic members of the Canadian Parliament

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

SalAMI members recruited allies through calls to action via email as well as tours of activist circles in Canada and the eastern United States in the months between the November ultimatum and April 2 action. Exact joining dates are unclear.

Segment Length:

Approximately 26 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade; International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

Not Known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

At the behest of Canada's delegation, the 6th ministerial meeting of FTAA negotiators released the draft FTAA text five days after the nonviolent raid. However, there is no evidence is available that print copies in various languages were distributed throughout Canada.

SalAMI assembled a huge coalition of allied organizations

On April 20-22, 2001, officials from 34 countries met in Québec, Canada for the third Summit of the Americas, intended to further negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). While the proposed FTAA had received near-universal praise in the mainstream North American media, activists feared that the agreement would expand what they viewed as the worst aspects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—degradation of environmental regulations, weakened labor laws, and the subjugation of national laws to secretive, pro-corporate tribunals. These fears were unconfirmed, however, because governments had kept the FTAA draft text secret from the public, even though they released the draft to multinational corporations. As many organizations prepared for actions to coincide with the summit, one group named Operation SalAMI decided to focus its campaign on the hypocritical secrecy of the FTAA negotiators. (In French, 'salami' means 'dirty friend,' and AMI is the acronym for the Multilateral Agreement on Investments, a previous target of the group.)

SalAMI, led by an activist named Philippe Duhamel, adhered to strict principles of ethical nonviolence, mandatory training, and tactical transparency. The organizers wanted to contribute to the actions in Québec during the summit, but were concerned about the probability of violent confrontation with police by non-pacifists, and what they perceived as the purely reactionary nature of protesting against the summit, rather than for something. This led them to seek out another venue for their campaign. They chose to focus their campaign on International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa. In November 2000, SalAMI issued the following ultimatum to the Ministry:

"We demand that the Canadian government publish the integral version of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as it stands at this stage of the negotiations. We demand that, on March 20, [2001,] at noon at the latest, the Canadian government:

- Make available across the country 5,000 copies of the draft text of the accord in French, 10,000 copies in English, 1,000 copies in Spanish and 500 copies in Portuguese;

- Put the four versions of this document on the Internet, with monthly updates...

If this just and reasonable demand is not met...I announce my participation in a non-violent civil disobedience action on April 2, 2001, in Ottawa, with the goal of closing down the building housing the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in order to carry out a strictly nonviolent citizens search for the official draft of the FTAA" (Operation SalAMI, Joint Declaration...).

This ultimatum was clearly phrased so that SalAMI could declare victory no matter what course the government chose. Even if the government refused to reveal the FTAA draft under threat of direct action, the action itself would publicize the suspicious secrecy of the negotiations. SalAMI also selected an issue that would surely appeal to the media, who have a vested interest in freedom of information.

From November through March, SalAMI activists contacted hundreds of other action networks, unions, student organizations, and church groups to gather support for the campaign. Most of the organizing was done via mail, email and fax, but SalAMI volunteers also toured activist circles in Canada and the United States to rally supporters. Through this process, over 18,000 people signed a petition with the above language, pledging to

hold the government accountable if it failed to produce the FTAA draft. The coalition, newly dubbed the “Ottawa Convergence against the FTAA,” also acquired the support of some opposition Members of Parliament, including the New Democratic Party leader Alexa McDonough.

As expected, the government did not produce the FTAA draft by the March 20 deadline, so activists announced that they had a “Citizen’s Warrant for Search and Seizure.” Activists then finalized preparations for the April 2 day of action. Organizers issued a statement to employees of the Department of International Trade and Foreign Affairs, urging them not to come to work on April 2 while simultaneously stressing workers’ solidarity. On April 1, the Ottawa Convergence held a day-long teach-in in three rented rooms of the Canadian Parliament building. This teach-in included speakers on the drawbacks of the FTAA, and nonviolence training to ensure all participants knew how to respond to all possible scenarios the following day.

400-500 protesters arrived at the Department of International Trade and Foreign Affairs on April 2. One team immediately blockaded the parking lot to ensure no vehicles could enter, while another created a human chain around the building to “surround and secure” the premises. Next, the activists gathered in front of the police and barricades blocking the entrance to the building. Organizers decided to send “search teams” over the barricades two at a time in order to maintain a spirit of playful decorum and not overwhelm or threaten the police. Each protester read the same statement as they climbed over the barricade: “We ask you, police officers, to do your duty and help us retrieve the documents to which we are entitled by right. Do not become accomplices in the secrecy and manipulation of this government. If you refuse to seek and retrieve the texts on our behalf, we will have no option but to attempt to retrieve them ourselves” (Duhamel). The police arrested each pair, to repeated cheers from the crowd. The atmosphere was festive and creative—one protester touted an over-sized key “to unlock government secrets,” and another had a magnifying glass “to investigate what’s really going on.” Activists sang and danced alongside the police barrier. All in all, approximately 85 people were arrested. The action received extremely positive media coverage across Canada.

The day of the protest, International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew repeated his vow not to release the FTAA draft due to privacy concerns. However, only five days later, at the sixth ministerial meeting of FTAA negotiators in Buenos Aires, Pettigrew moved to release the full text of the FTAA draft, and the rest of the ministers agreed. Pettigrew publicly stated, “It’s certainly not [the activists] who made me appear before my colleagues, trembling, to tell them we have to render the texts public. Their protest was a total failure. What is true is that I honestly believe that international trade negotiations will be better accomplished when citizens are better informed.”

Operation SalAMI remained active following its victorious campaign to publicize the FTAA draft, which, in fact, proved to be as harmful to environmental laws and state sovereignty as activists originally feared. Thanks in part to years more of organizing by SalAMI and countless other groups, negotiators missed the 2005 deadline for implementation of the FTAA, and the plan is now shelved.

Research Notes

Influences:

Duhamel names the Indian salt raids of 1930 as a direct inspiration for the “Search and Seizure” tactic (see “Indians campaign against British Salt Tax, 1930-31”). Also influenced by the sit-ins in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement as examples as physically embodying the demand of the campaign. The campaign was further influenced by the 1999 protest in Seattle, Washington, United States against the Multilateral Agreement of

Investments, but decided not to model their tactics (see "Citizens protest against World Trade Organization, Seattle, United States, 1999") (1).

This action influenced the Casino-free Philadelphia campaign in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States to physically embody their demand, in addition to demanding the right to information transparency (see "Philadelphians campaign for a casino-free city, 2006-2010") (2).

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

It is important to note that this specific campaign was a brief, albeit successful, moment in the larger movement against the FTAA, and neoliberal globalization in general. It also represented a statement of ethical pacifism in the anti-globalization movement, even as many other groups were willing to use violent tactics to counter police aggression.

On April 20-21, 2001, two weeks after this campaign, thousands of activists from many different organizations fiercely protested the 3rd Summit of the Americas in Québec with a combination of nonviolent and violent tactics. In Québec, SalAMI protested the use of an intrusive security fence by setting up its own “Temporary Autonomous Zone” in another part of the city. SalAMI, as a pacifistic organization, also attempted unsuccessfully to prevent violence by more militant protesters.

Notes on organizing the campaign:

The group took four steps to determine an effective course of action. They first defined their goals. They wanted to:

- Inform the public of the stakes in the globalization of economies
- Describe the objectives of FTAA
- Call into question the legitimacy of the process and demonstrate that it is broken
- Expand opposition and build networks
- Offer ways for a critical mass of people to get involved
- Fuel the growth of alternatives to corporate globalization
- Show the diversity of people who oppose corporate globalization

They then mapped the political landscape of the issue using a tool called the “Spectrum of Allies” (for more information, see trainingforchange.org) to determine who could be brought to their side. They decided that bringing neutral parties to their side would be critical for a success.

The next step was to look for effective tactics. Operation SalAMI looked very carefully at previous successes and failures in peoples’ movements while considering what would pose the greatest challenge to their opponents and what widely held values the negotiations were violating. They determined that the right to information would be the most effective entry point in exposing the corruption within the negotiations, and would address the issue of not having access the documents in order to logically oppose them.

Hence, the group decided to demand that the document be released to the public in the manner of a “dilemma demonstration.” This is an action that uses a demand to create a dilemma for the opponent forcing them to act. In this case, they decided to demand transparent access to information in the form of an ultimatum. The idea was that if the government were to refuse, they would look undemocratic and secretive, and if they were to comply, it would be a small victory for the movement that could be used to build momentum.

The final step was to organize and create a campaign framework. That is what the narrative here explains.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (15/06/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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