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## **Editorial: Harmonizing, Below Radar**

**W**e'd like to call your attention once again to a current trend in political power—the circumvention of representative government.

In recent years in our province, we have seen displayed a certain contempt for the legislature—to the extent that now the party in power can't be bothered to call it to order. We trust that the next election will proceed on its promised date, and that the voters will remember.

In our nation, we have seen minority governments that behave as if they have the mandate of a majority. The voters remembered once, and they will remember again. And in the US, whatever the voters remembered, the electoral machinery seemed to forget.

And below radar, the powerful and the arrogant have two new tools of stealth government, both of which fly by the innocuous name of 'harmonization.'

The first is described in Patrick Brown's article, on the front page, about the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). Following the blind passage of NAFTA, it seemed unlikely that legislators (or their constituents) will pass another one of those without reading the fine print.

The new technique seems to be to make all the changes in the fine print, and not let the legislators (or the public) see it at all. This is aided by the sheer volume of the regulations, and abetted by the apathy of the mainstream media.

Of course, the 'private sector' is heavily involved in the

process from the beginning. MPs or the public? Not at all.

The second stealth scheme is even more ingenious, and closer to home. The governments of the provinces of BC and Alberta, being of like mind, have made a Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) with each other (see Murray Dobbin's article, page 2). This commits virtually all government bodies, provincial and local, in both provinces, to deregulation and privatization. Further, it includes a provision for challenges of decisions, regulations and bylaws by investors and corporations who may feel unfairly dealt with. These challenges are heard by a three-person dispute settlement panel (like Chapter 11 of NAFTA); awards are capped at a mere \$5 million per action.

A new and unique feature in TILMA provides that a regulation may be challenged not only if it appears unfair to the challenger, but also if it may be claimed that the objective of the regulation may be achieved in a 'less restrictive' manner!

Both the SPP and TILMA represent outrageous attempts to subvert democratic government. Both are taking place with the connivance of our political 'leaders.' Neither scheme has had the benefit of debate, or indeed any form of legislative oversight, anywhere.

In this enlightened age, we no longer execute or guillotine failed politicians. But what recourse do citizens have if there is no public debate? ☞

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