

Canada's Natural Health Industry: Under Siege

Canadian access to vital nutrients threatened by trade deals

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Canadians who prefer health care the natural way need to take a stand, and fast, before their freedom to choose their own medicine (and a whole lot more) evaporates under their very noses.

The natural health product (NHP) industry across Canada is caught in a squeeze play that threatens its very existence: it has already cost Canadians their access to about two-thirds of the products that used to be on the shelves, and shows no sign of letting up. Meanwhile, many of us are completely unaware of the multifarious tentacles poised to crush what remains, and have not connected the dots to see them choking off our rights.

Producers and retailers of NHPs have been fighting for years against Health Canada's infamous "Health Protection Branch," which has "protected" us all with SWAT-style, guns-drawn raids on vitamin sellers and their families, using the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as enforcers. There have been over twenty such raids in recent times. And with a slew of newly-hired "inspectors" eager to bring home a few scalps, we can soon all look forward to being really, really "safe."

Interestingly, under the Constitution Act, health care is the responsibility of the provinces, not the Federal government, which means that Health Canada has absolutely no legitimate mandate to regulate anything at all. Health Canada is therefore practicing medicine without a license, but somehow continues to operate with seeming impunity. What's up with that?

It doesn't take much of a nose to sniff out the rotting fish in this scenario, but here's the bad news: it gets worse.

Lurking in the language of Bill C-36, the so-called "Canada Consumer Product Safety Act," was a clause stating that the Minister of Health may take direction from unnamed foreign authorities. That threw open the door to control of our health legislation and regulation by a committee of foreigners, with Canada having only one vote at whichever table it happened to be. Take our membership in the WTO, for example; there, we have one vote against nearly 200 others. And Prime Minister Harper gave up our prized bank regulations (the same ones he said saved us from the "recession") to the G20 last year, and quipped that while it was a loss of sovereignty, it was "a simple fact of life" – too bad, so sad.

And now comes CETA, the "Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement," with the European Union. The perceptive among us have spotted the snake that can easily slither through that gaping doorway in Bill C-36, accepting direction from these particular "foreign authorities," whose publicly-announced task is to "level the playing field with our trading partners." And why might our government need to place that portal in C-36, when trade agreements are enforceable contracts anyway? One answer might be that we could hardly refuse what we have already legislated, could we?

Now, another interesting link in this chain: our North American preoccupation with Codex Alimentarius, the "food code" being promoted by the World Health Organization and eventually to be enforced world-wide by the WTO through cross-sector trade sanctions. Health-freedom advocates have been screaming loudly for years about how it endangers our free choices, and rightly so. But while most focused on Codex Alimentarius, a nearly identical threat was looming in Europe, unnoticed, because there seemed to be no mechanism by which these standards could ever be forced on Canada.

CETA is the glue to this plot: the European Union Food Safety Directives, now effective as of 2009, dubbed "Codex Alimentarius' Evil Twin," will most certainly become the trade standard, the "level playing field," for the industry in Canada under the terms of CETA. And Health Canada's recent tyrannies over perfectly safe products have just been the slow boiling of the frog, to ease the

transition into global standards that funnel all profits into the pockets of the particular corporations who stand to benefit – Big Pharma.

CETA allows multinational corporations to bid freely on things we need to control for ourselves, from our municipal water utilities, to provincial energy policies, Canada Post, and, as amply noted, our health-care choices. And once they have got them, just try to get them back. At every level, CETA intrudes, and in its aftermath is a ravaging of our natural health industry, as well as all other major economic sectors. Via CETA, and similar agreements, Canada is being subsumed into a sea of other people's rules.

Shockingly, across the Country, neither city councillors nor provincial or Federal representatives have the first clue as to what is going on.

Meanwhile, from the 17th to the 21st of October, CETA negotiators in Ottawa will be accepting *final submissions* “from the provinces,” which translates to “from the Premier's secret committee that has prepared these submissions, without the oversight even of his own caucus.” This, despite the fact that more than half of the provinces are going to the polls.

This cluster bomb of an agreement is hurtling towards completion, so one is naturally led to wonder why the Canadian Health Food Association, supposedly the voice of the natural health industry, is conspicuously silent on the matter, and why its membership remains largely in the dark. Since they claim a good relationship with Health Canada, why are they not active in slamming the door on CETA and stopping the SWAT raids ordered up by the ministry as “drug busts”?

In the absence of real representation, the natural health industry needs to fend for itself, organize and take action on its own behalf. Suppliers, retailers, and consumers alike stand to lose far too much to knuckle under now.

If ever there was a time to stand up and be counted, this is it. This is the moment. No matter who you are, write, phone, fax, or email your representatives at all levels, local, provincial, and Federal; and tell them you want full disclosure on CETA, you want your democratic rights and sovereign laws upheld, and you want free access to the NHPs you choose, period. Support those groups that are speaking out, and speak out with them.

Do it now. There is no time for polite discourse. They serve *you* ... don't they?