

Normelle & Tom Blessey
Subject: Speech draft on fair trade

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Columbia River Fellowship for Peace

Thank you.

Tom Blessey Emergency Session

Daniel Danvers

Dore In

There are two kinds of politics in the world: the politics of love and the politics of fear. Love is about cooperation, sharing and inclusion. It is about the elevation of each individual to a life that neither suppressed nor exploited, but nourished to rise to its full potential, for its own sake and so that we may all benefit by the gift of that life. Fear and the politics of fear is about narrow ideologies that separate us, militarize us, imprison us, exploit us, control us, overcharge us, demean us, bury us alive and bury us dead in debt and sorrow. The politics of love and the politics of fear are now pitted against each other in a naked struggle that will define not only the 21st Century but centuries to come. We are the Sons and Daughters of Liberty in that struggle, indeed we are Let us not shirk from the mission that fate has bestowed upon us as a blessing.

This struggle is real. A very close friend of mine, a college student named Lauren, spent this summer in Guatemala to help small communities prosper in ways that support their local environments. Those villagers and their environments are under siege by American big business, using a captured U.S. Government to push through damaging treaties such as the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. The villagers want global fair trade; the corporations and their captive governments want free trade. If fair trade wins, a global middle class will rise, as farmers and craftsmen are paid fairly for their work, and as they gain a voice in their governance. If free trade wins, it is colonial exploitation, torture and murder written in blood across another century.

*Dore In
 Dec 18
 Ben Francisco
 Golden Gate Park*

Or do you wonder if it is really an honest difference of opinion as to which policies are best for the people? On July 24, three armed gunmen broke into the home where my young friend was staying in Guatemala, dragging her and another girl to the ground floor, covering their heads with blankets while, for an hour, they went through the files and photos of this good-hearted program to help real people. The Government of Guatemala, trying to repress dissent against these big business deals, needs to be seen as the corrupt villain it is. But its partner and blood brother is the Bush Administration.

The two girls survived, but tens of thousands have not, because they are in the way of big business. It is not an honest difference of opinion, it is a global struggle of people versus a global crime syndicate that counts taken-over governments and multinational corporations among its members.

There is a term now in common use in Latin America that is confusing to us Americans. It is called neoliberalism and it is a very dirty word indeed among pro-democracy and fair trade groups down there. "Neoliberal" sounds like the happy return of the Kennedys, but it is not. It is not about some resurgence of the liberal values of the Square Deal and New Deal and the War on Poverty or any of those things that called upon us to cooperatively address our largest needs as a free and self-governing people. The liberation that we have meant when we used the word "liberal" was the liberation from poverty, despair and ignorance, the liberation of the mind through public education, the liberation of the citizen through universal voting, equal rights and equal opportunity, and the freedom to prosper from the fruits of our labors. But that is not the liberal that is meant by neoliberal. It means newly free to rampage. It means free of government constraint. It means free trade over fair

trade.

“Neoliberalism” refers to the liberation of a giant beast that we, the ordinary people of America—the farmers, the townsmen and townswomen, the trade unionists—tied down to the earth early in the 20th Century and it is that beast that has now gotten himself loose again to do great damage to us all. The deadly meanderings of this beast are most apparent in the most labor-intensive regions of the world, but the beast is here, too, and he has brought misery and suffering into your life and mine. Neoliberalism is colonialism on crack, and sometimes quite literally.

How did we handle this evil giant before? The Teddy Roosevelt Progressives, and the William Jennings Bryan Populists before him, were part of a successful effort to tie down the giant. After the Civil War, at the high point of the Industrial Age and the age of railroads, oil and steel, great corporations and trusts were created that towered high over the human-scaled businesses of America's Main Streets and cast dark shadows on human liberty and happiness. These monstrosities treated humans as slaves. They robbed the public wealth and were properly called the robber barons of that Gilded Age. These giants freely stalked, destroying the economics of family farms and family businesses, corrupting our governments with great bribes and other deals, and polluting our food, our land and water and air. They tore our families apart and dragged us into the hardest of hard times.

I am not talking about all corporations or all big business. Corporations of reasonable size are but groups of people. Beyond some point, however, the humanity falls away from an organization and all that is left is the will to power and profit.

These are portable fascist regimes and they are a cancer upon our blue-green Eden. They care not that our seas and atmosphere are rapidly changing in ways that may lead to disaster and famine of unimaginable scale. They crush us under their boots and they pay off our political leaders with campaign contributions and other bribes. They trample on diversity of all kinds, including human personality, as fewer and fewer kinds of people can prosper in the world they are casting, and more and more are marginalized.

They would be powerless if they were not in league with crooked politicians. I do not mean that the politicians necessarily know what they are doing. The corruption is so immense that they cannot even see it, even when it pays their spouse and finances their reelection. These, the happily blind, populate Capitol Hill and our state capitols like vermin who have been for generations in deep caves where they lost their vision and there other senses, too. Well, two and a quarter centuries was a good run for this democracy, but a rebirth is long overdue, and it is indeed necessary if we are to save our freedoms and our human values here and abroad, and if we are to protect the beauty and sustaining graces of nature.

What that Republican Teddy Roosevelt understood at the beginning of the 20th Century was that, if the rights and fortunes of the human scale are to be protected, if the rights and fortunes of average Americans, small businesses, family farms and Main Street are to be protected from the ravages of overscaled business giants, then government must grow in size to protect us all.

That has not been a happy strategy, as large government has its own costs to us and its own abuses. The Libertarians (and of course the neoliberals, to use the word as it has lately come

to be used) would have us do away with most all of our government. Anyone who has paid too many taxes or dealt with a rude bureaucrat understands the Libertarian's feelings, but I ask at least the intellectually honest Libertarians to wisely see that government, which is indeed a system of restraint--must be matched in strength and scale to the corporate monstrosities that have the ability and the willingness to destroy us--to blow up the entire Appalachian Range for the profits of coal, for example, as is now happening --or to steal for profit the water supply of whole regions, or to enslave whole regions at low wages rather than allow fair trade. They are stealing our lives and all nature around us. Only government is large enough and powerful enough to reign-in those corporations with the cold heartedness to trade lives for profits all over the world. Republican Teddy Roosevelt began the buildup of big government solely to protect us from overlarge corporations so that they might not overwhelm we human beings. In doing so, he created a split in the Republican Party, and big business interests won. Perhaps the rational solution is to scale them both back--corporations and government--and let individual enterprise and individual freedom, and its many middle class treasures and blessings blossom in the old battlefield. But there is no leadership for that, only the battle before us.

~~What is happening now, of course, is that the neo's in the Bush Administration--you can call them neoliberals or neoconservatives, though they are neo nothing except perhaps neocolonial and neolithic--~~What's happening now is that the neo's in this Administration are starving government very much on purpose. Huge military commitments, huge tax cuts to the wealthiest individuals and corporations, and huge budget deficits leave no money for the old New Deal programs like Social Security or newer programs such as Medicare. No

money for schools, hospitals, police, fire, veterans—no money for anything but the front lines of a corporatized military and a militarized corporatocracy. A starved government—once our government—has no ability to restrain the liberated giant or to investigate his abuses or prosecute his crimes. And so, two years after Enron, but one person is behind bars. It is not for lack of villains, and, as all California cries, it is not for lack of victims.

When did the monster get untied? He did so in the era of corporate raiding, permitted and smiled upon by the Reagan Administration. Reagan admired those cowboy businessmen of the 1980s—the corporate raiders who engineered hostile corporate takeovers. But those takeovers, allowed by hamstrung regulators, caused all large and mid-sized American corporations to go on a rampage of streamlining, outsourcing, wage-cutting, plant closings and job exporting. They did so to make themselves takeover-proof. It was no longer respectable to make a respectable profit and to serve your community with good jobs and fairly-priced goods and services. The new mentality of profit maximization and unlimited mergers and no government control, was the untying of the monster and it was no accident. The ropes were further loosened in the greedy and morally corrupt Clinton and Bush administrations, until we find ourselves now with a government of, by and for the corporations.

A century ago, the ordinary people of America joined together to tie down the giant. The antitrust laws and environmental laws and the rights of workers to organize and collectively bargain for wages and benefits all joined to nurture the restoration of a great middle class—always the bedrock of democracy. The robber barons, the great giants, remained tied down, no longer free, liberated, to do as they pleased in

crushing us with their great wealth and political power. And so it was for a time.

And now, loosed again, these giants have taken over our television networks and most of our newspapers, turning them against our interests and against the truth itself. These giants send our young people off to fight their commercial wars—great profitable ventures. Witness the hostile takeover of Iraq by Halliburton and friends, having bodysnatched the agencies of our government to do so.

How free are we now, friends? Check you bills and your bank account. How much time and leisure do you have to enjoy your life and friends? How is your place in your community as a free and equal citizen? Or are we drones that go to work, go to bed to rest for more work, go to the stores to spend all that we earn and more, and watch television to receive our instructions what to buy the next day, if we have jobs at all? Is that freedom by some other name? It is not freedom by any name and it is nothing to push on the rest of the world.

What shall we do, my fellows, about these giants stalking our earth freely? How shall we get our children home from their wars and ourselves free from their captivities?

We must become the large counterbalance to these powers that our government no longer is. By communicating and acting in concert, we can reward the good companies and keep our money clear of the worst. We can make our demand for fair trade products and put out of business in a month those businesses who exploit our brothers and sisters here and around the world. We have the tools now to do this, both electronic and democratic. It will not be an easy task, but we have no real alternative if we are to save the world, and that is

How to win is to develop public funding of elections at the Federal level and the States Level. John Rauh, who works federally, with his organization Just \$6 and my organization which we are calling We are 4 Public Funding, We have *are ready in m.* three states Maine, Arizona and Connecticut and my state of N. H. is challenging the 30 plus other states that are also working on Clean Elections. To be state #4 We aim to convince the N. H. Legislature that this is the way to go.

Here is how public Campaign Funding works: Candidates collect a certain number of qualifying signatures and small contributions—usually in the five dollar range—from people who live in their districts. This demonstrates community support. Someone who has long been active in their community will have an easy time of it, and they don't need to kneel down ^{up} to wealthy donors in order to run for office. You, too, can run for office, if that is your thing. Once the candidate receives the required level of community support, the state provides the candidate with sufficient funds to run his or her campaign. The participating candidate (it is a voluntary system) must agree to neither raise nor spend any other money. This neatly gets special interest contributors right out of the picture.

what we are doing.

Tell your favorite coffee shop that, as of Earth Day, 2004, you will only buy fair trade coffee. Let us give a fair warning for fair trade in this and other areas of products and services. Let us develop the best information about who is doing what, and let us use our new tools to come to consensus regarding which companies deserve our support—a reverse boycott on a global scale. I will try to put information on my website about who is helping in this new effort, and I will put some stickers there you can print to give a fair warning for fair trade to your favorite shops.

*both states & federal to public
of our elections funding*

Yes, let's continue our efforts to reform our government, too.
But, with revolutionary new tools, we are redefining democracy at a critical moment, and let us not be shy about it for time is short. We stand for love and fairness in the world. That is not gentle work, nor is it painless or bloodless.

This is, after all, our world and our lives. Do you remember those few weeks after the 9-11 attacks when we, as an automatic antidote to the inhumanity of those attacks, sought our humanity again in a million little ways? For that moment we came out of the hypnosis we have come to live under and we saw the Eden of human love and cooperation. We must not fall back under that hypnosis again, as it is fatal and a waste of life. The forces of life and death are in struggle, for those are the other names for love and fear. Let us choose life and love, and happily use our selves up in their service.

Thank you

** We have three states Maine Arizona and
Conn & 30 more working @ public funding of elections
that gives their elections back to the people
This is how it works.*