

*Talk of free trade with Mexico follows the US/Canada Free Trade Agreement, and has stirred ideas of a North America Free Trade Area. The GATT talks (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) have currently broken down but will likely resume their decades-long march toward lower trade barriers. What are the implications of this "new world order" for national sovereignty (and hence international migration)? Richard Cattani's editorial from the December 19, 1990 Christian Science Monitor explores this topic. © 1990 by the Christian Science Publication Society, all rights reserved, it is reprinted by permission.*

## WASHINGTON AT THE GLOBAL FRONTIER

By Richard J. Cattani

The United States has expanded its population into its four corners--Boston, Miami, San Diego, and Seattle. The allure of a westward, rural frontier plays less strongly on the American imagination. During the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the United States secured its ties with the Pacific Rim nations, balancing the country's longtime preoccupation with its Atlantic origins in Europe. Alaska and Hawaii are its outposts in the Pacific.

During the presidency of George Bush the world has continued to change. It is moving toward a single market. Companies now routinely offset currency fluctuations with forward contracts and hedging. The globe has many technologically barren regions where even placing a telephone call can be arduous--Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, China. But countries like Mexico and Argentina are abandoning head-in-the-sand economic policies, are selling off state-owned industries and positioning themselves to take advantage of their labor supplies and potential free-trade zone arrangements.

The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the unprecedented political alignments at the United Nations over events in Kuwait confirms the movement toward a more integrated world economy. It is still a drift more than a rush, as shown by the protection of national agricultures, the lag in study of foreign languages, and the disappointing draw of business school programs designed to familiarize US executives with global operation.

A glass of cold water should be kept handy when talk waxes global. Parochial forces continue strong. Basic ways of thinking in Japan, the US, and Finland differ. Fuzzy, euphoric global talk should make pragmatic types feel uneasy.

And yet at least two changes are called for in the way we view the world:

First, the media require a new concept of "world cities." It is no longer enough for correspondents to report bilateral relations between, say, Santiago and Washington. It is no longer enough to report on the local economic, political, and social trends. Multilateral linkages--as among the European Community, ASEAN--are no longer the leading edge of reporting.

But now the reverse of reporting on-the-ground local conditions is required: What does the world look like from the many vantage points around the globe?

Mexico City, for example, is not simply a capital beset by smog, earthquake, and foreign debt. It is the principal city in a region, with its own ties to Cuba and Central America. What is Mexico City learning from Europe's march toward a common market? What are the expectations for a Western Hemisphere free trade zone?

The second change should come in Washington's self-perception. Washington should see itself less as the American political capital and more as a world city. This has been happening to a degree, as business is done among embassies, the World Bank, and other agencies based in Washington.

But national politicians in Washington hardly embrace their capital as a center of pride, ambition and achievement.

What is Washington's vision of itself as a world city?

The capital district is a federal government dependency.

The Bush administration sicked its drug czar on it. The Federal Bureau of Investigation destroyed its mayor, albeit with help from himself. There is no effort under way to erect a great world-class university in Washington--which might reasonably be expected of an "education president." The national parties shun the city for their political conventions. They prefer to keep it a provincial capital, a place to run against rather than for, even as they centralize power and raise millions of dollars in campaign war chests to get there. Some fight for power and influence ostensibly for the purpose of limiting its power and influence.

If George Bush is following the bent of Republican presidents (Reagan was an exception) to pursue relations abroad, as he is, he should balance this with the Democratic predilection to secure a progressive social base at home.

Led by economic interests, the global frontier is replacing national frontiers. But Washington has yet to find a sense of itself that corresponds to the new world order.