

The Real Problem with the FTAA and Immigration

By John Cobin, Ph.D. for the *Times-Examiner*

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There has been a fair amount of discussion lately about the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement (FTAA)—and for good reason. The core difficulty with FTAA is that it is not a “free trade” policy at all. It is a socialist, globalist, wacko-environmentalist, hard-core control policy that seeks to rape American sovereignty and wreak havoc in our region of the world. While FTAA promises a higher quality of life, it will in reality only bring higher taxes, more “big brother” rules, and greater encumbrances to economic development. There is no reason to have FTAA and we should oppose it. Enough said.

Alternatively, Americans should welcome a *genuine* free trade agreement. But policies like the FTAA that mix elements of tariffs, environmental regulation, wealth redistribution, immigration controls, and national sovereignty can be confusing. A lie is made “better” by mixing in some truth, and public policy pundits are good at finding politically-resilient mixtures of policies. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that some of the individual elements found in conglomerate trade policies like FTAA are not opposed by true conservatives and Libertarians. In other words, an anti-FTAA position can be strengthened by not throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The few good elements of FTAA can be extracted and turned into a basis for an alternative policy. Instead of just pitching out the entire FTAA as purely evil, let us first pull out a few elements that are congruent with our perspective. Then let us formulate a positive statement about our views regarding free trade, jobs, and immigration.

First, true conservatives and Libertarians are *not* against free trade with every country in the FTAA region, Chile in particular. Because Chile is one of the nations to be included in the FTAA, it deserves special attention. We must be careful to treat Chile differently when making comparisons or policies. Chile has very low tariffs across the board, making trade easier and fueling its economic boom. Hong Kong’s booming development was due in large part to having no import tariffs (“free trade”). In recent years Chile, and other nations like Estonia, have endeavored to obtain similar results by adopting genuinely free trade policies. Americans should likewise welcome the benefits of free trade. Americans already benefit from Chilean agricultural, seafood, and mining products, and Chileans benefit from American technology and service industry products. Remember the seasons are opposite in the northern and southern hemisphere, making high quality fruits and vegetables accessible at low cost to American markets during our winter months. That trade is good for America.

On account of its free market-leaning policies, Chile has had a booming economy. Thus, like America, Chile has many immigration problems of its own—especially as relatively poorer people from Peru and Bolivia pour over its northern border. Its economic superiority in the region offers worker’s wage rates that are as much as three to five times higher, and assimilation is relatively easy for migrants on account of common language and similar culture. Having lived in Chile for nearly five years, I can tell you that Chileans (like many Americans) do not want to be part

of any so-called “free-trade zone” with any basket-case countries. Their tariff rates (4% on all goods) are much lower than USA rates and Chileans have regularly opposed any union with socialist Mercosur (a South American version of NAFTA), which features behemoth nations like Brazil and Argentina. Chile has a relatively high standard of living, private social security, and virtually no welfare state. In many ways it is a freer country than America—which is even more appealing to illegal immigrants on account of its welfarist proactive policies. Interestingly, twenty-four percent of Chileans are Protestants (more than half of which are Evangelicals). Chile has far more Christians than most Latin nations. Hence, despite sharing a common language, Chile should not be lumped in with decaying countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela.

Second, true conservatives and Libertarians are *not* against free trade itself. They want lower taxes and do not want civil government to “protect” inefficient business practices in the USA by propping them up or by afflicting their foreign competition with tariff barriers. Political boundaries are fictions when it comes to economics, and American consumers should be able to buy goods at the cheapest price. It is a myth that America must produce all that it needs from internal sources. Even during wartime, someone in a neutral country would be willing to sell the goods to us that we need at the right price. That is precisely what happened during the War Between the States. The South tried to lure Britain and France to its aid by cutting off their cotton supply. Doing so hurt Britain and France in the short run, but they quickly found substitutes for Southern cotton elsewhere and the blundering South was left still worse off. In the market, the only incentive necessary for trade is the right price, and with a world of competitors the price will be driven down to an efficient level.

Third, true conservatives and Libertarians are *not* against the elimination of inefficient jobs or migration of lower-level jobs to other countries. While re-training is a hassle and even hard for some people, it can hardly be denied that America is better off today precisely because we regularly slough-off lower-skilled jobs to other people in developing countries in order to shift labor resources to higher-paying and higher-skilled jobs at home. New industries and new technologies create demands for new labor skills and an increasingly more productive workforce. Who is unhappy that Americans did not protect horse-drawn carriage and buggy whip industry employees by making automobile production illegal? What American consumer can complain about the cost of high technology products consumer being cut (by more than half) since circuit board production has been shipped overseas? Would we really all be willing to pay much higher prices in order to protect a relatively inefficient job? Quality reduction is not the ultimate fear. If Malaysians, Indians, or Mexicans are not able to provide the same level of quality at a lower price, then on-shore production will return soon enough.

Fourth, true conservatives and Libertarians are *not* against immigration itself. *Legal* immigration is not bad *per se*. Economically speaking, illegal immigration might not be a bad phenomena (especially if the illegal immigrant is only migratory or seasonal and does not use the welfare state), but that topic is one on which good men may legitimately disagree. The most socially expensive years of any human life are from ages 0 to 16 and over age 80, both in terms of money, health care, and edu-

cation. Immigrants who come here and *truly assimilate* are always a boon to us. Why? Most legal immigrants benefit us because they come to us already educated and with enough gumption and guts to leave their native land and families and come to a new place with a new language. Those kinds of people provide personal qualities and a work ethic that are very beneficial to our economy and they are, frankly, far more desirable to our nation than the hoards of welfare cadets we currently have. Just look at how well the Asian immigrants have done on the West Coast.

The main problem with immigration is not immigrants at all, but rather the existence of a welfare state. A secondary, and perhaps growing, problem arises when activist or militant groups form in America with the goal of repatriating American lands to Mexico. If both of these problems were crushed, by dismantling the welfare state and actively pursuing ring-leading criminals, there would hardly be an immigration problem. Assimilation is also hardly a problem in America. Just look at how quickly upstate (and other American) churches have risen up to provide Spanish services and try to reach out to the community as the Latinos move in. Whether or not we like immigrants being here, we cannot say that the American people are unwilling to help them assimilate, or that most immigrants are unwilling to assimilate.

Finally, Christian conservatives and Libertarians are *not* against any migration of other true Christians—even if it is illegal. A Christian’s first and foremost allegiance is to God and to His church—regardless of a fellow believer’s race, language, or nationality. If poor Christians from Iraq or Afghanistan want to come to America illegally, then we must not oppose them on the basis of Matthew 25:31-46 and Galatians 6:10. We must not turn them away saying, “Brother, while I love you, I must turn you into the INS for deportation since I am an American. It is my duty to obey the laws of the American government and thus we cannot help you find a job or live in our country.” What hypocrisy it would be, for instance, to turn away oppressed Christians and would-be migrants from Columbia who were converted under the ministry of a missionary we supported to that nation!

With these positive principles noted in our platform, conservative Republicans, Constitution Party members, Libertarians, and others will be able to unite in both a concerted opposition to the FTAA and in concerted favor of a proper free trade, jobs, and immigration policy. Rather than being seen as radicals or marginalized as hecklers who offer no alternatives, we will be able to oppose what is evil while promoting what is good.

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