

Investment and foreign policy fuelling resentment against Canada, warns researcher

Economic activity in Latin America and the Caribbean is having negative impacts

Montreal, Quebec – June 1, 2010 – Canada’s increased economic involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean is beginning to fuel resentment against Canadians in the region, warns a York University researcher.

In a paper presented at the 2010 Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences taking place at Montreal’s Concordia University, Todd Gordon says activism against Canadian interests is likely to grow unless our policies change.

Gordon says most Canadians remain unaware that Canada is a major economic player in Latin America and the Caribbean. Yet in the decade from 1996 to 2006, he says, Canada became the third largest foreign investor in the region, after the United States and Spain. In Ecuador, he adds, Canada is actually the largest foreign investor.

Some of that investment is in banking – travelling Canadians often notice familiar Canadian banks in the Caribbean – as well as oil and gas and manufacturing. But some of the biggest investment is in the mining sector.

Gordon says Canadian investment in the region took off in the 1990s after the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund imposed a rigorous program of structural adjustment on the regional economies. One of the requirements of structural adjustment was that the economies be opened up to investment.

He says that as Canadian corporations gained a foothold in the region, Canadian diplomats began paying more and more attention to the Caribbean and Latin America. In particular they began to work out trade agreements with various countries. Gordon says those trade agreements can create resentment among locals, by forcing development and investment they may not want.

“Pretty much anywhere Canadian corporations go, they are facing resistance from local communities and workers,” says Gordon, adding that this is most evident in areas where mining companies are coming to clear the land and set up mining operations.

“You are seeing militant resistance,” he says, adding that most Canadians don’t realize people have been killed fighting against Canadian mining interests.

Gordon says that if policies and approaches do not change, Canada’s reputation in the region will suffer.

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Organised by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences brings together about 9,000 researchers, scholars, graduate students, practitioners, and policy makers to share groundbreaking research and examine the most important social and cultural issues of the day. Montréal's Concordia University is the host of Congress 2010, May 28 to June 4.

The Congress program includes original research from across disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, providing a great collection of expert sources and innovative story leads. Contact the Congress Media room for assistance connecting with researchers at Congress.

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