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‘Security and Prosperity Partnership’ The Stealth, Profit and Power Corporate Take-Over

By Ruth Caplan and Nancy Price

Almost everyone is familiar with NAFTA—how NAFTA has hurt workers in the US and farmers in Mexico, accelerating the migration of Mexican workers to the US, while US factories and jobs move to Mexico, building resentment on the part of US workers. Critics can cite NAFTA Chapter 11 which allows corporations to sue governments over regulations that might take away future corporate profits. But who has heard of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America—SPP? Have you?

It’s no surprise, if you answer “No.” The SPP is a stealth agreement finalized without approval of the US Congress, the Canadian Parliament or the Mexican Congress. Rather, it was agreed to by President Bush, former President Fox of Mexico and former Prime Minister Martin of Canada with only a handshake in Waco, Texas, on March 23, 2005.

President Bush did not mention the SPP in his 2008 State of the Union address when he announced the US “will host this year’s North American Summit of Canada, Mexico and the United States in the great city of New Orleans,” on April 21-22.

Corporate Coup d’État: Because corporate and Wall Street executives and the Bush administration encountered resistance to so-called “free” trade agreements like NAFTA, which ignore labor rights, public health and the environment, the SPP was negotiated in secret to prevent public debate. Instead President Bush and these executives carried out an “end run” around the public and the democratic process. In fact, they have carried out a silent corporate coup d’état which we expose, here, for what it is.

Creating the Corporatocracy

The “joint statement” by Bush, Fox and Martin explains: “this partnership has increased institutional contacts between the three governments.” In reality, the increased “institutional contacts” are regular meetings of Cross-border Working Groups under the umbrella of the North American Competitiveness Council made up of corporate executives and government officials. They sit on any of three Security and ten Prosperity Working Groups reporting to top government heads. In the US, the Security Working Groups report to the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Prosperity Working Groups report to the Secretary of Commerce.

So, while Congress did not approve the SPP, government officials are tasked to accomplish the annual objectives arising from this agreement, using taxpayer dollars for meetings and projects that the public knows little about. To keep it this way, public interest advocacy organizations have been barred from the working group meetings, let alone invited to join any working group.

What is the SPP? Sometimes called NAFTA-Plus, the SPP is a comprehensive plan for the economic and military integration of Mexico, the US and Canada to enhance continental security and global competitiveness. The

official goal is to enable the “three governments to respond to a shared vision of a stronger, more secure and prosperous region.” But whose vision is this?

The SPP vision of security from “internal” and “external” threats is to create a police and military system dominated by the US, using a combination of “smart” high-tech surveillance and identification technologies to control the movement of people and goods across borders. Backed by US military might, the SPP is driving the US Empire more deeply into all of North America, with Canadian and Mexican corporate and financial leaders full partners setting policy and annual goals.

Their shared vision of prosperity is “endless more”—ever increasing global imports of cheap goods and accelerated extraction of raw materials, with “harmonization” of labor and environmental standards throughout North America to the lowest common denominator to decrease production costs at home.

This vision means building a new, extensive transportation and distribution network of at least six SuperCorridors from northern Canada to southern Mexico linked with transcontinental east-west routes. These SuperCorridors may include up to 10 car and truck lanes, rail lines, oil, natural gas and water pipelines and telecommunications lines. They will link inland “dry” ports, huge trucking warehouse and distribution centers, such as one planned for Kansas City, to “super ports” strategically located on the East and West Coasts of all three countries.

Private consortia are already working with federal, state and local officials and corporate executives to plan, fund and construct these facilities with potentially billions in public dollars budgeted and hundreds of millions of acres appropriated. As Congress approves funding for individual state transportation projects, pieces of the SuperCorridors are falling into place without the whole picture being revealed, so a broad public debate about the harmful impact of the SuperCorridors on local communities and the environment is shut off. Three SuperCorridor routes planned for the mid- and far-West slash through our agricultural heartland.

Is fear of the SPP just a right-wing conspiracy?

Does this mean, as Christopher Hayes wrote in “The NAFTA Superhighway,” for *The Nation* (Aug. 9, 2007) that concern about the SPP is just a right-wing conspiracy? “There’s no such thing as a NAFTA Superhighway,” he said, calling it a “cause célèbre of many a paranoiac, a myth ... not fabricated out of whole cloth, [but] ... sewn together from scraps of fact.”

Looking at the structure of the SPP, there’s no doubt that the SuperCorridors and SPP are part of the same deal. The SPP set up a Transportation Working Group whose mission is to “improve the safety and efficiency of North America’s transportation system by expanding market access, facilitating multimodal corridors.” The Texas Dept. of Transportation website elaborates on this saying that “Multimodal corridors will include dedicated corridor for utilities and water pipelines.”

In the US, the anti-immigration right wing is most opposed to the SPP out of fear a North American Union opens the borders to migrants from Mexico and Latin America. They reject a future like the European Union, with its Euro currency and supra-national government. By 2007, resolutions to oppose the SPP were introduced in 19 state legislatures, with Idaho, Montana and Oklahoma sending a resolution to the US Congress urging the US to withdraw from the SPP and cease all activity leading to a North American Union.

In the Sept. 10 issue of *The Nation*, appearing just two weeks after the Hayes article, Naomi Klein wrote a column titled “Big Brother Democracy” on the protests at the third SPP Summit in Montebello Quebec. Klein writes that protesters were locked out while CEOs from about 30 of the largest corporations in North America—from Wal-Mart to Chevron—were part of the official summit.

She characterizes the SPP as a “merger of the North American Free Trade Agreement with the homeland security complex—NAFTA with spy planes.”

“The model dates back to September 11, 2001, when US Ambassador to Canada Paul Cellucci pronounced that in the new era, ‘security will trump trade.’ But there was an out clause: The trade on which Canada’s and Mexico’s economies depend could continue uninterrupted, as long as those governments were willing to welcome the tentacles of the US ‘war on terror.’ Canadian and Mexican business leaders leapt to surrender, aggressively pushing their governments to give in to US demands for ‘integrated’ security in order to keep the goods and tourists flowing.”

Klein warns that the SPP vision of security is “a nearly invisible web of continental surveillance—almost all of it run for profit. Two members of the SPP advisory group—Lockheed Martin and General Electric—have already received multibillion-dollar contracts from the US government to build this web. In the Bush era, security doesn’t trump big business; it may be the biggest business of all. Security is the new prosperity. Surveillance is the new democracy.”

So what stand should progressive populists take?

Should we be frightened off from strongly opposing the SPP just because we do not share the right-wing critique. Or, rather, shouldn’t we make clear that we oppose creation of a North American corporatocracy operating as an American (read US) empire backed up, as are all empires, with military might?

The Alliance for Democracy calls for the SPP Summit to be cancelled and for suspension of all Working Group meetings until the SPP has been brought to Congress for debate and then only if there has been a vote for continuing the SPP. We join with the Alliance for Responsible Trade, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and Global Exchange in organizing opposition to the SPP and its SuperCorridors and work with groups in Canada and Mexico to set forth a different vision of security and prosperity for our communities and people. For more on the SPP and SuperCorridors visit <http://www.thealliancefordemocracy.org>

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