

THE SPP, A NEW TYPE OF AGREEMENT

The **Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America** (SPP) is an initiative of the economic and political elites of Canada, the United States and Mexico, to push further the integration of the three countries towards the creation of a "secure economic community for North America".

Launched on March 23, 2005, the SPP is an international agreement of a new generation that marks the entry of the neoliberal model in a new phase, in which:

- ★ the concept of "security" becomes closely linked to economic and trade logic;
- ★ the power of big business is institutionalized, to the extent that corporations intervene in the very definition of public policies.

The SPP's goal is to harmonize many of Canada's and Mexico's domestic and foreign policies with those of the United States. Under the guise of wanting to protect citizens from the threat of terrorism and to facilitate trade, this partnership involves draconian measures like

- ★ a greater integration of North American energy markets;
- ★ the harmonization of treatment, based on US policy, for immigrants, refugees or foreign tourists;
- ★ the creation of common policies in the area of security, which includes increased military co-operation (and its budgets) and "smart" border control.

The State's capacity to implement policies for the population's wellbeing is also seriously compromised by the SPP. Arguing an improvement of productivity, trade costs reduction and ultimately a better quality of life, which is far from being a convincing equation, the SPP binds to market's logic several domains that traditionally fall under national jurisdiction. The partnership has set a tight deadline to achieve harmonized standards in many areas like health, food safety and environment.

The SPP is moving forward quickly: 19 working groups (9 for the security agenda, 10 for the prosperity agenda) received the mandate to develop more than 100 initiatives which in turn break into 317 « deliverables ». According to the 2nd Report to leaders, released in Sept. 2006, the deadline on 65 of these « deliverables » had already been met. Since no new report has been released, who knows how many more have been met since 2006.

THE SPP GOES UNDER X-RAYS

A MILITARIZED DEEP INTEGRATION

With the SPP, economy and security have become closely intertwined. United States national security is presented as a condition for further development of the three countries' economic relations. The guise of security is becoming a new weapon to conceal economic interests that all too often benefit only the chosen few.

Canada and Mexico are faced with the obligation of ensuring the security of the United States from an external threat they are unable to assess, and forced to support US methods even though their appropriateness and effectiveness are almost impossible to evaluate.

The SPP is signalling an unprecedented advance in the process of continentalization, by guaranteeing the de facto extraterritoriality of US security laws and policies, a situation which entails necessarily a loss of sovereignty for Canada and Mexico.

The SPP is the regional version of a widespread trend toward increased militarization the world over: the State's repressive functions are back at the center of policy, a very lucrative area indeed.

THE CRUMBLING OF OUR RIGHTS

It has been proven that since its implementation in 1994, NAFTA has eroded the economic, social and cultural rights of large sectors of the populations in the three countries. Everything indicates that the SPP will now push this logic much further. By granting disproportionate power to private companies and by accentuating the trends towards liberalization, deregulation and privatization, the SPP puts in danger many fundamental rights, like the right to health services, the right to decent and favourable working conditions, the right to unionize, the right to social security and the right to a decent standard of living.

Individual rights are presently being sacrificed in the name of national security which becomes the fallacious pretext to increase the control of the State on the people. The civil and political rights that we thought untouchable are challenged by the militarist logic which reigns nowadays at the four corners of the North-American region.

A CORPORATE 'COUP D'ÉTAT'

The SPP establishes a new mechanics where the private sector has a stranglehold on the decision-making process. The companies are leading the negotiations, with direct and exclusive access to them. They are the ones defining policy objectives and the way they should be implemented, while each country's executive powers (three Heads of State and nine appointed ministers) share the responsibility of executing them either by precise economic policies, or by modifying some regulations.

Lobbyists sitting outside the negotiations' room are no longer needed ! The big business power has been formalized in June 2006 with the creation of *The North-American Competitiveness Council* (NACC), which regroups 30 corporations' representatives, including the largest multinationals in North America.

Moreover, the SPP includes sectoral public-private working groups:

- ★ the Permanent Trilateral Working Group on Regulatory Cooperation
- ★ the North American Energy Working Group (NAEWG)
- ★ the Automotive Partnership Council of North America (APCNA)
- ★ the North American Steel Trade Committee (NASTC)
- ★ the Trilateral Cooperation in the domain of Health

The SPP guarantees the primacy of private interest over public interest. It is nothing less than the privatization of the political sphere, a hardly buckled "coup d'état" of the economic elites to control the public policies and to satisfy their thirst for profits.

DEMOCRACY IN JEOPARDY

The SPP has gone forward without a public debate nor has it been discussed or approved in Parliament. Most Canadians have never heard of the SPP and most of the talks have been held behind closed doors, far from the glare of the media, parliamentarians and the public.

In fact, promoters deliberately withdrew the SPP away from the most fundamental democratic rules by instituting it as an "informal" dialogue between good neighbours, between Heads of State, between ministers. Therefore, the SPP operates beyond the reach of parliaments and the legislative branch. Moreover, by giving an unchallengeable power to technocrats on the one hand, and to corporate leaders on the other, the SPP institutionalizes unaccountability as the normal way of governing.

The economic elite doesn't hide it in any way : the SPP creates a framework that entrenches the big business economic guidelines despite changes in governments. That's some vision of democracy!

