



Calum MacKenzie's View From The Shore:

NAFTA on Steroids

As a harbinger of the demise of democracy on this continent, if the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was not bad enough, its new and improved cousin, The Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), rubs salt into that wound.

The blight of out-sourcing, off-shoring, de-regulation, laissez-faire oversight of business and the diminishing adherence to labour law, lax environmental restrictions, under funding of social programs can only find increased support in the SPP. The rights, freedoms and healthy initiatives surrendered under NAFTA will not be re-instated but will be accelerated downward to banana republic status, if not out of existence.

The privatization of Canadian institutions such as the military, the RCMP, the CBC, the health service, the judiciary as well as other government services, all fall within the realm of possibility under the auspices of the SPP. Canada, as an example of a workable social democracy, will be flushed out of existence and replaced with an inferior form of statehood managed from within the DC beltway.

Having already held meetings in Mexico City, and Waco Texas, the three amigos have just met in Montebello, Quebec on August 07. Guarding the three ne'er-do-wells were the US Army (yes US grunts on Canadian soil), the RCMP and the local constabulary, Le Surete du Quebec. No buses, vans or cars carrying more than two were allowed within 5 kilometres of Montebello Castle where the fiasco was played out. Canadian NGOs hoping to host teach-ins and provide information panels were forbidden from renting a local hall 6 kilometres from the venue of the talks. Police statehood rules. It says something when our elected leadership fears those who elected them.

The three nations involved in this exercise in fascism are Mexico, the USA, and Canada. For over two years now, this business-led initiative has met secretly, developing and honing its plans and allowing very little but the most bland and innocuous information to leak. Heavily funded by its corporate masters, the busy little beavers promoting the SPP, have found ways to circumvent legislative bodies, and impose their elitist edicts by feeble and non-binding regulation rather than by law. The Canadian quarterback on this team is Mr. Tom D'Aquino, CEO of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. The other participating nations have similar business round table organizations and a similar agenda which easily gains access to the inside track in the corridors of power.

There is no public debate in the SPP negotiations. There is no legislative discussion as to the pros and cons of the process or its results. There are no independent committees receiving inputs from all the other stakeholders. It would seem that the CEO fraternity

knows what's best for all the people of North America and all other inputs are just not relevant. The rich elites have hankered after power down through history and now seem to have bought access to the golden ring. Is this a new form dictatorship? Instead of a nation-based empire are we now seeing the rise of a corporate fascist empire of global proportions and reach? What can we do to stop it dead in its tracks? Maggie Thatcher would invoke the TINA syndrome meaning there is no alternative. She was wrong then and they are wrong now.

While we still go through the exercise of an electoral process, it hardly seems relevant to continue down that road. No matter which party comes into power, no matter how much money is raised, no matter what the various political campaigns promise, the end result seems to be, that the loyalty of politicians is bought and paid for before the final votes are tallied. Even accuracy in reaching a tally is being questioned. Just as the American Democrats are but less well-groomed Republicans in opposition, when the balance of power shifts, the ordinary voter sees no difference in action or fact.

The complicit mass media provide only the information that the corporate gatekeepers allow. That misinformation so often is leaked by the party in power to further its own ends. Independent research and due diligence are no longer a hallmark of what passes for journalism. The same bland similarity is present in Canada. Tories change places with Grits and the band plays on. The same venal behaviours continue unabated. In Canada the CBC can't be trusted anymore just as in Britain the BBC is similarly tainted. They are both subject to financial masters who can dictate their editorial slant with a threat of privatization and appointments to decision-making roles.

The SPP is a NAFTA-plus initiative. The partnership fuses economic integration and security integration reflecting the US paranoia post 9-11. The SPP is not a treaty but an executive-to-executive pact arrived at in a series of secret pow-wows. It is not a single agreement but a series of moves to fully integrate all three countries into what has been called the North American Community, (NAC) much like the European Economic Community, (EEC), now the (EU), European Union. While the big three meetings get the shallow media attention, a vast background of actors in each country, prepares the ground and smooths the way on an on-going basis.

The big differences are that the SPP has no grass roots involvement. Whereas the EEC was brought into being with full transparency, and individual nations debated the issues and held plebiscites or referenda on specific topics, the SPP received its launching in-camera. Some European nations sought exclusions, for example to currency or political integration, but no such allowances are made for North Americans.

While the Europeans allowed for debate by trade unions, by professional organizations, in open forum discussions, in TV current affairs programming and the like, on this continent it's the CEO way, or the highway. While in Europe, labour law was upheld and respected, social programs were enhanced to the highest individual nation's norm, professional etiquette was promoted and a consensus was sought to protect the best and upgrade the rest, in the US-led process the opposite is the case. Ditto the approach to international treaties, pacts and conventions. While the EU has strengthened its institutions at home and abroad, we seem to be dismantling, privatizing and politicizing ours.

Should an NAC come into being, the question of currency will arise. Each country has a central bank which operates as a state institution and sets its own monetary policies. With political union, eventually monetary union will arise. In fact, the Amero is already being bandied about as a replacement for the dollar-dollar-peso format now in place. Has anyone thought out how the ocean of US debt will be handled? Who knows? Will the currency be privatized as federal, provincial and state debt is privatized? The odds are that the US Treasury Department will surrender none of the international clout it now holds in majority positions with the IMF and World Bank; which is much the same as its veto power at the UN.

While the peoples' representatives are kept in the dark those who represent the business community have a seat at the table. Through the creation of a North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), not only is business party to the proceedings, but their guidance is welcomed and prioritized in driving the SPP agenda. Along with the security and prosperity issues, there are some 300 initiatives awaiting confirmation. The goal is to completely integrate the three countries, politically, legislatively, and economically into a seamless continental market in which the least restrictive business environment rules. That means seeking out and accepting the most lax regulation and applying that across the board. A misbegotten NAFTA on steroids!

So if Canada has laws to protect its remaining sovereignty and national interests, if Canada has regulations which enforce stricter food security, if Canada has limiting rules about exporting resources such as oil, natural gas, water, trees, etc., those would all have to be diminished to meet inferior standards in the other countries. If Mexico has restrictions on oil exports to protect its own national interests, but the Canada does not, guess which nation will prevail? We can also expect smart cards containing finger print, retinal scans, blood type, perhaps even DNA markers for travel.

There are specific SPP initiatives which gave cause for alarm. Air passenger no-fly lists are rife with blacklisting of innocents, racial profiling, invasion of privacy, false information and faulty criteria for judging high-risk travelers. Once on a no-fly list it is almost impossible to get off it. No-fly lists are shared with other western countries which do not re-investigate for accuracy or pertinence and the national spooks and police forces are complicit in condemning the innocent. The case of Canadian citizen Maher Arar, who was rendered for torture to Jordan and Syria, aptly illustrates the madness which paranoia brings on.

Even though the US remains a rogue state in violating international treaties, systematically violating the Geneva Conventions on torture, and codifying those crimes into the notorious Military Commissions Act, our Canadian government has been silent on the issue. Why are we at the table with international criminals? What part of 'Accessory before or after the Fact' do we not understand?

Even though it takes the energy of one barrel of oil to produce four for the US market, there are plans to expand the Alberta Tar Sands project five fold. Given that this project is one of the greatest sources of air, water, and soil pollution on the continent, the plan is to go ahead. Although the US holds the right to maintain a strategic reserve of fossil fuels,

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Canada has no such reserve and must actually meet US needs first. As the Brits are prone to murmur, "Which arse-licking Tory bastard allowed that to happen?"

Even though Canada can't meet its own energy needs with west-east pipelines, all future pipeline plans are for north-south projects to ship tar sands bitumen to the US for processing. Of the 18,000 value-added jobs to be created, none will go to Canadians. The folly of such plans is so obvious, but whether they will be discussed or not, we will never know. It seems that in order to maintain a cross border flow of goods, Canadian governments will not only bend over backwards, but give away the store in the process.

Health, safety and environmental standards are also up for revision downwards. It was recently reported that Canadian lists of toxic food additives and pesticide maximum-residue limits would be relaxed. The US sees such restrictions as trade barriers and business irritants and so they must go. There is no mention of seeking the best-in-class, revising standards upwards, being the best that we can be; no sir, the slide is to the bottom.

Given the above, we see a process of harmonization downwards by stealth. We see an incremental process of baby steps which take NAFTA to a new low. In the process, Canada's, America's and Mexico's ability to apply their sovereign rights and democratic jurisdictions, are subjected, perhaps even suborned, to the whims of the CEO cabal. The fifth estate is AWOL.

About a century ago we saw a similar grinding down of good common sense by the corporatocracy and its culture of unbounded greed. The resulting laissez-faire state of governance terminated in the crash of 1929 and threw the entire world into a depression lasting over a decade. Graduates of MBA schools conveniently forget the lessons of history and it doesn't take a PhD. in chaos theory to see that the repetition of those lessons is not far off.

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