



The SPP and workers

Lowering working standards and wages across North America

It does not address poverty in North America. It does not address joblessness, or pay equity. It does not provide a response to deindustrialization or worsening trade deficits in manufactured goods. It does not address growing economic inequality or climate change... In the SPP view of the state, "social provision" and "welfare" are completely absent.

~ From *Deep Integration in North America: Security and Prosperity for Whom?* By Teresa Healy, Social and Economic Policy, Canadian Labour Congress

The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA were sold to Canadians with the false promise of "jobs, jobs, jobs." Almost 20 years later, with average incomes stagnant and manufacturing in steady decline, it's obvious that free trade has not been kind to workers. But the SPP doesn't just ignore every major concern of workers today, it is going to make things a lot worse, especially for migrant workers.

U.S. rules force Canadians out of work

In January 2007, Bell Helicopter, the world's largest helicopter maker, banned 24 employees at a Montreal assembly plant from working on a U.S. military contract simply because of where they were born. U.S. law states that citizens from among 25 nations considered security threats are not allowed to work on military contracts, even if they are working on them in another country like Canada. "The problem here is that there is no factual basis whatsoever for the kind of action taken," said Montreal labour relations lawyer Gaston Nadeau in an interview with the CBC. "And people are eliminated simply because they were born in a given country. This is total nonsense." While Prime Minister Harper said he was "very concerned" about the layoffs and has raised the issue with the U.S. government, he is nonetheless working within the SPP to harmonize our immigration and security policies with those of the U.S. This will put Canadians at further risk of being subject to ridiculous, and frankly racist, U.S. laws.

Freedom to move labour – not of labour mobility

Leaked SPP documents from the North American Future 2025 Project claim that, "In order to remain competitive in the global economy, it is imperative for the twenty-first-century North American labour market to possess the flexibility necessary to meet industrial labour demands on a transitional basis and in a way that responds to market forces." It's not a stretch to say that a "flexible" labour supply means a cheap labour supply, and all the better if it "responds to market forces" instead of demanding better working conditions, a better salary and all the rights of citizenship that we all expect as workers in Canada.

Just as free trade agreements have more to do with boosting investor rights than with actual trade between countries, labour mobility agreements have less to do with workers being able to work wherever they want than with companies wanting to move certain types of labour (i.e. cheap, non-unionized workers) to where they can use it to boost profits. This is especially true for Canada's energy sector, which increasingly relies on temporary workers from Mexico and South America. But under the auspices of the SPP, Canada is loosening the limits on its Temporary Foreign Worker Program to make it easier for all kinds of companies to slash wages by hiring workers from abroad – all in the name of making North America more "competitive."



Workers not consulted about migrant labour

Discussions about expanding the migrant worker program, many of them within the context of the SPP, have to date completely excluded workers. According to a Canadian Labour Congress report on the issue from March 2007, this has meant that worker rights aren't even an afterthought, despite numerous documented abuses of the system from the United Food and Commercial Workers, INTERCEDE and other organizations. The government is obligated by law to consult with unions in workplaces where employers want to hire migrant workers but consultation has been limited and inconsistent, claims the CLC. Also inconsistent has been government monitoring to make sure that the working conditions and salaries of migrant workers are the same as people already working in Canada.

Labour shortages or a shortage of cheap labour?

According to the same CLC report, labour shortages tend to be claimed by employers aiming to provide sub-standard wages, benefits and working conditions in a given sector. The Manitoba Trucking Association, for example, makes their motives for hiring migrant workers clear in a 2006 quote from manager Bob Dolyniuk: "The drivers who don't mind being on the road for long periods of time are retiring. There are a lot of family breakups, divorces. Drivers today don't want to be away from home for long periods of time. Immigrants are part of the solution." In the words of the CLC, "Instead of improving working conditions in response to the demands for work-life balance made by workers in Manitoba, trucking employers are electing to transfer work-life imbalances ... to migrant workers."

Bridging the income gap or the infrastructure gap?

Proponents of the SPP often talk about Mexico's lower working standards and wages as a barrier to integration. "The gap in income that separates Mexico from its northern neighbours has to be narrowed significantly," claims a leaked discussion paper by U.S. professor Robert Pastor, a major proponent of integration, from the secret 2006 North American Forum. And yet most of the attention and money devoted to Mexico in the SPP is going toward massive infrastructure projects (specifically huge new highways) designed to fortify current supply chains based on cheap Mexican labour. Other leaked SPP documents discuss "enhancing Mexico's competitive position through the establishment of a grant fund for development with U.S. and Canadian resources to finance the development of physical infrastructure in Mexico." While it's hard to argue against Mexico's need for good roads, the corporate backers of the SPP are clearly more concerned with fattening their bottom line than raising living standards.

A continental living wage and an end to poverty

A coalition of progressive Mexican unions is calling on North American workers to endorse an increase in the minimum wage in Mexico, Canada and the U.S. to levels that allow working people to provide a dignified standard of living for themselves and their families in whichever country they live. This is exactly the kind of policy a true "Security and Prosperity" partnership would embrace if workers were involved in the discussion. But the SPP is not about improving the lives of workers. It is about lowering working standards and further exploiting existing supply chains to the benefit of a few CEOs.

Are you concerned about the SPP? Visit www.canadians.org, or phone us at 1-800-387-7177, for more information on what you can do to fight deep integration.