



Pat Croutan

A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

THE NORTH AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL DECIDES THE FATE OF CANADA-U.S. INTEGRATION — BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

by Stuart Trew

A few months ago, Ottawa played host to an ultra-secret meeting of the infamous Bilderberg Group. A dozen activists camped outside one of the city's exclusive suburban hotels and badgered people in stretch limos, chanting slogans about genetically modified crops and war with Iran. The local papers snapped photos of those entering the building to talk about who knows what, but their names alone were enough to get the conspiracy theories flowing: Richard Perle, the alleged neo-con mas-

termind behind the U.S. invasion of Iraq; Frank McKenna, former Canadian ambassador to the U.S. and Atlantic Canada's best connected business tycoon; David Rockefeller, he of dubious family fortune and founder, in 1973, of the powerful Trilateral Commission that brings rich people from Western Europe, North America and Asia together to promote corporate solutions to the so-called "crisis of democracy."

It's fun and frightening to imagine what the Bilderberg group could have been discussing, but really there is only circumstantial evidence proving that its

wealthy members have any influence over government policies in any country. Far more relevant to Canadians is what the members of the newly formed North American Competitiveness Council (NACC) talk about behind closed doors. That's because even though it's mostly secret, we know that the NACC was created specifically to influence, even to write, Canadian policy.

ELIMINATING "UNNECESSARY BARRIERS"

The NACC was born in mid-June this year, its vague mandate announced with little fanfare in the press by Stephen Harper, George W. Bush and acting Mexican president Vicente Fox. The all-business council is composed of 30-odd CEOs (at least 10 from each country), who are to meet regularly to set priorities for the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) of North America.

The goal of the SPP has been superficially reported as an increase in the security and prosperity of North America by means of strengthening co-operation between Canada, Mexico and the United States in a number of areas, including immigration, security, trade and transportation. In fact, it contains hundreds of provisions and "demands" that will affect everything from food and drug regulations to immigration policies to the creation of joint energy plans and a common foreign policy. The real goal of the SPP is no less than the integration of the Canadian and U.S. economic and security policies, and the process is being pursued without public knowledge or debate.

But the media don't seem interested in the progress of the SPP, nor of the NACC, which was created so that business could direct this continental integration. For instance, the U.S. State Department announced in an August 14 press release that the NACC was meeting the next day to discuss ways "to cut red tape or eliminate unnecessary barriers to trade in North America," and to set priorities for the SPP. The discussion concerned the future of Canada within North America, and yet not one Canadian journalist thought to contact

the Canadian delegation to the NACC and ask what they talked about.

ALL THE UGLY DETAILS

Luckily, the Council of the Americas has been keeping track of NACC meetings and posting minutes on its website (www.americas-society.org). So despite the media silence we know, for instance, that the August 15 NACC meeting was chaired by Ron Covais of Lockheed Martin. We know that the Mexican delegation agrees with the U.S. on the priorities these unelected CEOs should set for the three countries, priorities that include energy integration, regulatory harmonization, and workforce mobility.

We also know that in its upcoming meetings, the NACC will give a lot of attention to the broader issue of “how to forge a more cohesive North American approach to the continent’s relationship with the rest of the world as it relates to trade, competitiveness and security issues.” They are talking about a common foreign and international trade policy for North America, and they are talking about it behind closed doors, with no public input.

Digging further on the Council of the Americas website we find out that the NACC goes back at least to January 2006, where public and private leaders from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. met in Louisville, Kentucky, to discuss objectives for the SPP. According to the minutes of that meeting, participants agreed that the future of the integration process depends on the “creation of a genuine constituency of North America.” This will require “buy-in” from legislators who have been left out of the process so far, as well as governments that recognize “the importance of business issues to the overall social welfare” and that empower “the private sector to engage substantively and pragmatically on trade and security issues without undue deference to political sensitivities.”

So the NACC was apparently created to bypass the democratic process and to let corporate leaders in all three countries

come together and set the conditions under which they do business within North America. That’s more than we know about the Bilderberg Group. And it’s more than enough of a reason to demand that we disband the North American Competitiveness Council and cease all talks leading toward deeper integration between Canada and the U.S., including the Security and Prosperity Partnership summit planned to take place in Canada next spring. That’s what the Council of Canadians is demanding.

While few Canadians would reject collaboration with the U.S. on common security and defence concerns, Canada must retain the ability to form our own foreign and economic policy based on assessment of our own best interests. Without public access to the NACC, what guarantee is there that the CEOs won’t sell off our ability to govern for the sake of their own financial gain?

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THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Meet the Canadian and American delegates to the North American Competitiveness Council

CANADIAN MEMBERS: All 10 Canadian members of the NACC are also members of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE). This is hardly surprising, considering that the CCCE is responsible for writing the template for the Security and Prosperity Partnership and has been present at every tri-national meeting to discuss the shape and form of continental integration.

- Dominic D’Alessandro, Manulife Financial
- Paul Desmarais, Jr., Power Corporation of Canada
- David Ganong, Ganong Bros. Limited
- Richard George, Suncor Energy Inc.
- Hunter Harrison, CN
- Linda Hasenfratz, Linamar Corporation (NACC chairperson)
- Michael Sabia, Bell Canada Enterprises
- Jim Shepherd, Canfor Corporation
- Annette Verschuren, The Home Depot
- Rick Waugh, Scotiabank

U.S. MEMBERS: Of the 13 U.S. companies represented on the NACC, four are on Global Exchange’s 2005 list of worst corporate evildoers: Chevron, for its human rights and environmental abuses in Burma, Nigeria and Ecuador; Ford, for emitting more greenhouse gases than any of the other Big Six automakers; Lockheed Martin, the world’s largest military contractor, for its vice-president’s role in drafting Republican foreign policy; and Wal-Mart, the second biggest corporation in the world, for its record of forced overtime, sex discrimination, child labour and relentless union-busting.

- Lou Schorsch, Mittal
- Joseph Gilmour, New York Life
- William Clay Ford, Ford
- Rick Wagoner, General Motors
- Raymond Gilmartin, Merck
- David J. O’Reilly, Chevron
- Jeffrey R. Immelt, General Electric
- H. Lee Scott, Wal-Mart
- Robert Stevens, Lockheed Martin
- Michael Haverty, Kansas City Southern
- Douglas R. Conant, Campbell’s Soup
- James M. Kilts, Gillette
- Herman Cain, Whirlpool