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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

