

TAKING TO THE STREETS

THOUSANDS GATHER IN OTTAWA, IN MONTEBELLO AND ACROSS CANADA TO OPPOSE THE SPP

by Ariel Troster

Whose security and whose prosperity is the SPP protecting? That's the question that was on the lips of citizens in August, as U.S. President George Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderón met with Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Montebello, Quebec.

The meeting sought to further entrench the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, an agreement that has not been debated by any legislature and has been kept secret from citizens in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Thousands of people took to the streets from August 19 to 21. On Parliament Hill, in Montebello and in communities across Canada, Council activists came bearing protest signs and petitions, some in costume, others carrying food for hungry protesters. It was a colourful and creative crowd, unified by the demand that the SPP be brought to the public and Parliament for a full debate.

The Council of Canadians brought hundreds of people together at a public forum on August 19, packing an auditorium at the University of Ottawa. Maude Barlow, along with civil society representatives from the U.S. and Mexico, condemned the SPP and promoted a vision of a more just and sustainable North America.

The Council had originally planned to hold the forum in Papineauville, Quebec, just six kilometres from where the leaders met on August 20-21. But the RCMP intervened, forcing the municipality to cancel our reservation at the last minute. Thanks to generous last-minute donations from outraged Council supporters,

we were able to secure an alternative venue for the forum.

So we made do with a smaller room in Ottawa, and unfortunately we had to turn away at least 100 people on Sunday night, as more than 500 people stood and crouched in the aisles of the auditorium, hungry for more information about the SPP and how to fight it.

"The SPP extends George Bush's War on Terror, with its fixation on bombs, borders and bibles, to Canada and Mexico," warned Council Chairperson Maude Barlow that evening. "[But] we are going to stand up loud and clear and say no to this agenda, not just because of Canadian environmental concerns, and Canadian workers' concerns and our concerns about health and safety ... but because if we allow this to happen on this continent, it's going to become the blueprint for the world, and we are not going to do that again," she said.

MONTEBELLO BOUND

The next morning, we boarded the bus to Montebello, carrying more than 10,000 letters from Council of Canadians members demanding a moratorium on SPP negotiations and a debate with the public about its implications for Canadians. We had originally negotiated with the RCMP to drop the letters at the gates of the Chateau Montebello. But within minutes of the planned delivery, we received an email from RCMP indicating that the Department of Foreign Affairs was preventing us from taking the letters to the gates.

Instead, the Council of Canadians led a march of about 1,200 people along the streets of Montebello, carrying with us those 10,000 voices. We parked our boxes of letters in front of a line of security personnel in riot gear, and led the crowd in a chant, "No to the SPP. Yes to democracy!" In doing so, we joined with Council chapter activists in more than 30 communities across Canada who par-



Christina Riley

anticipated in our National Day of Action Against the SPP.

OPPOSITION MOUNTING

Thanks to support from members, the Council of Canadians was able to produce and distribute hard-hitting research on the SPP in the weeks leading up to the summit. We gave out more than 600 copies of our citizen's guide to the SPP, *Behind Closed Doors: What they're not telling us about the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America* that weekend, and more than 30,000 people downloaded the report from our website in the month of August alone.

All of the major political parties, with the exception of Harper's Conservatives, have been critical of the SPP and the secrecy behind it. Even the North American Competitiveness Council – the all-CEO advisory group that has been intimately involved in the development of the SPP – has admitted that the legislatures of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico should “remain fully informed about progress and actively engaged in the process” of implementing the SPP.

This is a far cry from the Council of Canadians' call for public scrutiny and debate, but we see it as recognition of the fact that citizens won't stand for secrecy around the SPP any more.

DEMOCRACY'S ALIVE

As Maude Barlow said, “The stakes are very high here. And we have the opportunity not only to defeat something that is profoundly wrong for our peoples and for the sustainability of our planet, but to promote something very, very different.”

While the Harper government continues to laud the SPP and ignore our call for greater transparency, the Montebello summit came with a silver lining. Both the Quebec police and big business were forced to make striking admissions, as a direct result of collective public pressure. This serves as a reminder that citizens must remain vigilant in defending democracy and protecting the public interest.

Thanks to help from Council activists, the Harper government can no longer ignore the demands of Canadians: a better and fairer North America.

For more information about the SPP or the Council of Canadians, visit our website at www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7177.

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