

ON THE STREETS AND BEHIND THE GATES

A SPECIAL 8-PAGE SUPPLEMENT

THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS CONNECTS YOU TO WHAT HAPPENED IN MONTEBELLO, IN OTTAWA, AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AS THE LEADERS OF CANADA, THE U.S. AND MEXICO MET — IN PRIVATE — TO DISCUSS THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP OF NORTH AMERICA.



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THE JELLY BEAN SUMMIT

HARPER SUGARCOATED THE SPP, GLOSSED OVER THE OPPOSITION, AND HELPED CONSOLIDATE CORPORATE CONTROL OVER DEEP INTEGRATION. SO WHY ARE WE SMILING? BECAUSE WE STILL WON.

by **Stuart Trew**

If Prime Minister Stephen Harper's good at anything it's the art of distraction. At his first Security and Prosperity Partnership summit in March 2006, a criminal fashion statement stole the show. Instead of talking about how 30 CEOs had been

handed control over the unpopular process of North American economic and security integration, the media focused on the dreadful fishing vest he wore for a photo op. Score one for secrecy and zero for democracy, we said at the time.

This August, Harper looked more at ease, confident even, as he, U.S. President George Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderón shared a stage, sans cravats, to end the 2007 Leaders' Summit in Montebello, Quebec. The only people who stood out were a few Quebec police officers posing as rock-wielding protesters among the thousands who had gathered outside the gates of the luxury hotel.

Yet despite the protests in Montebello and across the country, as well as the new political opposition to the SPP – the Liberals, NDP, Bloc and Greens all want a public debate – distraction again reared its ugly head! With a single comment, Harper belittled all legitimate criticism of the “security and prosperity” agenda and the secrecy with which it is being implemented.

“Is the sovereignty of Canada going to fall apart if we standardize the jelly bean?” asked our Prime Minister with a smirk. “You know, I don’t think so.”

It doesn’t take a candy lover to see what’s wrong with that statement. Jelly beans aside, the integration agenda is on track, even without the broader public support that fans and foes of the SPP claim will be necessary to keep the process moving.

WHO NEEDS RULES?

The pride of the most recent SPP summit, for Harper as well as for the North American Competitiveness Council, was the announcement of a new voluntary North American Regulatory Cooperation Framework. Tom d’Aquino, President of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, gloated that this framework, designed to discourage regulation more than anything, was a key recommendation of the NACC in its February 2007 report to SPP ministers.

That’s true enough, but regulatory harmonization has been the first priority of the SPP’s so-called Prosperity Agenda since 2005, based on big business lobbying to remove “non-tariff” barriers to North American trade. “Non-tariff” is code for all differences on health, labour, safety, manufacturing and environmental rules between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Rules in one country that are stricter than any other are referred to as “trade barriers,” and so the goal of regulatory harmonization is naturally the lowering of health and safety standards across the continent.



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WITH A SINGLE COMMENT, HARPER BELITTLED ALL LEGITIMATE CRITICISM OF THE “SECURITY AND PROSPERITY” AGENDA AND THE SECRECY WITH WHICH IT IS BEING IMPLEMENTED.

We saw this logic in action earlier this year when it surfaced that thanks to the SPP, Canada was increasing pesticide residue limits on hundreds of fruits and vegetables in order to match lower standards in the United States. Jelly beans aren’t a food staple for most people but we all need our greens, which by U.S. request will now be covered in even more pesticides.

The 2007 regulatory cooperation framework goes further than this by making room for U.S. input into Canadian rules “throughout the rule development process to avoid incompatibility issues.” This is called “transparency” but in practice it will mean vetting significant new regulations – bans on trans fats or toxic chemicals, or stricter greenhouse gas emissions – by U.S. regulators first.

If industrial standards just kept getting better down south, matching them might

not be so bad. But a prominent legacy of the Bush administration has been the wholesale deregulation of industry and a move toward voluntary compliance with existing rules. And just this past July, an executive order came into effect that centralizes the authority over regulation in the hands of the White House.

“Business groups welcomed the executive order, saying it had the potential to reduce what they saw as the *burden of federal regulations*,” reported the *New York Times* in January 2007 (emphasis ours), when Bush appropriated these new powers from groups like the already struggling Environmental Protection Agency. That’s because it requires agencies to prove a “specific market failure” to justify government intervention.

Regulatory convergence with the U.S. will require Canada to adopt a model whereby industry largely regulates itself. If Harper doesn’t think that’s an issue of sovereignty he’s either a fool or he is purposely misleading Canadians about the extent of the SPP’s regulatory agenda.

HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD

Harper, Bush and Calderón announced several other policy changes with clear impacts on sovereignty.

First, there is the new Intellectual Property Action Plan, “for combating piracy and counterfeiting,” according to a statement. It sounds harmless enough, but the plan is actually the result of intense lobbying from Hollywood and U.S. officials who have been making frequent, highly unscientific complaints on behalf of a small but loud business community.

According to Michael Geist, Canada Research Chair of Internet and E-commerce Law at the University of Ottawa, Hollywood lobby groups and media reports have wrongly claimed that Canada is the source of 70 per cent of illegally recorded movies when in fact Canada meets its international obligations on intellectual property.

Ambassador David Wilkins has been pestering us too, just like his predecessor Paul Cellucci did, to pump up Canada's military.

Apparently the pressure works – just look at Canada's transformed military, the softwood lumber sellout, and just this year, the Harper government's law that criminalizes the practice of recording Hollywood movies in the theatres. It may not sound like much, but according to Geist, Canada's laws already conformed to international standards. This was a corporate sellout in order to please Bush and Hollywood.

DRAINING OUR ENERGY

Harper wimped out on energy, too, by signing a benign-sounding “agreement for cooperation in energy and technology.” It is essentially a political pitch for work already being carried out through the North American Energy Working Group, which has so far produced a continental natural gas vision – what's ours is Bush's – and endorsed a fivefold increase in tar sands production, all for export to the United States.

From previous political pitches, it's clear that this agreement is also mostly about acceding to Bush's energy vision for the continent.

Almost in lockstep with Bush, Harper has chosen to stall real change on the energy and environment fronts in order to boost the most unsustainable industries out there: biofuels that require vast tracts of intensive agriculture to grow; so-called clean coal that doesn't exactly remove pollutants so much as displace them and dangerous liquefied natural gas plants where highly flammable liquid gas from overseas is re-gasified in Canada to be piped to the U.S. market.

Harper says that all this will make Canada a “clean energy superpower,” but what kind of superpower writes energy policy based not on national needs but on priorities set by the White House?



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One especially contentious aspect of Harper's “clean” agenda is his love affair with nuclear power, particularly its role in the Alberta tar sands.

“It's not a question of if, it's a question of when, in my mind,” said Energy Minister Gary Lunn in December 2006. “I think nuclear can play a very significant role in the oil sands. I'm very, very keen.”

This would fit in with Bush's energy vision just fine. Not only will it ensure that America gets the crude oil it wants out of Alberta's tar sands, accelerating environmental destruction and water depletion in the process. But a pro-nuclear Canada would be in a better position, politically, to supply all the uranium Bush will need to fuel his own nuclear renaissance.

MAJOR BACKLASH

Linking these three new SPP items is the underlying issue of democracy, and whose security and prosperity deep integration will enhance. Despite clear gains for corporate Canada, the SPP is also suffering a major backlash from friends and foes alike.

The North American Competitiveness Council was yet again the only non-governmental group allowed full access to our leaders at Montebello, despite numerous calls that it be opened up to public and parliamentary debate. The Hudson Institute, a U.S. think tank favourable to deep integration, claimed that without congressional involvement in the U.S. the trilateral talks were destined to collapse. The chorus is getting so loud that even the 30-odd CEOs on the NACC are starting to worry about a lack of will behind the SPP.

“While overall progress to date has been encouraging, the NACC is concerned that on a handful of important issues progress has stalled and the spirit of the SPP is being undermined,” they wrote in their August report to leaders. “Above all, we urge the leaders to make it clear to all levels of their governments that sustained progress on the SPP agenda is a strategic priority.”

OPPOSITION MOUNTING

That will be difficult with all four main opposition parties – Liberals, Greens, NDP and Bloc – now calling for more public oversight and questioning some of the bigger-ticket items like regulatory harmonization, bulk water exports and the wholesale acceptance of draconian U.S. security policies.

Committee hearings into the SPP this past spring clearly sparked an interest in the SPP on the Hill. It also forced the political parties to acknowledge the public's response to the agreement, which has been overwhelmingly negative.

The Liberals, who wrote the SPP to begin with, have now incorporated the Council of Canadians' demands into their own position on the SPP, including “disclosing the complete list of SPP working groups, their contact persons and participating membership [and] requiring them to provide opportunities for public input.”

Despite all the fuss, the CEOs of the NACC are currently demanding more power and influence from our leaders. In their August report, the group claims that “We are prepared ... to move beyond our initial report to ministers, whether by considering additional action items within our three priority areas of border facilitation, regulatory cooperation, and energy integration or by proposing additional priorities.

“With the support of the Leaders, we would be pleased to engage on other strategic issues affecting the competitiveness and security of the North American economies.”

Not so long ago, these same CEOs considered signing on to missile defence a “strategic issue” affecting Canada’s competitiveness. Ditto for joining the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. If we didn’t partner up with Bush on these two issues it was curtains for the Canadian economy, they said.

Canadians didn’t buy it then and they don’t buy it now. But if the NACC gets its way, corporate influence would

trump public and even political resistance in future instances where saving face with the U.S. administration is declared a matter of North American “competitiveness.”

MOMENTUM INCREASING

The movement against deep integration has grown substantially in the last year thanks largely to Council of Canadians activists fighting the SPP across the country. Harper tried his best to shrug off this criticism with his quip about jelly beans. And while a few news reporters fell for the joke, Canadians saw right through our Prime Minister’s cynical comment.

“If this is such a wonderful deal and it is about protecting North Americans from shoddy products or whatever they’re now saying ... then be proud of it, stand up, tell us what’s in it ... and send it to our Parliament for oversight,” said Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, in an interview with CBC.

The sentiment was repeated over and over again in letters to newspapers and to Prime Minister Harper, demanding that Canada put an end to deep integration with the United States. It’s now up to us to keep the pressure on our leaders as Parliament begins its fall session and the Conservatives try to distract us once again with a new agenda for the next year.

The momentum is on our side, a public consensus is forming against the SPP, and despite some limited gains at Montebello for the corporate backers of the SPP, Canadians have a lot to smile about.

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