

# HIGH STAKES AND BIG IDEAS

## TEACH-IN DRAWS HUNDREDS TO OTTAWA TO CHALLENGE THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

by Ariel Troster

The energy was palpable in Ottawa from March 30 to April 1, 2007. Over 1,500 people crammed themselves into a concert hall and a high school to learn about the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America and how to fight it. Activists, academics, workers, policy experts, journalists, artists, musicians – and even breakdancers – congregated for Integrate This! Challenging the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, a free teach-in sponsored by the Council of Canadians, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Canadian Labour Congress.

Avi Lewis, acclaimed broadcaster and the moderator for the Integrate This! panel discussions, captured participants' enthusiasm when he said:

"There is a geeky thrill to a teach-in. There's the fact that you've come here on a Saturday morning. That you're smelling the high school hallway smell, and that you are excited by that. I find that intoxicating. Teach-ins are pivotal moments and people remember them ... you're going to be able to say I was there in that high school auditorium in Ottawa. And you are going to leave here full of facts ..."

When we saw hundreds of people stream into the auditorium of the Ottawa Technical High School at 8:30



Christina Riley

**"TEACH-INS ARE PIVOTAL MOMENTS AND PEOPLE REMEMBER THEM ... YOU'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO SAY I WAS THERE IN THAT HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM IN OTTAWA. — AVI LEWIS**

on a Saturday morning, we knew that we were in the midst of an exciting political moment.

Council of Canadians staff members were still riding a wave of excitement from the night before, when a roster of over 25 musicians, artists and dancers gathered at Capital Music Hall for our Power In Numbers party, the official launch for the Integrate This! teach-in.

Local stars Andrew Vincent and the Pirates, and the Soul Jazz Orchestra, shared the stage with Nomadic Massive, a collective of hip-hop artists from

Montreal who electrified the crowd in English, French and Creole. We also heard from DJ Rise Ashen and slam poets Doretta Charles, John Akpata and Ritallin, watching in awe as local breakdancers flipped and spun through the air. Host Alanna Stuart kept driving the message home that this party was a protest against the SPP.

But the next morning, people still had lots of energy for a long day of discussion and action planning. It was incredible to see the connections being made that day between students and veteran Council chapter members, between environmentalists and anti-poverty activists, between workers and volunteers from dozens of social justice and non-profit organizations. We met activists from Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, all dedicated to raising awareness of the danger that the SPP poses to their countries' independence, social security and environment.

This is the kind of energy that propelled people to take to the streets and disrupt the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999. It's the kind of passion that saw thousands of people braving tear gas to protest against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001. It's the kind of dedication that encourages hundreds of people to spend a sunny Saturday in a high school auditorium.

The Integrate This! teach-in featured five panel discussions, twenty workshops and more than a dozen strategy sessions, all aimed at spreading information about the Security and Prosperity Partnership and brainstorming creative ways to challenge the SPP in our communities.

"The stakes are very high here," said Maude Barlow that day. "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."



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**BUSINESS OF INSECURITY**

**W**ith corporate Canada intent on trading Canadian sovereignty for greater access to American markets, the SPP is ushering in a new definition of “security,” which places Canadians at risk of unfair accusations and invasions of privacy. Does more surveillance make us feel secure? Is it more important for Canada to protect its trading relationship with the United States than the civil liberties of its citizens? At the Integrate This! teach-in, we sought answers to these questions, and more.

John Foster from the North-South Institute expressed concern about the secrecy of the SPP implementation process, focusing specifically on the North American Competitiveness Council. Foster wondered aloud how “unhealthy and weak our democracies are if we are permitting and tolerating unique and privileged access for a group of powerful and overpaid corporate CEOs ... to advance agendas that will change the face of the continent and how it has governed.”

**“THIS IS COMMUNICATION BY STEALTH AND ITS WATCHWORDS ARE OIL AND WAR, DRESSED UP AS ENERGY STRATEGY AND SECURITY.” – JOHN FOSTER**

Foster referred to a meeting of the North American Forum that was held in Banff, Alberta, September 12-14, 2006. Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day was there, and so was Defence Minister Gordon O’Connor. They met with U.S. and Mexican government officials and business leaders to discuss North American integration. The event was chaired by former U.S. secretary of state George Schultz, former Alberta premier Peter Lougheed, and former Mexican finance minister Pedro Aspe.

Despite the involvement of senior North American politicians, organizers did not alert the media about the event. The event was organized by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and the Canada West Foundation, an Alberta think-tank that promotes, among other things, closer economic integration with the United States.

At the Integrate This! teach-in, Foster revealed that a recent Access to Information request uncovered that the

Canadian government’s communications strategy for this meeting was to insist that the meeting was “private,” and that “participants were instructed to avoid direct media engagement.”

“This is communication by stealth,” said Foster, “and its watchwords are oil and war, dressed up as energy strategy and security.”

Maureen Webb, human rights lawyer and author of the recently published *Illusions of Security: Global Surveillance and Democracy in the Post-9/11 World*, focused on how the business community and the Canadian government are “working hand in glove” to implement security measures “lockstep with the U.S. government.”

According to Webb, the U.S. government is using the principle of pre-emption to guide its security policies, and this is having a dramatic impact on Canada’s security practices.

“[Pre-emption] is dangerous in areas of security,” she said. “The idea is that risk needs to be eliminated to the greatest degree possible. And that means everyone needs to be evaluated as a potential suspect.”

According to Webb, “our principles are at stake here – things like due process, presumption of innocence, the right to know the evidence against you and to respond, the right against unreasonable search and seizure, rights under data protection laws, rights of mobility and asylum rights – all of these rights go out the window in a pre-emptive model.”

**BIG OIL AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**C**anadians care about the environment. At least, that’s what the media has been reporting since January, when Decima released a poll indicating that Canadians rank the environment as their top priority, with health care coming a close second. At the Integrate This! teach-in, we wanted to raise awareness of how continental

integration is affecting the environment, specifically highlighting threats to climate change, public health and fresh water.

Diana Gibson from the Parkland Institute focused on the war industry and its ever-escalating need for fuel.

“Why does the U.S. want our energy?” she asked. “First, as everyone knows, they consume more than they’re producing. They have an energy strategy that does not focus on reducing consumption, but focuses on increasing and securing supply for the future. And Alberta’s tar sands feature quite prominently. The U.S. had also made energy part of their security agreement. Their national security and their energy security are one and the same.”

According to Gibson, since the implementation of the proportional sharing clause in NAFTA – which ensures that Canada can never reduce the proportion of energy that we export to the U.S. – Canada has become a “resource hinterland for the U.S.”

What’s worse, according to Gibson, is that production has increased dramatically in recent years and is set to go even higher, since the Bush administration has expressed a desire for a “fivefold expansion” in the tar sands – a predicted increase from 1 million barrels of oil per day to over 5 million. And Canada has the lowest taxes in the world on oil, at only 23 cents per barrel.

Still, Gibson believes that there is sufficient cause for optimism, given that most of Canada’s energy is secure and publicly owned.

“I think we need to look to Northern European countries like Norway ... which has solid majority public ownership of their energy. They save all of their energy revenues to invest in their future. They have strong policies around foreign access. And they get 96 per cent royalties off of their energy and the industry is still lined up at the door to

**“THEY ESTABLISHED THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT, AND SOUGHT TO EXPAND IT THROUGH THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS. WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT AGENDA? THEY FAILED!” – ANTONIA JUHASZ**

get in there. There hasn’t been some sort of capital strike against Norway ... Canada is completely out of step with the rest of the world in energy sovereignty.”

Rosa Kouri and Ben Powless from the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition stressed the need for Canada to take serious action on climate change, and expressed concern over the disastrous environmental implications associated with increased production in the tar sands.

For Kouri, the harmonization of environmental regulations and health safety standards under the Security and Prosperity Partnership raises an alarm.

“While hemispheric standardization would be a good idea if we were all to raise ourselves up to a common standard, generally what happens is that we end up gravitating to somewhere below average, and I would even say to the bottom.”

Both Powless and Kouri discussed the concept of a “just transition” to a more environmentally sustainable future, ensuring that the needs of vulnerable communities and of low-income people are taken into consideration.

“We want to make local communities the owners of this transition,” said Kouri. “Under NAFTA and the SPP, Canada can’t give incentives to local organizations to build a wind farm. This reminds us that if the same big companies are profiting from the transition to a clean air economy, we only continue to perpetuate economic and social injustice.”

**DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT**

**W**hile the Council of Canadians is a non-partisan organization, we spend a lot of time talking to politicians. Sometimes we communicate by delivering thousands of petitions to their offices, as we did with Environment Minister John Baird on March 22, 2007. We often get our message to them by flooding their offices with emails and faxes. When required, we make presentations to parliamentary committees and lobby government lead-



*Christina Riley*



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ers. But we rarely get the chance to hear politicians respond to our concerns in an open forum. That's why we invited representatives from the five major political parties to the Integrate This! teach-in. We wanted to hear what they had to say about the Security and Prosperity Partnership, and Canada-U.S. relations in general.

Regrettably, only the New Democratic Party and the Green Party agreed to attend.

Peter Julian, the NDP Member of Parliament for Burnaby-New Westminster and critic for international trade, and Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada, addressed our questions alongside José Antonio Almazán, a deputy with the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in Mexico.

Julian began the discussion by announcing that NAFTA has failed. He said that the notion that NAFTA has brought more prosperity, employment and exports to Canada is actually a myth.

"Since the signing in 1989 of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement that later morphed into NAFTA ... what we have seen is not unprecedented prosperity for all Canadians, but unprecedented prosperity for corporate lawyers and CEOs."

He pointed out that since 1989, the poorest of Canadian families have lost over one month of income per year, their income having declined by an average of 9 per cent. According to the

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, working-class and middle-income Canadians lost the equivalent of about two weeks of income in the same period. Meanwhile, the wealthiest of Canadians have seen their real income skyrocket by nearly 20 per cent, representing a "complete re-jigging of our economic system."

Julian suggested that the reason the Canadian government has kept the Security and Prosperity Partnership negotiations under wraps is that "they know when it is a head-to-head debate with the Canadian public (we saw that with the Canada-U.S. free trade debate, we've seen this with NAFTA) increasingly they lose the public debate."

Elizabeth May referred to the SPP as an "attack on our core identity and on our sovereignty by stealth."

For May, the SPP represents a "fork in the road for Canadian society – whether we are going to pursue traditional Canadian values internationally, or whether we are going to become part of Fortress North America, a large gated community where U.S. security forces will guard the perimeter and all Canadians will be allowed to move about freely, provided we're willing to have our irises scanned ..."

José Antonio Almazán spoke about how his party, the PRD, views the impact of



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the Security and Prosperity Partnership in Mexico:

"The SPP is not an alliance, it's a relationship of subordination. In the context of the constitutional and legal framework of Mexico, we consider it to be a semi-colonial arrangement, insofar as it implies even more of a loss of our sovereignty as a nation."

Still, Almazán said that opposition to the SPP has been growing within parliamentary and congressional spheres within Mexico, and it has also taken hold among civil society activists. He expressed gratitude for the "conscious and dignified grassroots participation" at the Integrate This! teach-in, which he said "is really where we build strong movements to defend what is ours – this planet, our lands, our water, our forests, our natural resources, life."

**WHAT WE REALLY WANT**

**A**fter spending an entire day discussing the kind of North America that we don't want to see, we figured it was time to present some positive, progressive alternatives to the Security and Prosperity Partnership. We convened a discussion moderated by veteran activist and broadcaster Judy Rebick, who said:

"Without a vision of what we want – the kind of world we're fighting for, we're not going to be able to mobilize to defeat what they're bringing down on us. Being against is not enough – we have to know what we're for."



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**Hip-hop group Nomadic Massive kicked off the teach-in on March 29.**

Bertha Lujan, Minister of Labour for the Legitimate Government of Mexico, addressed some common myths about the impact of free trade in her country.

While NAFTA's fans are quick to suggest that the agreement has brought prosperity to Mexicans, Lujan maintains that it's only the "multi-millionaire business leaders of large corporations" that have profited. Meanwhile, "real salaries for people in all three countries continue to slide, and so does employment."

Lujan's vision for a more just relationship between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico includes a focus on workers' rights and the recognition of autonomous legal systems for First Nations peoples. It promotes sustainable economic growth "that is respectful and mindful of future generations," relying on fair trade rather than unfettered free trade.

According to Antonia Juhasz, author of *The Bu\$h Agenda: Invading the World One Economy at a Time*, we shouldn't be spending too much of our energy trying to construct an alternative vision for North America. Because she's convinced that "we actually know very, very clearly what we want. We want worker rights and protections, we want human rights and protections, we want indigenous rights and consumer rights, we want economic justice, environmental justice, economic equality, we want sovereignty,



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**Bertha Lujan brought a message of solidarity from Mexicans fighting the SPP.**



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**— MAUDE BARLOW**

and we want democracy. We want unity. We know all of these things, and we have articulated them very well."

While the United States government may be spending billions of dollars on the war in Iraq, Juhasz is optimistic about the ability of social justice activists to challenge the SPP.

"We have been very successful in challenging their other modes of pushing their agenda," she said. "They established the North American Free Trade Agreement, and sought to expand it through the Free Trade Area of the Americas. What happened to that agenda? They failed! Is there a Free Trade Area of the Americas? Is it being negotiated any more? No, absolutely not. It's a failure. And it's a failure because of our organizing and resistance ... The IMF and the World Bank have never been weaker than they are right now. Countries are refusing to contribute money. Countries are refusing to pay back loans."

Maude Barlow ended the day by underscoring the Council of Canadians' demand that the Security and Prosperity Partnership be brought to the public for a full debate.

"These people do not have the mandate to be moving ahead with an agenda by stealth, to fundamentally and radically change the face of North America in the image of the big business community, to confiscate the working people, the resources, the social security, the civil rights, the human rights of people in the Americas for their agenda," she said. "They have not taken it to Parliament, and we would not give it to them if they did."

For Barlow, the corporate sector's vision of North America stands in marked contrast to the alternatives being brought forward by civil society.

"We live our alternatives," she said.

"We know what the alternative is to their kind of greed, and we know that in their system, the economy confiscates people and communities to work on behalf of the global economy. We think it should be just the opposite. The economy should serve communities and people, and we will not rest until we have this vision in our day-to-day lives in all of our countries."

Barlow encouraged the participants at the Integrate This! teach-in to work with partners in all three North American countries to defeat the SPP:

"The environment crosses all of our borders. Rivers, animals, air, cultural diversity, ideas, and our people, travel. And we want to share something very, very fundamentally different. And we want our voices part of this process," she said.

**To read the full report of the Integrate This! teach-in, visit [www.IntegrateThis.ca](http://www.IntegrateThis.ca), and don't forget to sign up for email updates, so we can keep you informed as plans progress to protest against the SPP Leaders' Summit in Montebello, Quebec, August 20-21.**