

MexAmeriCanada: The SPP and Our Class War

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, February 20, 2008

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Live webcast 19 Feb. SPP forum



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PUBLIC FORUM ON THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP From Behind Closed Doors, Into The Public Eye

Tuesday, February 19th / 7:00pm - 8:00pm
Heritage Hall, 3102 Main Street (between 15th and 16th Avenues)

Guest Speakers:

- **Don Davies**, B.A., LL.B., Director, Legal Resources, Teamsters Canada (Local 31)
- **Peter Julian**, MP (Burnaby-New Westminster), NDP International Trade Critic
- **Murray Dobbin**, Political Commentator and Author
- **Douglas Ross**, Professor, Political Science at SFU

Shining a light on cockroaches is always fascinating to watch as they scurry around with the “Who, Me?” look on their face. Too many people found out about the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in the late 1990s. Secretly implementing a corporate bill of rights was not terribly appealing for real human beings who found that the corporate “people” should not have more rights than us.

Try this on for size, though, from Luiza Savage’s “Meet NAFTA 2.0” in *Maclean’s* of all things on September 11, 2006:

This is how the future of North America now promises to be written: not in a sweeping trade agreement on which elections will turn, but by the accretion of hundreds of incremental changes implemented by executive agencies, bureaucracies and regulators. "We've decided not to recommend any things that would require legislative changes," says [Ron] Covais [Lockheed Martin representative on the NACC]. "Because we won't get anywhere."

The North American Competitiveness Council is the corporate legislature of the North American Union. It is made up of 10 CEOs from each NAFTA country. They guide the deliberations of the three SPP amigos.

If you smell the makings of a class war, you haven’t been paying enough attention. It’s been waged for decades and has now gone underground. Whenever you see tens of thousands of police military and security forces protecting political meetings, you have spotted the New World Order at work.

And tonight, a community forum turned on that flashlight!

"From Behind Closed Doors, Into The Public Eye: Public Forum on the Security and Prosperity Partnership"

The forum is designed to inform citizens about the nature and implications of this secretive project for North American "deep integration". Co-sponsored by Libby Davies MP and the Vancouver Kingsway Federal NDP, the forum will feature the following panel of speakers:

Peter Julian MP (NDP International Trade Critic)

Don Davies (Director, Legal Resources, Teamsters Canada)

Murray Dobbin (Political commentator and author)

Dr. Douglas Ross (Professor, Dept. of Political Science, SFU)

If you missed it, you can watch it here: http://media.workingtv.com/website_archived.aspx?c=1



Peter Julian: Evaporating Canada Behind A 50,000 Person Security Force

Peter Julian's talk concerned the Canadian trade experience over the last 20 years as it entered into the SPP. He set the groundwork for what everyone tonight was talking about by examining what the SPP is and why it is destroying what most of us considered to be "us." The following speakers expanded on the SPP's implications.

When he attends trade functions, corporate CEOs spew the filth that "NAFTA has brought unprecedented prosperity to Canada." Average income is certainly up, but average income is an unreliable statistic of domestic economic justice because it shuffles all economic experiences together, masking the bifurcation of wealth that is spreading like a virus through the industrialized and economically developing world.

StatsCanada refused to release their studies of the trade realities of Canada since 1989. Sounds like a political policy decision to me. The NDP spent a year trying to have that information released. Here's what they found:

- the wealthiest quintile had a 20% increase in income; they now earn half of all income in

Canada—clearly they love NAFTA

- the upper middle class has stagnated
- the middle class has lost the equivalent of one week of income from every year they work
- the lower middle class has lost 2 weeks of income per year
- the poorest income earners, under \$20k have lost 1.5 months of income per year

Ten reasons why the NDP is opposed to the SPP:

1. It's anti-democratic by nature as politicians feel that the public isn't ready for this discussion because we've rejected integration since the 1980s [see the Maclean's quote above]
2. It's shrouded in profound secrecy, including massively redacted released documents
3. It's about much more than Steve's jelly beans
4. It's about quality of life issues: eroding regulations to protect our safety [pesticide harmonization]
5. It includes the erosion of civil rights evident in the USA [MCA]
6. It integrates social policy with American standards: military harmonization, guest workers without rights and protections of citizens
7. We're losing our sovereignty water stewardship
8. Energy is already bound to American priorities; this will get worse
9. The softwood sellout is the template for exporting our decision making
10. Abandoning decision making means giving away our sovereignty

And from this snapshot we have a solid grounding on the threat of the SPP.



Murray Dobbin: Let's Just Call It the Class War It Really Is

“The power of our adversaries is our isolation from each other.”

When Margaret Thatcher screwed up and publicly admitted [well, bragged] that neoliberals reject society in lieu of individualism, those of us keeping track have noticed the constant and increasing assault on our social contract. They want us isolated as atomized individuals living as consumers in a market, not citizens in a society.

“Our ruling elite—economic and political—have betrayed us...willingly and enthusiastically.”

Peter Julian's statistics above fully demonstrate that.

“Those who exercise power today are no longer interested in nation building”

The global market is the goal. Trade agreements are a means of de-compiling society through binding our sovereignty to international agreements. Now, agreeing to follow the Geneva Conventions or the Kyoto Protocol is a worthwhile means of restricting our potential choices because of the greater good they could bring to the world, though our American neighbours have rejected both of those agreements.

Neoliberal trade agreements, however, have a market good, a good for the elites in mind—not so much a goal for all of society largely because they reject the social contract’s legitimacy to constrain their greed.

Dobbin notes a sadly humorous point about the largest Canadian business lobbying group, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. It used to be called the Business Council on National Interests. Since there are no national issues any more when your goal is embracing the American political and economic machine, the last thing the CCCE wants to do is give anyone the impression that national interests matter more than American interests.

Canadians’ expectations of our society over the last two decades have not changed. Our ability to keep and improve the society we want is what is becoming restricted. I could call it class war, but that might sound reactionary. The reality, though, is that is simply is a class war—and we are losing.



Don Davies: Workers as SPP Chattel

As a Teamsters lawyer, he and all of labour are critically concerned with trade agreements. Canadian labour sees the SPP as part of a whole package of agreements including the FTA, NAFTA, and TILMA.

Labour in Canada is interested in a strong economy but when Canadian businesses make money, workers should have a share, along with rights, fair trade and domestic sovereignty. Corporate interests cannot be at the expense of citizens, as the NACC is comprised of 30 CEOs, with no representation from labour or the rest of civil society.

The SPP lacks input from a broad spectrum of our society. I believe this is intentional since society as a whole opposes the intentional erosion of our sovereignty, us being society and all.

Worker rights are also being undermined. Within extensive examples of this trend, in the interests of continental security, transportation workers but not managers, are required to provide extensive personal information to the American government so they can cross the border with the 80% of Canadian exports that go to America.

Finally, guest workers are becoming a new labour underclass that drive down everyone else’s worker

rights, while they suffer from horribly restricted protections themselves.

Ultimately, the question facing Canada is one we must answer as a whole: Can we encourage trade and investment while ensuring workers and communities share equitably in the benefits, and while preserving our sovereignty and democratic control; does the SPP fail these tests? Absolutely.



Douglas Ross: Political and Military Insecurity Cannot Be Ignored

North American and global security concerns are significantly responsible for our integration trends.

Some highlights of his massively informative presentation indicate the tone of the global security scene that we need to recognize:

- In the media, the SPP is mostly about only how we will be modestly inconvenienced.
- The top 1/5th of 1% of American wealth has exploded, worse than in the 1920s.
- We must get rid of NAFTA. Integration is only on American terms. Pipelines and the electrical grid are not impeded at borders, but labour certainly is.
- “Our foreign policy is completely designed to make the US happy.”
- Putin admitted last week that we are in a new arms race because the USA has stated its goal to be the supreme military power in the world. Fear and the military industrial complex has defeated the Cold War peace dividend. Russia is re-building their early warning capability and has been dabbling in a Doomsday system, along with planning to smuggle nuclear weapons into the USA for a second strike attack.
- Highly authoritarian governments are accumulating massive petrodollars. They will spend this money in ways that threatens everyone’s security, not that others aren’t spending money in anti-social ways.
- NORAD is now a treaty, not an executive agreement any more. Russian bombers carrying rather stealthy cruise missiles are already flying around the arctic. A few days ago Putin promised to target Ukraine with nuclear weapons if they joined NATO.
- Recommendations:
 - We need to re-nationalize our political and economic approach to the world, including getting out of NATO unless it changes sufficiently, including moving away from its current exploration into the value of a nuclear first strike.
 - We need a council on national issues involving everyone, not just business.

As we fill our evenings with TV game shows and 4 second sound bites from US presidential candidates, we need to remember that the depth of real politics is lurking well past all that. We ignore it at our peril.

What Kind of Future Will We Craft?

I say craft because we really are a work in progress. We aren't stuck with someone else's vision of the future: sovereign nations or MexAmeriCanada. If we do nothing to take part in creating our future, we give up that right and responsibility to those who show up. If we don't show up, we get what others plan for us.

One of the most telling features of anti-New World Order forums like tonight's in Vancouver is the proportion of people over 50 to people under 50: usually it's around 4:1. Tonight it was perhaps 3:1, slightly better. The real challenge will be to expand the role so that the youngest two generations are more informed and involved. Maybe they're getting this knowledge on the internet and aren't into community forums to become informed. If so, they may be missing a crucial element in social progressive movements: community, and not just the online, virtual communities so many know, but the face-to-face realities of seeing people from other social milieux in the same room. Rebuilding community means re-engaging in society with others of all walks of life.

Becoming informed is critical. Being physically a part of solutions means engaging with others in solutions. Murray Dobbin is right when he talks about our mutual isolation helping the neoliberal agenda remove our sovereignty.

Peter Julian closed with the idea of taking a 20-something to lunch! They need to be up to speed and motivated. When 25% of the youngest block of voters bothered to vote, we need to figure out why and fix it. Electoral reform is a good start, but it will take far more than that to ensure that we even have a society worth protecting into the future.