

# *alternativas*

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Godard 20, colonia Guadalupe Victoria, CP 07790, México D.F.

Tel/fax: 53564724 / 53551177 / 53560599

[rimalc@laneta.apc.org](mailto:rimalc@laneta.apc.org) / [www.rimalc.org.mx](http://www.rimalc.org.mx)



**“SPP violates the law, and technically speaking, it is a coup d'etat”**

**Interview done by Sergio de Castro Sanchez of *Diagonal*-summer of 2007.**

Interview with Professor Alberto Arroyo, member of the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC).

*Translation to English done by Frances Arbour.*

**T**he North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) is a new attempt to strengthen neo-liberal policies in North America against the background of the difficulties and failures that both the approval of the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) have had in several countries of the continent. The SPP adds the new element of security to the commercial interests of the large transnational corporations. We interviewed Alberto Arroyo, member of the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC) and professor of Political Science at the Autonomous Metropolitan University of Mexico (UNAM).

**Diagonal (D): What is the SPP?**

**Alberto Arroyo (AA):** In reality, it is a deepening of the FTA model, but there are radically new elements, such as incorporating the theme of security in trade agreements. In reality past Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have not been purely commercial. Certainly, they involve investment, intellectual property, the role of the State, etc. In fact, the commercial parts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) represent only three out of twenty-four chapters. Earlier FTAs did not deal with overtly political issues or with security. This has been a tendency in recent agreements. In the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) they began to gingerly incorporate some security issues, and serious ones.

**(D): ¿Why (do we speak) now of an Alliance\* and not of Agreements or Treaties?**

**(AA:)** This is a response to the fear on the part of the real powers that are behind these treaties, the corporations. The agreements must pass through the Legislatures because they have a status of Supreme Law. And they fear that a Treaty of this type will not be approved by the Legislatures (since it is increasingly difficult, even in the United States and Canada, to get them approved). Therefore they don't channel it (through legislative bodies, ed.) as such but rather as agreements among presidents that have a less legal status but in reality they operate with the same force. In the section that they designate as " Prosperity" (the economic part) they try to come down to more operative levels than what they agreed in NAFTA. For example, FTAs require changes in a good number of laws, including, in some cases, in Constitutions; now they are trying to modify rules and regulations, etc. That is to say, items that depend on Executive decree, and which allows for what they agreed to under NAFTA to be deepened. When they have to modify laws<sup>2</sup> (as they had to do with the FTAs) they will do it but without the public, nor the Congress/Parliament, realizing that this is part of a global plan. Technically it is a coup d'etat, because the Executive Power approves things that actually are the responsibility of the legislative power. In some cases they are violating the law.

The other reason they don't want to pass this by Congress/Parliament is that it would have to become public. They can negotiate in secret, which they have always done, but in the end there should be a text that they have to present in the Congress/Parliament. Sooner or later what was agreed upon would come out. For example, on August 20 and 21, 2007 it is expected that an enormous U.S. aid package for the fight against drug trafficking/smuggling will be approved. However, what is involved is a "Plan Colombia". In fact, a U.S. congress person said that, or rather it slipped out of him – he used the term "Mexico Plan," a plan more ambitious than "Plan Colombia," is how he put it. It is already known that Mexico has bought very sophisticated software from the US to filter and control e-mail. However, Mexico has a law that prohibits the tapping of communications unless it is by order of a judge. It is said that there is already real-time data sharing between all areas of the US and Mexican security systems. This is not proven, but in the SPP they discuss achieving a degree of "electronic compatibility of information systems." It is understood that this is real-time network connecting. The other part (relating to economic aspects) is no longer free trade but "integration," which involves coordinating macroeconomic plans in all sectors.

**(D): If the NAFTA is in place and neo-liberalism has been introduced in to North America, where does the need for the SPP arise?**

**(AA:)** The establishment of the neo-liberal model was product of a Consensus, the Consensus of Washington, based on the "brainwashing" of the different governments. When the devastating effects of the model become clear, the Consensus begins to break down so that coercive mechanisms through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are initiated/launched that turn on the problem of debt repayment. The difficulty is that there are two conditions for this coercion to work: that you owe money and that the governments were willing to play along. Thus the need for a FTA to guarantee that those who governed had limited room for manoeuvre, so that the fundamentals couldn't be changed.

Another risk is the population, who may ultimately decide not to play along. Therefore it is necessary to look for mechanisms that guarantee that national governments have sufficient capacity

to control social unrest. And under the Bush framework this is not done through consensus or ideological manipulation, the way it had been done for many years: rather it is done through brute force. Changing the laws is required for this, even though these totally violate human rights, so as to criminalize social protest. The proposal of the new Mexican Penal Code, for example, allows the tapping of telecommunications systems only by the decision of the Public Ministry without going through a judge; house searches without a judge's order; lengthening the period of time in which evidence of a crime has to be demonstrated... What has already been approved is the modification of two or three articles of the Mexican Penal Code which introduces what in almost all 3 countries is called the "Anti-terrorist Law". Under this law the definition is so broad and vague that it can be applied to almost anyone.

**(D): How has the SPP been negotiated and what relation does this have to what you call the "privatization of politics"?**

(AA:) It begins with meetings of business groups. The "Prosperity Council" is established between Mexico and the US with only large business interests being represented. From this starting point some proposals are forthcoming. A meeting takes place a short time before the establishment of the SPP on March 23, 2005. President Fox is present at this meeting where discussion begins about the SPP. Some months later a document prepared by a consultant commissioned by a number of businessmen from the three countries called " Ideas for the Future of North America" is released. Subsequently on March 23, Fox, Bush and then Canadian Prime Minister Martin meet and sign the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), that is no more than the beginning of formal negotiations. The heads of state are at the top of the negotiating structure, followed by a minister from each country re. "Prosperity" and another re. "Security". Next comes 22 public-private working groups, not as advisors, but sitting directly at the discussion table. Finally, the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC) is created made up of ten CEOs from major corporations in each of the three countries. The NACC puts forward proposals just before each Presidential Summit which then become the agenda for those discussions. But, in addition, sectorally-based trilateral commissions of businessmen have been created: one for energy, and another for steel and a third for the automotive sector. Another for textiles has been proposed. Therefore, a private sector plan becomes public policy.

**(D): There is discussion that trade liberalization will not only be among these three countries but also with others with whom any one of these three has signed a free trade agreement with. Is this a strategy for the US to move into countries not politically allied/close, as for example Brazil?**

(AA:) Exactly. I believe it was a difficult blow not to achieve the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTTA), but a plan B is put in motion. They are going to try to create the FTAA piece by piece.

**(D): The consequences of the NAFTA have been disastrous in the three countries. What can we expect from the SPP?**

(AA:) In the rural areas, I believe that the disaster is going to deepen because the SPP includes phyto-sanitary measures which are going to create more difficulties for the few able to export. In social terms the effects are greater in the countryside. But in macroeconomic terms the

consequences are more severe for industry, where the most serious effect was the break-up of the productive structure of the country. Small islands of success are created disconnected from the surrounding economic environment. All this is made worse by the strategic sectoral plans decided on by the transnational corporations that don't plan with employment generation in mind for a specific country, rather respond to imperatives outlined by the parent company. 4

**(D): And what can be done?**

**(AA:)** We are in a stage of sharing information, putting the issue on the agenda of organizations, and creating an actor that will take on the struggle. But without the necessary information, we have nothing.

*\* In the Spanish acronym for the SPP – ASPAN, the word Alliance was used instead of the English usage of the word 'Partnership'.*

**alternativ@** Ses un espacio de reflexión y análisis en torno a los problemas de la globalización neoliberal.

Sus contenidos no necesariamente reflejan la posición de la RMALC.

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rmalc@laneta.apc.org