



E-Newsletter, May 2007

The Harper government has its back against the wall on the SPP, energy, water ...

The Harper government is on the defensive these days. With the public and the media raising more and more questions about the war in Afghanistan, the threat of bulk water exports and the lower “harmonized” standards being considered by Health Canada for food and drugs, the government can no longer deny that the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America is having an impact on Canadians’ day-to-day lives.

So, how have the Conservatives responded to the increased scrutiny? In some cases, they’ve abruptly changed their position to respond to citizens’ demands. In other cases, they’ve stormed away and lashed out when challenged.

Here at the Council of Canadians, we’re thrilled to see the SPP getting so much attention in the media. Perhaps the government might want to consider our demand that a moratorium be placed on SPP negotiations until the issue can be brought to a full debate and vote with Parliament and the public. It might save them some backtracking in the future.

We expect the SPP to get even more attention soon, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper set to meet with George W. Bush and Mexican president Felipe Calderón in Montebello, Quebec from August 21-22. The Council of Canadians will be there, protesting against the secrecy of the SPP and its implications for Canada’s social programs, health and safety standards, water and natural resources. We’ll be joining with partners from the U.S. and Mexico to promote a more just vision of North American relations.

To sign up for email updates as plans for August 21-22 progress, visit our website.

Meanwhile, here’s what’s been sending the Harper government scurrying lately:

- [Too hot to handle: Conservative MP shuts down Council board member’s testimony on energy at SPP Parliamentary hearings](#)
 - [Conservatives pull out of discussions on bulk water exports as Council holds “open door” meeting in Calgary](#)
 - [Looming increase in pesticide levels highlights the danger of a “tested once” policy for food and drugs](#)
 - [Are Ontario and Quebec planning an Eastern TILMA?](#)
 - [Hot off the presses! Final report of the Integrate This! teach-in](#)
-

Too hot to handle: Conservative MP shuts down Council board member's testimony on energy at SPP Parliamentary hearings

Gordon Laxer caused a firestorm on Parliament Hill last week, when Conservative MPs abruptly shut down parliamentary hearings on the Security and Prosperity Partnership, in reaction to his presentation about Canada's energy. Laxer, a Council of Canadians board member and the director of the Parkland Institute, warned that "Canadians will be left to freeze in the dark" if the government moves ahead with plans to further integrate Canada's energy supplies with the United States.

According to CanWest, "the Conservative chair of the trade committee, Leon Benoit, ordered Laxer to halt his testimony, saying it was not relevant." Then, "opposition MPs called for, and won, a vote to overrule Benoit's ruling." But Benoit declared, "This meeting is adjourned," and stormed out with three of the four other Conservative MPs.

Observers say that Benoit's actions are virtually unprecedented. And New Democratic Party MP Peter Julian wondered aloud whether the government was purposely trying to silence debate on the issue of energy and the SPP.

The trade committee has been holding hearings on the Security and Prosperity Partnership for the last couple of weeks. Maude Barlow presented on the issue of bulk water exports and the SPP. You can read her presentation on our website. And visit our website to read Gordon's presentation, which was suppressed by the trade committee, but published in full by the *Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald* yesterday, along with an editorial in *Embassy* calling for a national debate on Canada's energy policy.

Conservatives pull out of discussions on bulk water exports as Council holds "open door" meeting in Calgary

In last month's e-news, we told you about the leaked document that the Council of Canadians obtained in April, revealing that government and business representatives from Canada, the U.S. and Mexico were set to discuss bulk water exports in a closed-door meeting. The "North American Future 2025 Project," organized by the U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Conference Board of Canada and the Mexican Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, was set to meet on April 27 in Calgary to discuss "water consumption, water transfers and artificial diversions of bulk water" with the aim of achieving "joint optimum utilization of the available water."

Within days of the Council releasing the damning document, Environment Minister John Baird issued a statement saying that the Canadian government "has no intention of entering into negotiations, behind closed doors or otherwise, regarding the issue of bulk water exports."

The Council could see that Baird's assurances were full of holes, so we responded with a press release, saying, "Minister Baird's claims that current legislation prohibits bulk water exports are inaccurate ... the provincial accords he mentions are voluntary and can be broken at any time. The so-called prohibition on bulk water exports contained in the 1909 International Boundary Waters Treaty Act only applies to waters that are shared with the U.S. and does not apply to what the U.S. is really after – water from Canada's North."

On April 25, the Council of Canadians held an "open-door" meeting in Calgary to discuss the looming threats to Canadian water posed by North American integration. Maude Barlow joined other progressive activists and policy experts to develop a vision for a national water policy that protects Canada's water from diversions, bulk exports and privatization.

By April 27, the Conservative government had pulled its representatives from the CSIS meeting.

Is it possible that the government may be hearing our message that the SPP threatens Canada's water?

Visit our website to read more about bulk water exports, and what you can do to help stand up for public water.

Looming increase in pesticide levels highlights the danger of a "tested once" policy for food and drugs

You might want to think about giving your fruits and veggies an extra scrub when you bring them home from the grocery store. Because according to a recent *Ottawa Citizen* article, Canada is set to raise the allowable limits of pesticide residues on fruit and vegetables.

According to reporter Kelly Patterson, "the move is part of an effort to harmonize Canadian pesticide rules with those of the United States, which allows higher residue levels for 40 per cent of the pesticides it regulates."

The push to remove "trade irritants" like stricter laws on pesticide consumption is coming from the Security and Prosperity Partnership – and this is only one example of how regulatory harmonization under the SPP is affecting the food we eat and the air we breathe.

The *Edmonton Journal* recently came out in opposition to the SPP, saying, "The Harper government needs to step back from fast-tracked talks with the U.S. on a Security and Prosperity Partnership and convey to the other side that, while harmonizing standards is a good idea, dropping them to the lowest common denominator is not."

Are Ontario and Quebec planning an Eastern TILMA?

There has been much speculation about whether Ontario would sign on to the Alberta-B.C. Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA). Last October, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty told the CanWest News Service that, "I think [TILMA is] a step in the right direction for us to move toward ultimately a state where there is free trade actually within this country." A month later, Sandra Pupatello, Ontario's minister of economic development and trade, said in a speech that, "we should encourage inter-provincial trade by matching the industrial needs in Alberta with the industrial capacity in Ontario. We should also explore the merits of joining the Alberta-British Columbia trade agreement."

Of course joining TILMA would be a terrible decision for Ontario to make. In the name of tearing down so-called barriers to inter-provincial trade, TILMA hands private businesses and individuals incredible powers to challenge and revoke local and provincial laws, regulations or other rules that they feel get in the way of their trade or investment ventures. Considering that all regulations can be seen as a barrier to greater investment (or greater profits), TILMA makes even those rules designed to protect our health and environment vulnerable to corporate lawsuits.

But now Ontario and Quebec are faced with the prospect of their own TILMA. Jean Charest announced this month in his inaugural address as Quebec Premier that his province would seek a free-trade agreement with Ontario similar to TILMA, which was signed without public debate by Ralph Klein and Gordon Campbell in April 2006. In fact, Charest's overtures, combined with the "Protocol of Cooperation" he signed with McGuinty last year, follow very closely in the footsteps of TILMA. In October 2003, the premiers of Alberta and B.C. signed a similar agreement and three years later we had TILMA.

Whether Ontario and Quebec sign their own inter-provincial trade agreement, or whether they both decide to sign on to TILMA, citizens in both provinces stand to lose out. Visit www.canadians.org/TILMA/ to see what our chapter

activists have been up to out west to fight TILMA and what you can do in Ontario and Quebec to make sure your province doesn't make the same mistakes that Alberta and B.C. have.

Hot off the presses! Final report of the Integrate This! teach-in

Avi Lewis spoke of the “geeky thrill” that activists feel when we gather together in high school auditoriums to debate and discuss political issues. And that’s what hundreds of people did from March 31 to April 1, at the Integrate This! teach-in.

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

We wish that all of you could have made it to Ottawa for the teach-in. But now you can read about what we heard, what we learned, and what we can do together to fight the Security and Prosperity Partnership.

Visit our website to read the report.

Join the Council of Canadians today!

Founded in 1985 by a handful of citizens including Farley Mowat, Pierre Berton and Margaret Atwood, the Council of Canadians is Canada’s pre-eminent public watchdog organization. The Council receives no money from government, corporations or any political party. To preserve our complete independence, we ensure that almost all our revenue comes from generous individuals like you. **Join the Council** today, and help us prove that a better Canada is possible.

Signing up / Signing off

Use the links below to sign up for more information from the Council, or to remove yourself from this list.