

## THE PLAN PUEBLA PANAMA REVIVED: LOOKING BACK TO SEE WHAT'S AHEAD

Miguel Pickard\*

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During a tour of three Central American countries last March 24-26, Mexican President Vicente Fox formally relaunched the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), which in Mexico had languished for a year and a half — dying according to some, dead according to others. After much fanfare during its inauguration in the early months of the Fox presidency in early 2001, the PPP suffered, if not a premature death, then a prolonged paralysis in terms of actions that officially pertained to it, as well as a long silence from government offices regarding its true intent and probable future.

This essay will review briefly the PPP's evolution over the past three years, the opposition it has provoked among civil society of Mesoamerica, the PPP's new designer image created with the help of marketing experts, and, in conclusion, the lessons that the PPP has taught grassroots movements for the immediate future. Given the numerous and excellent analyses on the PPP<sup>1</sup>, we will not delve into its components here.

### **The PPP is hatched and nearly dies within a year**

According to Fox, the objective of the PPP is to overcome the existing underdevelopment of a particularly poor part of the American continent,

that of the nine southeastern states of Mexico and the seven Central American republics. This area has scarce private and public investment, and its socio-economic indicators are above only those of Haiti and Bolivia in this hemisphere.<sup>2</sup>

Fox draws on concepts that were in vogue half a century ago stating that “underdevelopment” is attributable to a lack of inputs, principally technology and capital. The PPP is designed, then, to build, or improve, large infrastructure projects (toll highways, airports, deep-water ports, electrical and telecommunications grids), that, together with on-going projects (hydroelectric dams, “dry” trans-isthmus canals), would motivate large private companies to locate there. It is their presence (together with the capital, technology and jobs that they bring) that will supposedly lead to “development.” In order to stimulate these decisions, PPP infrastructure projects are designed to overcome the bottlenecks that might cut into companies' profits<sup>3</sup>.

Fox's PPP is not, however, a new agenda, but rather a handy “conceptual umbrella” that brings together several large projects that have been ongoing, or in the pipeline, for years. The Plan tries to link infrastructure projects in Mexico's southeast with those of its Central American

\* Miguel Pickard is an economist and co-founder of CIEPAC (Centro de Investigaciones economicas y politicas de Accion Comunitaria) in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. [www.ciepac.org]. Special thanks to Daniel J. Nemser for editorial support for the English version of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> A number of excellent English-language resources have been published online by the Americas Program at the Interhemispheric Resource Center, at

<http://www.americaspolicy.org/citizen-action/spotlight/>

<sup>2</sup> The PPP comprises the nine states of Mexico's southeast (Puebla, Veracruz, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo), in addition to the countries of Central America (Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama).

<sup>3</sup> For example, the lack of adequate port facilities, to bring in raw materials, or good roads to distribute finished products, are often cited as bottlenecks by potential investors.



neighbors, in order to jump-start the region's insertion into corporate globalization.

Yet this "developmentalist" vision has long been questioned, both by new theories as well as on-the-ground practice, since it downplays the structural problems of underdevelopment related to concentration of economic and political power in the hands of elites and the corresponding lack of opportunities for the majority.

Early on, it was clear to civil society in Mexico and Central America that the infrastructure projects scheduled under the PPP were not concerned with social development. Today civil society is rejecting the notion that "development" is the exclusive reserve of bureaucrats and the private sector. Development for whom, with whose money, to benefit whom, and with decisions taken by whom, are the questions that civil society is asking today.

Plainly put, it's also a question of democracy. If a good part of the funding is to come from public coffers, and if loans granted, plus interest, are to be repaid through taxpayer contributions, then an informed civil society should have a say in deciding on "development" done supposedly on its behalf.

The PPP area covers approximately one million square kilometers and 65 million people in eight countries, around 50% of whom are classified as being in extreme poverty.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the impoverishment of its inhabitants, the area is rich in natural resources (water, timber, oil, gas, various minerals, plentiful biodiversity) and well suited for generating hydroelectric power. For inhabitants of the PPP area, the Plan was yet another neocolonial form of extracting its natural wealth and exploiting

<sup>4</sup> Colegio de Mexico professor Julio Boltvinik, one of the country's leading researchers on poverty estimates the "indigence index" in the Mexico portion of the PPP as 65.8%, defining indigent as that part of the population that can cover less than half of the minimum norms of income and basic needs, calculated on the basis of family income and living conditions (housing, services in the home, access to health, education, free time and basic belongings). See "Planes, desigualdad y pobreza" in *La Jornada*, June 22, 2001, available online at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2001/jun01/010622/022a1eco.html>. Boltvinik calculates the index by means of the "Integrated Poverty Measuring Method", a full explanation of which is available in Julio Boltvinik and Enrique Hernández Laos, *Pobreza y distribución del ingreso en México*, Siglo XXI, Mexico City, 1999. See also Armando Bartra, "Sur: megaplanes y utopías en la América equinoccial" in *Mesoamérica: los ríos profundos*, A. Bartra (coord), Instituto Maya, Mexico City, 2001, p.29: "In Central America 78% of the population lives in poverty and 60% in extreme poverty, rising to 70% in Honduras and Guatemala. The data are from 1990 and if we compare them with those from 10 years previous we see that the percentage of poor people dropped by 7 points while those in misery increased by 13 points, in other words the social basement is quickly expanding in population".

the cheap and abundant labor force of its population. It was also easy to detect the PPP's conceptual links to other large-scale neoliberal plans to promote corporate interests in the region, particularly the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), a continent-wide counterpart of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

The PPP was born with several additional problems, not the least of which was its antiquated notion that people, especially the poor, are objects of "development", never its subjects. The PPP's creators, bureaucrats at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and the Mexican government, hammered out the scheme without so much as a single consultation to measure people's feelings on the matter. Second, the PPP ignored not only the opinion, but also the make-up of the people who inhabit the region, particularly the specific circumstances of the indigenous people who, over millennia, have lived therein.

Third, and most important, the PPP's promoters underestimated the rejection that the Plan would encounter among large sectors of the region's population. Two months after the official launch of the PPP, Mesoamerican civil society already had held its first regional gathering to analyze the Plan. In May 2001, over 300 representatives of Mesoamerican civil society met in Tapachula, Chiapas to exchange information, create or strengthen relationships and networks, and begin to think about activities and alternatives. The PPP was, and continues to be, one of the most important catalysts that can make Mexicans and Central Americans stop thinking and operating solely in their own worlds, separated in their planning and organization by a recent history of differentiated grassroots struggles.

The PPP made it evident that corporate globalization, of which it forms a part, is the same everywhere, and therefore it behooved grassroots groups to respond as one. Since the Tapachula meeting, this regional gathering (now called "With Globalization the People Come First") has been held in three Central American cities, with greater participation every time. The next encounter will be held in July 2004 in San Salvador. The PPP was also a catalyst and motive for several other regional and topic-based gatherings. There have been forums on dams, biodiversity, water, agrotoxins, genetically-modified substances, militarization, autonomy, grassroots economics and others. It has also sparked local, national and regional coordinating bodies against the PPP and neoliberalism. In Chiapas, for example, the Chiapas Gathering on Neoliberalism was formed in October

2002, charged with the task of not only resisting the PPP and neoliberalism but also coming up with alternatives. In Mexico, in March 2002 the Mexican Alliance for People's Self-Determination (AMAP) was created by uniting dozens of organizations in the nine-state area covered by the PPP. AMAP networks work with similar nationwide coordinating bodies in Central America and with anti-neoliberal groups throughout the hemisphere.

Grassroots activism throughout the PPP area soon led the Fox government to backpedal. Elitist in its origin, undemocratic in its implementation, promoter of corporate interests, exclusive of social concerns, particularly of indigenous people, the PPP's nature was enough to stoke the embers of grassroots resistance. In early 2001, when the PPP was little more than a declaration of intent from the Fox transition team, the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) had already declared its opposition, renewed in July 2003 by Subcommander Marcos, "At the very least in the mountains of southeastern Mexico, its implementation will not be permitted for any reason."<sup>5</sup>

Concurrently with the mobilization and organization that the PPP stirred up in southeast Mexico and Central America, a struggle broke out among the *campesinos* (communal farmers) in Atenco, some 10 miles northeast of Mexico City, when in October 2001 President Fox expropriated 15 thousand hectares (37 thousand acres) of their land in order to build a new airport for the country's capital. The nine-month struggle that ensued as *campesinos* defended the lands won through the "blood shed by our grandparents" in the Mexican revolution 90 years before was an example of what grassroots organization, resistance and mobilization could achieve, even in the face of billion-dollar megaprojects. When the Atenco struggle ended in victory for the *campesinos*, with the government rescinding the expropriation order in August 2002, it became clear that Fox's schemes of "development," through megaprojects by imposition and decree, would never work. The option most feared, violence from police forces, was eschewed by the government, given Fox's image, curried abroad as a reformer, in addition to the unforeseeable consequences it would bring, and the uncertainty that it would provoke among foreign investors.

The nature of the opposition—multisectoral, multiclass, multinational, and growing—led to a noticeable disheartening of the Fox administration towards its much-touted PPP, which led to several political measures. In 2002, the head office of the PPP was banished from the Office of the Presidency to a subsecretariate in the Secretary of Foreign Relations, which, at first, alleged lacking the funds to even house the new office. Likewise, the first coordinator, the controversial Florencio Salazar was fired, and later accused of the "erratic and inaccurate information" disseminated on the PPP in its first year.<sup>6</sup> A moratorium on official declarations on the PPP was declared, and the Plan's web site, the only official source of information reasonably accessible to the public, disappeared. Thus the PPP entered a sort of limbo, since Mexican bureaucrats didn't deny its existence, but they said nothing about it, and generated no public information.

Another factor dampened the Plan's aspirations: in spite of the publicity that was stirred up by the fanfare at the PPP's inauguration, it was unable to obtain the financing that the government sought. There were several reasons: the plunge of the Mexican (and world) economy after September 11, the refusal of the IDB to grant financing to the Mexican government for the PPP at the preferential rates conceded to the Central American countries for the same purpose, in addition to the contractionary effects brought by reductions to the Mexican government's budget when the economy failed to grow and the country entered a recession. Funding from the private sector also failed to appear.

Forced to face reality, the government downsized its expectations, since it would now have to finance the infrastructure projects in Mexico with the country's own funds and/or through funding already obtained elsewhere. But no fresh funds were forthcoming, neither from private or multilateral banks, nor from other potential sources, such as the European Union, in which Fox held high hopes in 2002.

During about a year and a half (June 2002–November 2003), publicity on the PPP was virtually frozen, since signaling an infrastructure project was tantamount to mobilizing civil society against it and risking it being blocked, delayed or even cancelled—which, in fact, occurred on several occasions throughout the PPP's territory. The

<sup>5</sup> From the EZLN's web page: <http://www.ezln.org/documentos/2003/200307-treceavaestela.d.es.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> See bulletin no. 329, "Grassroots Protests Force the Mexican Government to Search for a New PPP Strategy", at <http://www.ciepac.org/bulletins/ingles/ing329.htm>.

interim strategy, while another was being designed, was to proceed with the infrastructure projects to the extent that financial and social considerations allowed, but to not call attention to them. Once finished and inaugurated, the projects could be attributed to the PPP, much as Fox did during his recent tour of Central America.

### The PPP's new publicity strategy

During this year-and-a-half freeze, the PPP's "new image" was being designed. It was first necessary to quell the opposition among the governors of the states participating in the PPP, who had unleashed criticism due to the "great misinformation," the delays in financing, the "centralism" with which it had been designed, and the "marginalization to which they had been subjected in the decision-making process."<sup>7</sup>

In fact, in April 2003, the governor of Oaxaca, José Murat, declared that the PPP "is rotten," and "only exists in the imagination of those who are given to drawing up projects with propagandistic purposes."<sup>8</sup> At the official launching of Mexico's portion of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor<sup>9</sup>, in March of the same year, the governor of Chiapas, Pablo Salazar, withheld his state's participation in the MBC until its links to the "controversial PPP" could be cleared up.<sup>10</sup>

In response, a few months later the Secretary of Foreign Relations, Luis Ernesto Derbez, called together the eight governors in an effort to align them by creating a "coordinating commission," whose public role would be to oversee meetings and agreements between the federal and state governments, but also, we suspect, to unite declarations. The governors suppressed their disagreement, and even the rebellious Murat said afterwards that it was "indispensable to maintain

the [PPP] as it presently is, in order for it to receive financing from international organizations."<sup>11</sup>

Nine months later, in March 2004, the Mexican government sought the same show of unity at the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Tuxtla Mechanism with the Central American presidents. One of the reasons for the meeting, according to Marcelo Antinori, PPP coordinator at the IDB in Washington, was to "seek consensus on the PPP with the presidents."<sup>12</sup> The absence of four of the seven Central American leaders was interpreted in various ways, but Fox's declarations put the accent on the unity of economic interests between Mexicans and Central Americans.

The next step was to create a friendlier image of the PPP. The IDB called in the U.S.-based advertising agency Fleishman-Hillard for the purpose, for a fee said to have been close to one million dollars. On the basis of its recommendations, the strategy consisted in raising the profile of declarations having to do with social aspects, particularly with regard to indigenous peoples and the need to hold public consultations on the Plan. For example, in Guatemala Fox recently declared, "The PPP is a regional development process which has to do mainly with people, families and, particularly, with indigenous communities". Days later, before the Central American leaders in Managua, he would declare:

We are united by concrete development plans and projects, in which our indigenous communities participate in their design and application. In Mexico, for example, we have held more than fifty direct consultations of 36 indigenous peoples, since we want development without discrimination, a balanced and just development, with a human face, development that respects the culture and practices of these communities.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding the speeches, there is no record in Mexico of these "consultations" on the PPP or any "concrete development plan" designed and implemented by indigenous people in Mexico.<sup>14</sup> It is true, however, that the Mexican government is holding consultations with indigenous communities, through the offices of the National

<sup>7</sup> "Modificarán la SRE y gobernadores el PPP," *Proceso*, June 27, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> "Lanza Murat dura crítica contra el PPP," *El Universal*, Mexico City, April 4, 2003, p.18.

<sup>9</sup> "The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor is a regional initiative that seeks to conserve biological diversity and ecosystems in a way that promotes sustainable social and economic development." Translated from the MBC's web page at [www.biomeso.net](http://www.biomeso.net) (Spanish only). See also the Mexico section of the MBC at <http://www.conabio.gob.mx/institucion/corredor/doctos/index.html> or search the World Bank's web site, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org) for numerous documents in English on the MBS. See, for example, <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/LAC/LAC.nsf/ECADocByUnid/2B9835DF5991FDC085256D660045E1DA?Opendocument>

<sup>10</sup> "Causa controversia inicio del Corredor Biológico," *El Universal*, Mexico City, March 4, 2003, p.12.

<sup>11</sup> "Plantea Derbez 'relanzar' el PPP," *El Universal*, June 27, 2003, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> InterAction, "Reunión entre ONG y IDB-PPP," February 12, 2004, p.13. Available at <http://www.interaction.org/idb/ppp>.

<sup>13</sup> Sistema Internet de la Presidencia, declarations of Fox in Managua, March 25, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> César Bustamante of the IDB in Mexico City stated in an interview granted to Luca Martinelli of the University of Pisa on March 12, 2004 that the Mexican government had not to date held even one consultation on the PPP.

Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (Conadepi), at the behest of the Secretary of Foreign Relations. But these consultations are “rigged,” according to Gabriela Rangel of the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC), since the Commission makes no reference to the PPP in its convocations and thus participants arrive unprepared to debate the matter in full. The nature of the consultations, unfortunately, does not seem to have changed, since indigenous people continue to receive the customary treatment of passive recipients of what are little more than Power Point presentations.<sup>15</sup>

Another aspect of the new image is the removal of the most controversial projects from the PPP, which are instead classified as “secondary projects.” The most notorious example in this regard is the construction of dams. Notwithstanding the undeniable interest of the Mexican government in building dams on the Usumacinta River,<sup>16</sup> which straddles Chiapas and Guatemala, the official line from the PPP is to deny that the Plan has anything to do with dams. Similarly, the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, at first part of the PPP, has since been separated, since the MBC hopes to promote “sustainable ecological development,” while the PPP only wanted to incorporate the MBC as its “green arm” for what is basically a “project of cementification”, according to Tania Carrasco, specialist in social development at the World Bank in Mexico City.<sup>17</sup>

The pronounced drop in the federal government's budget for the PPP (from US\$677 million in 2002 to US\$78 million in 2004, a

decrease of 88.5%),<sup>18</sup> coincides with the relabeling of certain projects, in addition to the general reductions carried out by the Secretary of the Treasury (SHCP). Certain construction projects may no longer be contained in the PPP, but they continue to advance, since funds are simply channeled to the respective ministry in charge.

Officially, for the entire PPP region, what is the total budget and what aspects are included? Unfortunately there is still little clarity. The Mexican government handles a total figure of US\$4.4 billion, but it is far too low, according to InterAction, a Washington-based NGO, which calculates that US\$10 billion would be needed over ten years, based on projects already approved and in the pipeline.<sup>19</sup> Officially, there are 28 megaprojects for the eight components of the PPP, listed below. (The percentage of funds from the total budget assigned to each component appears in parenthesis):

- 1— Highways (85.2% of the total budget)
- 2— Electrical interconnection (11.1%)
- 3— Promotion of tourism (1.3%)
- 4— Human development (0.8%)
- 5— Prevention and mitigation of disasters (0.7%)
- 6— Trade facilitation (0.6%)
- 7— Sustainable development (0.4%)
- 8— Integration of telecommunication services (0.03%)<sup>20</sup>

The amounts budgeted for each component demonstrate the emphasis placed by the PPP, today and since its inception, on the construction of highways to connect especially strategic or sensitive areas in Mexico and Central America. One of them is the Atlantic Corridor that runs around the Gulf of Mexico, site of some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the region. By means of this Atlantic highway corridor the region is due to be linked to the United States by modern toll roads, to be concessioned to private companies. Similarly, the second most important component, electrical interconnection or SIEPAC (System of Electrical Integration for the Countries of Central America), will in the end create one integrated

<sup>15</sup> After one such consultation in Juchitán, Oaxaca in December 2003, the Coordinator for the Defense and Territory of the Indigenous People of the Isthmus declared “The first phase of this consultation, convoked by Conadepi, the Secretary of Indigenous Affairs and the Development Planning Commission, has shown that it does not respond to the authentic concerns for the wellbeing of the indigenous peoples, but rather it is a disguised “poll” on the acceptability of development models planned for the needs of large multinational corporations who seek to control world trade by means of diverse trade treaties and agreements, be these the Plan Millenium, the Escalera Náutica, or the Plan Puebla Panama. [...] We believe that Condadepi's role should be to contribute to establishing a political relationship of respect with the indigenous people and cease using the disguise of indigenism.” Source: Comuniciqué from the Coordinator, December 17, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> “This is the greatest of rivers in Mexico” and it flows through “an underdeveloped, impoverished part of the country. If we work together responsibly, we can help the region, not hurt it,” Julio Acosta, coordinator of hydroelectric projects for the Mexican CFE (Federal Electricity Commission), told the *New York Times*, September 22, 2002, “Mexico Weighs Electricity Against History”.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewed by Luca Martinelli of the University of Pisa, March 9, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Calculated based on “El PPP en el Proyecto de Presupuesto de Egresos de 2004” by José Alberto García Ponce, advisor to the Chamber of Deputies, LIX Legislature, November 2004. García calculated his figures using (real) 2004 pesos, which we have converted to dollars at US\$1 = MX\$11. Figures include both Program 75—Development of the South-Southeast Region and Program 77—Plan Puebla Panama from the Mexican federal budget.

<sup>19</sup> See “Supplemental E-Bulletin” by InterAction, April 2002, at [http://www.interaction.org/files.cgi/539\\_PPP\\_Supplement\\_Update.pdf](http://www.interaction.org/files.cgi/539_PPP_Supplement_Update.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Presidency of Mexico, “Informe de avances y Perspectivas,” 2002

energy grid from Canada to Panama, to facilitate the sale of electricity to, principally, the “energy-starved U.S. economy.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet the grid will not stop in Panama. Colombian president Alvaro Uribe recently expressed interest in having Colombia’s electrical grid linked to the PPP’s. The president’s wit led him to suggest that the PPP’s initials should now mean “Plan Puebla Putumayo,” for the country’s southern-most province. “We want total integration of Colombia into the Plan Puebla Panama,” Uribe said. “This would begin with the electrical interconnection line between Colombia and Panama, whose initial studies will be made available to us in April [2004], and the second project would be the construction of a gas pipeline, with the expectation that not only Colombia should be joined to Panama, but also to Venezuela. This is necessary in order to link the continent from the United States to the Patagonia.”<sup>22</sup>

### *Can the Plan Puebla Patagonia be far away ?*

In summary, the PPP’s new image cannot hide the obvious: in essence, nothing has changed. Perhaps there will be some adjustments in presentation, with renewed interest in projecting an image of unity, openness, transparency, and decisions made by consensus with civil society. But the basic fact remains—it continues to be a custom-designed initiative for big-money interests and, as we shall see further on, for strategic interests of the United States. An enormous effort founded on a now discredited theory that makes “development” synonymous with abundant infrastructure.

It is prudent, however, to predict that there will be, in fact, greater openness, transparency, consultations, but lacking in substance. The expression of grassroots discontent and rejection will persist, but today the task before the Plan’s administrators will be to channel it towards vacuous and innocuous exercises. Perhaps an amusing example in this regard is the Mexican government’s web page on the PPP, available on the Internet once again after a year-and-a-half absence (<http://ppp.sr.gob.mex/index.php>) with, obviously, a virtual forum, where visitors can express their opinions on the PPP. Unsurprisingly, opinions left therein are largely critical of the PPP, but can there be any doubt that this channel of expression, along

with the “real” consultations held with civil society, indigenous people, women, will change absolutely nothing?

Will the PPP survive Fox’s six-year mandate? Sources close to the government have opposing opinions. César Bustamante, in charge of the PPP at the IDB offices in Mexico City, believes it will, not only in Central America, but also in Mexico. However, this does not imply a change in the real importance it would have for Mexico, since the Plan today has changed into “more of a political mechanism for economic and energy integration.” On the other hand, Fernando Cuevas, head of the Energy Unit at the UN’s ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) office in Mexico City, says that the PPP is “Fox’s idea that will fall apart at the close of his administration.” There is no one behind it, Cuevas believes, not in his party, not in his government. But the PPP will continue in Central America, because it was there that the IDB put its money. In Mexico, it will continue only for those companies who win contracts, for example to build highways in Panama, Cuevas concludes.<sup>23</sup>

### **Lessons from the PPP for the grassroots movement**

The PPP Coordinator at the IDB Marcelo Antinori said it clearly last February: “Now it is more explicit that the PPP means Mesoamerican Economic Integration.”<sup>24</sup> He was seconded by Harry Brautigam, president of the Central American Bank of Economic Integration (BCIE): “For the BCIE, the PPP means an indispensable compliment for the economic expansion of the region and a platform to prepare Central America for its entry into the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).”<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, the declarations are identical to what the Plan’s opponents pointed out three years ago: the PPP cannot be separated from the logic behind economic integration plans for the region, and the world, as conceived by the ideologues of neoliberalism, be they NAFTA, FTAA or the WTO.

It is on these wider concerns that the grassroots movements will have to focus, especially in regards to disseminating information and awareness to greater sectors of the population. The specific

<sup>21</sup> Alejandro Alvarez Béjar, “México en el siglo XXI: ¿hacia una comunidad de Norteamérica?” *Memoria*, Mexico City, No. 162, August 2003, available at <http://www.memoria.com.mx/162/alvarez.htm>

<sup>22</sup> “Plantea Colombia sumarse al PPP,” *Reforma*, Mexico City,

<sup>23</sup> Both Bustamante and Cuevas were interviewed by Luca Martinelli, University of Pisa, March 11-12, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> InterAction, February 12, 2004, *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> “NotiCen”, *Latin America Data Base*, University of New Mexico, April 1, 2004, Vol. 9, No. 13.

details behind the PPP, whether one project or another is contained therein, whether the budget has risen or fallen, are relatively less important, in the face of the threat posed by neoliberalism's concept of development and view of the future.

The threat of such a vision, the struggles that await Latin American civil society, and the challenges for grassroots activists and educators in creating awareness on these topics goes beyond the PPP, NAFTA or the FTAA. The larger problem, mainly for our sovereignty as nations, perhaps resides in the "deep integration" with the United States that is presently being prepared by elites. Mexico and Canada are on the front line. Deep integration as an idea has been making the rounds among strategists since at least the beginning of this century. Fox picked up on it after his election, called the idea "NAFTA-plus" and sent up conceptual trial balloons.<sup>26</sup> It has been well debated in Canada, at least in academic circles<sup>27</sup>. It picked up new meaning after the September 11, 2001 attacks, with the "double-time" incorporation of Mexico and Canada into the U.S. armed forces' Northern Command.

At its simplest, deep integration means the creation of a new space, the "North American continent," where Mexico, Canada, and the United States would be integrated, obviously under the tutelage of the latter. Apart from a single North American military force, there would be a common border, a single currency, homogeneity in economic, security, migration and refugee policies, a single identification card, i.e., the fusion in almost all respects of the three countries. The Mexican economist Alejandro Alvarez says that "the Community of North America is the single greatest challenge for Mexico in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>28</sup> Certainly part of Canadian civil society has understood the meaning of "deep integration" and

has sounded the alarm, in a still weak and incipient manner, to Canadians.

The same needs to be done in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. The PPP's real intentions are a good basis to alert civil society to the impact that it will have on our lives in the short term, but linking it, through grassroots education, to the future awaiting all of us under neoliberalism is perhaps the most urgent task at hand.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Pastor published in August 2001 one of the most complete books on deep integration, *Towards a North American Community*. Pastor is a close friend of Jorge G. Castañeda, advisor to Fox during his election campaign in 1999-2000, and his Secretary of Foreign Relations during two years.

<sup>27</sup> In October 2003, the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) at York University and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) held a public forum on "Canada, Free Trade and Deep Integration in North America: Revitalizing Democracy, Upholding the Public Good", at York University in Toronto. Contact Ricardo Grinspun ([ricardo@yorku.ca](mailto:ricardo@yorku.ca)) for Conference papers. See also the Council of Canadian's web site, [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org), for an essay by Maude Barlow on "deep integration" in "The Canada We Want", as well as information on a 7-city tour of Canada by the Council in March 2004 on "Colony of Country?: The Future of Canada-US Relations".

<sup>28</sup> Alejandro Alvarez Béjar, *Ibid.*