

UNDERCUT:

Surviving the Domino Effect — its fallout



Wendy Holm P.Ag.

undercut (verb): to cut away the part under; to weaken; undermine.
— *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*

Housed within the Department of Political Science, Dr. Janine Brodie is the University of Alberta's new Canada Research Chair in Political Economy and Social Governance.

Brodie recently delivered an important paper at a conference in Mexico. Executive Power and the Privatization of Authority pronounced The Security and Prosperity Partnership alive and well and proceeding –behind the scenes – in a quietly strategic manner.

Canadian nationalist Mel Hurtig offers two quotes from Brodie's paper: From Paul Celluci, former American Ambassador to Canada: "...I believe that, incrementally, we will continue to integrate our economies - 10 years from now, maybe 15 years from now we're gonna look back and we are going to have a union in everything but name. And from Thomas d'Aquino, president and CEO of Canadian Council of Chief Executives, whom Hurtig said has been "pushing 'the new big idea' that will see Canada and the U.S. reach a level of economic and security cooperation unmatched by any two countries on earth": the good news is that the next big idea already exists.

Officially launched in Waco Texas in March of 2005 by Canada's then prime minister Paul Martin, U.S. President George Bush and Mexico's then president Vicente Fox, the Security and Prosperity Partnership draws the leaders of all three countries together once a year to fast track the economic integration of North America.

My March/April WDF column Limp Carrot, Sharper Stick - posted at www.theholmteam.ca - describes the SPP as "a sharp stick in the eye of Canadian agriculture."

A few weeks ago, as a director of Vancity Credit Union, I reviewed Compete to Win, Ottawa's report on competition, productivity and the economy released last June by the Competition Policy Review Panel. Appointed one year earlier by the Harper government, the Panel's 65 recommendations create the metaphorical 16-lane highway, fully serviced to deliver the Security and Prosperity Partnership's goal of North American economic integration. Most attention has been focused on the panel's call to "end the de facto ban on bank, insurance and cross-pillar mergers of large Canadian financial institutions, as appropri-

ate regulatory safeguards already exist to protect prudential soundness, competition and the public interest." (Ironic, no?)

The Panel calls for amendments to federal laws (during the scheduled 2012 review of Canada's Bank Act) to allow "greater competition between domestic banks, international competition and non-bank lenders", higher thresholds for Competition Bureau notification of mergers and a shortening of the time within which a merger can be challenged. They also recommend the "net benefit to Canada" test be dropped.

The Panel calls for increased foreign competition in the Canadian marketplace, recommending Canada eliminate "unnecessary" barriers to entry, increase the international flow of goods and services and eliminate all trade barriers between the provinces by 2011. They call on Canada to conclude foreign trade and investment agreements with all trading partners, impose a competitiveness screens on all proposed regulation and harmonize product and professional standards and legal requirements with the US.

Not surprisingly, a number of changes are recommended to Canada's Competition Act.

The effect is to remove the few teeth that are left and fit it with a nice muzzle. Saying policy advocacy by the Competition Bureau should not be permitted, the panel calls for repeal of price discrimination, promotional allowances and predatory pricing provisions and repeal of conspiracy and price-fixing provisions (moving all but hard-core cartels to civil penalties – aka pay and play).

Canada is also called on to reduce corporate taxes, eliminate provincial capital taxes, and open up Canada's airline, uranium and telecommunications sectors to increased foreign investment.

Are farmers mentioned? Well yes, in fact they are. Obliquely. The panel concludes: "interests associated with the... agricultural sector have... opposed the conclusion of trade agreements that... broadly serve the goals of Canadian productivity and competitiveness domestically. This has served to deprive Canada of the benefits that accrue to the economy through greater competition".

The final recommendation? That Ottawa appoint a Canadian Competitiveness Council (Chair, Board of Directors) to move all this forward.

Our own little home grown version of the North American Competitiveness Council struck by Harper, Bush and Fox in Cancun Mexico at their 2006 Security and Prosperity Partnership summit.

It doesn't take Merlin's crystal ball to figure out where this is all going. The domino meltdown of the U.S. economy triggered by the greed of the sub-prime mortgage fiasco will leave two or three

giant mega-financiers standing. The reason we did not fall into that deep pit – though we are slip sliding around the rim — is because the Canadian domestic banking system is more regulated and has more checks and balances. Say goodbye to those.

In fact, say goodbye to Canadian policy sovereignty. Supply management and Canadian Wheat Board, solid examples of proactive Canadian regulatory policy that sustains farmers and communities, would fall mugged by the wayside under the SPP.

Who is speaking about this? Where is it on the public radar? Mention “Security and Prosperity Partnership” to the average Canadian and their eyes glaze over.

Why?

Because the SPP is a “sleeper? (Who has heard of this?) Because we are in denial? (Won't really come to pass.) Because we think it can't be stopped? (What can you do?) It's time for Canadians to mobilize community support for a more sustainable and sovereign future, particularly as it applies to food.

Canadians have not — to date — put a priority on farm and food policy because as a nation we have never gone without. The big disconnect. Embarrassingly, Canada remains one of the few nations in the world that does NOT have a national food policy. But things are quickly changing, and community discussions around peak oil, peak food, food security, food safety, food miles, food sovereignty and food democracy are moving that change forward. What would a made-in-Canada food policy look like? Something simple like “Canadians have the right every day to an accessible and affordable supply of safe, nutritious, local food produced in a manner that respects, sustains and enhances the land, the farmer, the community and the environment.”

Respect for farmers is central to respect for community. Moving quietly ahead like a stealth bomber below the radar, the Security and Prosperity Partnership is a direct threat to Canada's nationhood.

This calls for more than just another bumper sticker...

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