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Martin-Bush-Fox Summit in Texas THE "THREE AMIGOS" GET IT WRONG AGAIN

By Rick Arnold
Common Frontiers

On March 23rd Paul Martin, George Bush and Vicente Fox met in Texas for a private discussion to promote a deeper integration agenda for North America. What has become a U.S. obsession with 'homeland security' framed these talks and prevented a much more urgent discussion on the deterioration of 'human security' in North America, from taking place.

Talks about North American integration seem to assume that it is a matter for executive decision, whether among political leaders or the corporate sector. Legislatures are relatively marginalized, citizens even more so. As issues of integration and options for its shape affect all North Americans, why is participation so restricted, debate so limited? Civil society has opinions and proposals which could enrich future discussions on continental integration.

Bringing an end to poverty while simultaneously tackling the inequalities that currently exist among the three countries should have been at the top of their agenda. The gap between rich and poor in Canada and the US has continued to grow under NAFTA, while in Mexico more than half the population (some 53 million people) is condemned to live on less than US\$ 3.80 a day. In Texas, the leaders should have committed to making poverty history.

The three governments have professed an interest in combating a growing list of environmental problems in North America. However, the United States has refused to sign on to even the modest targets contained in the Kyoto accord. Canada and Mexico, despite being signatories to Kyoto, are not pushing rapidly ahead with their implementation plans. Raising these issues might have been inconvenient, but necessary.

Canada can boast that we have access for all to health insurance and services, a guaranteed priority for state resources and attention. However, that is not the case for our two neighbours where millions remain without support. Canada should insist that in any future discussions on North American integration the three leaders commit to a continental strategy for public and universal health care.

In all three countries, NAFTA has undermined people's food sovereignty by enshrining privileged treatment for multinational agribusiness cartels over the rights of farmers and consumers. Mexico's agricultural economy is in the midst of its worst crisis ever with 1.5 million small peasant farmers being forced from the land since the passage of NAFTA. The Canadian farm population is being hard hit by illegal border closures against a variety of agricultural products. This accord favours centralized agricultural-industrial production over decentralized farmer production, which in turn threatens rural economies and the safety of our food supply. The right of all rural and urban people to have their basic needs met is a key consideration that should have been taken up in the March 23rd Texas, and requires urgent attention from the "three amigos".

The obvious foundation for further progress on continental integration would be a commitment to democratic governance within the framework of international human rights guarantees (economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political), including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the San Salvador Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the core labour standards established through the International Labour Organization. With ratification and implementation of these fundamental rights, discussion might be encouraged about the appropriate democratic means of furthering participatory debate and shaping future relations among the peoples of North America.

The 'three amigos' should drop all plans to expand on the failed NAFTA model before addressing the damage done by this accord. Eleven years after the implementation of NAFTA, it is possible to measure the impact that this accord has had on the people in each of the three countries. As citizens

we have the right to expect that our political leadership will now prioritize tackling problems affecting social, cultural, environmental and economic rights that accompany economic integration. Before thinking about deepening the process of integration for the three North American countries, it is imperative that the experience under NAFTA be opened up to public debate.

Rick Arnold. Common Frontiers-coordinator
Roseneath, Ontario. K0K 2X0
905-352-2430
comfront@web.ca