

7-29-2004

The Plan Puebla-Panama

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "The Plan Puebla-Panama." (2004). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/9219>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

The Plan Puebla-Panama

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Central America

Published: 2004-07-29

The breach between the organized poor of the region and the political-industrial complex that would have them believe Plan Puebla-Panama (PPP) megaprojects and free-trade schemes are good for them yawned wider recently, as groups on both sides advanced their agendas.

In San Salvador, the V Foro Mesoamericano, an annual event of the Movimiento Social de Mesoamerica, opened three days of sessions centered on strategies and tactics for their ongoing battle against neoliberalism. This year's Foro bore the title "Building Popular Power for the People's Self-determination." More than 2,000 delegates from hundreds of Central American and Mexican nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) attended. Salvadoran representative Raul Moreno said the consensus among attendees was to focus the fight on privatization of water, health, and electricity embedded in the PPP and trade agreements during the coming 12 months. The Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) all emerged as designated targets of resistance (see NotiCen, 2002-12-14).

Moreno was especially gratified at the turnout this year. The number of delegates exceeded expectations by about 500 people. "This is the most crowded Foro we have ever had," he said. It was held at the Polideportivo (sports complex) of the Universidad de El Salvador (UES). The crowd included observer delegations from Canada, the US, South America, and Europe. For this gathering, the terms "neoliberal" and "US" were used interchangeably to describe the enemy, as in "to confront the neoliberal policies imposed on the countries of the region promoted by the United States," as Costa Rican representative Jorge Coronado put it.

The Foro concluded July 21 with a demonstration symbolizing the determination to turn back what participants regard as a neoliberal assault on the sovereignty and development of the region's peoples. According to the text of the event's closing document, the struggle to prevent ratification of CAFTA in the legislatures of its constituent countries is a major goal.

Guatemalan delegate Francisca Pacheco said another was the fight to protect regional agriculture and the determination to reject "all transgenic food." She said next Oct. 12, Columbus Day in the US, would see massive marches throughout the region in support of the struggle. Others are set for Nov. 25, the Day of Nonviolence Against Women, and March 8, International Women's Day. The more than 2,000 participants effectively shut down the capital, bringing traffic to a halt until well into the night as a sample of what, they promise, is to come regionally. As popular sectors become better organized and more resolute, the neoliberal forces continue to operate as if none of this were happening.

New PPP projects continue to come on line. The day before the Foro opened, Mexico's Comision Federal de Electricidad (CFE) signed a five-year service contract with the Comision Ejecutiva Hidroelectrica del Rio Lempa (CEL) of El Salvador. Seen by the popular sector as compromising

sovereignty, the arrangement, for the state electric companies, "is an example of regional cooperation," in the eyes of CFE president Alfredo Elias. This and other PPP infrastructure projects enter the public discourse through the corporate media as having the object of diminishing by half the rate of poverty in the isthmus and the nine southernmost states of Mexico and of improving education, health, roads, telecommunications, as well as electricity. Despite setbacks, PPP backers still foresee the whole project becoming a reality by the year 2015.

Drag them out of poverty kicking and screaming

PPP advocates still contend they will turn around the annual US\$3,603 per capita income and 17% illiteracy rate in southern Mexico, as well as the US\$2,322 per capita income and 23% illiteracy rate in Central America. They say that PPP will bring potable water to the 20% of the population of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua that lacks both water and drainage. These are, they say, the major causes of infant mortality and malnutrition. The emphasis remains fixed on the goals, rather than on the privatizations that have failed to bring these services to the poor elsewhere in Latin America and have on occasion done the opposite, by withholding these services to populations who could afford them before, but later lack the resources to pay higher prices to the private companies (see NotiSur, 2003-10-24).

The popular sectors are also concerned with the debt burden to their countries. Two weeks before the Foro began, Nicaragua announced the signing of a US\$86.5 million loan for PPP highway construction. Minister of the Treasury and Public Credit Eduardo Montiel said US\$46.5 million of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loan would be spent on a highway in the northwest of the country, a network of roads in the department of Chinandega, and a land link to the Pacific port of Corinto. The project will include repaving 160 km of roads connecting to the new roads in Chinandega, El Guasaule, and Corinto. The other US\$40 million will pay for maintenance and repair of roads in these agricultural, cattle, and shrimp-producing areas.

Nicaragua will spend another US\$45 million for its territorial share of a 300-megawatt line to transport electrical energy through the isthmus, another PPP project, scheduled for completion in 2007. Nicaragua will borrow the funds. This is part of a 1,583 km line from Panama to Honduras. The whole project will cost in the neighborhood of US\$320 million. It will go out for international bid under the direction of a Spanish company.

Meanwhile, in the other parallel universe, the one that sees PPP as an invasion, the II Cumbre Indigena de America finished its convention in Ecuador with the announcement that it would oppose the transnational companies behind the Plan Puebla-Panama, the FTAA, and all integration schemes and projects that, in their judgment, seek to consolidate neoliberalism in the hemisphere.

The panindigenous repudiation extends to the Integracion de Infraestructura Regional Sudamericana (IIRSA) as well as any and all bilateral accords with the US. Spokespersons for the group said these transnational agglomerations, together with the various US-sponsored military expeditions and drug-war activities in the hemisphere, only benefit the countries that plunder the planet. They argued that the only real purpose is to create infrastructure "for the circulation

of their merchandise, the stripping of the continent's natural resources, and the protection of the transnational companies."

These developments come, curiously enough, in the same time frame in which physicist Stephen Hawking renounced his long-held theory of the interpenetration of parallel universes. He admitted he was wrong about that. The popular and private sectors appear doomed to pass each other forever in the cosmic night.

-- End --