

Shallow Opposition to Deep Integration? Maude Barlow Besieges Fortress North America

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Background

The events of 11 September 2001 have undoubtedly fostered interest in the concept of 'deep' or 'continental' integration. It is true that continentalism, the doctrine which views Canada as a fundamentally North American society whose future hinges on a close association with American business and military interests (Smith, 154), has long been an essential component of the Canadian political landscape. The succession of trade accords signed under Brian Mulroney's progressive conservative government (like the Canada–United States Free Trade Agreement or the North American Free Trade Agreement), as well as Canada's participation in continental defence (through the North American Aerospace Defense Command), could undeniably lead one to believe that the continentalist agenda was the main way forward.

However, opponents of the North-South axis, variously described as nationalist, internationalist or progressive (Campbell & Finn, 9), somewhat counterbalanced this view when the Liberals held office in the 1990s and 2000s. Lloyd Axworthy, Jean Chrétien's Foreign Minister, then underlined that significant steps were taken by US border states to increase ties with Canadian provinces, resulting in the emergence of regional cross-border networks which did not fit into the logic of continental integration (Rifkin). The 9/11 terrorist attacks halted this activity and continentalism quickly retrieved its lost influence.

At the time, obviously prompted by the case of Ahmed Ressam (an Algerian national arrested two years earlier at the US–Canadian border with a car full of explosives aimed to wreak havoc on Los Angeles Airport), erroneous reports claimed that terrorist hijackers came from Canada. This nurtured fears in Washington that the undefended border between the two countries was a prime security risk. Even though the Bush administration had ordered the freezing of the Canada–United States border for only a little more than 24 hours, this nevertheless led to plant shutdowns and widespread economic losses (NASPI). In the days following the attacks, delays at the border caused parts shortages in both countries, costing manufacturers millions of dollars an hour (ITFR, 3).

The Canadian business community sent grievances to the American government but it was useless given America's predicament at that time. In the words of Paul Celluci, then US ambassador to Canada, the 9/11 attacks gave rise to a new era where security would trump trade. Canadian entrepreneurs were flabbergasted, since their trade dependence on the American market had increased from 75 percent in 1990 to

86 percent in 1999 (Pastor, 90), mainly due to the enforcement of CUFTA and NAFTA. But they were all the more surprised that neither of the two agreements had managed to prevent American authorities from ordering an immediate and unilateral closure of the border. Canadian corporate elites therefore came to the conclusion that it was necessary to devise a strategy which, in the future, would keep Canada and the United States safe from terrorism while keeping the Canada–US border open to trade.

Consequently, several Canadian think tanks strove to find a solution to this new order. One of them, the Toronto CD Howe Institute, came up with a study focused on “deeper integration”, in which the author advocated that the best way to keep the USA from shutting its border with its northern neighbour was to suppress the actual border (Dobson). Canada would need to take steps to erase the border by harmonizing its policies, norms, procedures, techniques, methods and intelligence and security measures to American standards in order to convince the US government that it was as secure in the face of external threats as the USA itself (Pickard).

Despite offering good terms for a deal, it was however rather surprising that the Canadian suggestion first received a cool reception in Washington. But the situation was exceptional, and as months passed, the concept began to make sense. The American government was especially receptive to a subsequent proposal made by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. In January 2003, Thomas d’Aquino, its president and chief executive, launched the “North American Security and Prosperity Initiative” which urged the three North American governments to further integrate their economies thanks to a plan which identified five fronts, namely reinventing borders, maximizing economic efficiencies, negotiating a comprehensive resource security pact, rebuilding Canada’s military capability and creating a new institutional framework (NASPI).

In October 2004, it was the turn of an influential American organisation, the US Council on Foreign Relations, to instigate a new initiative. The CFR created a tri-national “Independent Task Force on the Future of North America,” that was actually vice-chaired by CCCE President Thomas d’Aquino. Six months later, it released its central recommendation which stated that by 2010 a North American economic and security community would be established. This was defined by a common external tariff and an outer security perimeter (ITFR, xvii). In March 2005, as if answering the calls of the CCCE and the CFR, George W. Bush, Paul Martin, and Vicente Fox issued a joint statement announcing the creation of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, described as an effort to build upon and expand NAFTA.

The three leaders also decided this integration would be essentially carried out at the bureaucratic level, so that legislation – and therefore debate – would not be required. Thus, the SPP was completely conceived as an executive-branch initiative (Jasper), without any participation or authorization from the US Congress or the Canadian Parliament or its Mexican equivalent. At most, the legal status of the SPP was that of a press conference (Corsi, 20), which was confirmed by the official American website of the SPP which presented the partnership as a dialogue to increase security and

enhance prosperity among the three countries, clearly recalling that it was neither an agreement nor a treaty.

One year after the birth of the SPP, Fox, Bush and Harper (who had replaced Martin) announced the creation of the North American Competitiveness Council, a working group comprising thirty prominent CEOs whose task would be to consult with stakeholders and set priorities for the SPP. When the American, Canadian and Mexican leaders took part in a major trilateral summit in Quebec in 2007, they welcomed all the proposals made by the NACC, thus clearly signifying that they entrusted the North American corporate elite with the task of defining what continental integration should be like.

Introduction

Although the media first paid scant attention to the birth of the SPP, it was not long before the new program triggered a major debate in Canada. Several commentators were puzzled by the lack of transparency that this executive-led initiative implied. Since the Security and Prosperity Partnership could bypass the legislative process of the three democratic nation states which launched it, it obviously suffered from a lack of legitimacy (Sciacchitano). Because it also deliberately upset checks and balances, there were serious doubts that the partnership had been devised to defend the interests of all American, Canadian or Mexican citizens. In reply to this criticism, the supporters of the partnership understandably stressed that the SPP was nothing to get worked up about. It was not submitted to Parliaments simply because there was no need to do so, as it was a harmless process, mostly concerned with bureaucratic minutiae and standards harmonization (Hayes).

The controversy on continental integration could be construed as revealing a growing chasm dividing Canadian society, reaching beyond the traditional continentalist / internationalist divide. Of course, among those suspicious of the SPP could be found those who advocated that Canada should seek greater independence from the USA and conversely, proponents of the process generally included those who wished to eliminate trade barriers and develop a common defense policy with the United States.

The national conversation on the SPP really seemed to result in a deeper polarization of Canadian society as this conventional rift now received a new dimension. On the one hand, it was established that defenders of a deeper integration stood unambiguously for private interests and economic deregulation, following religiously the recommendations made by conservative think tanks such as the Fraser Institute and by organizations linked to the business community, like the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. On the other hand, there was no possible doubt that opponents of a continental merger fought in favour of strengthened public policies and government intervention, seeking the advice of progressive research centers like the Polaris Institute as well as civil society organisations like the Council of Canadians, a 100,000 member strong progressive citizens' advocacy group which took a leadership role in mobilizing civil society responses to the Security and Prosperity Partnership.

However, did this debate giving a picture of a country in which public and private interests were increasingly at odds with each other and in which people had no other choice but to be for or against the SPP, really reflect current trends in Canadian society? Did Canadian citizens massively conform to this “you’re either with us or against us”, binary approach which, corporate representatives and watchdog groups asserted, was the only reaction to the SPP which could be found North of the 49th parallel?

This is the feeling one gets when reading *Too Close for Comfort: Canada’s Future within Fortress North America*, a monograph which was published six months after the announcement of the Security and Prosperity Partnership. Maude Barlow, its author and current chairperson of the Council of Canadians, wrote it to denounce what she sees as an American attempt to drag Canada into an unholy alliance that would entail the latter’s subservience. In this work, the writer claims that her point of view is shared by a majority of Canadians who unfortunately cannot make themselves heard because they are gagged by a minority of influential businessmen who own the mainstream press.

But the arguments brought forward by Maude Barlow in her fight against the business establishment and its willingness to integrate the North American economies against the people’s will are too partial and her criticism lacks intellectual rigour (1st part); her stance that Canadians are either kept in the dark or forbidden to express themselves because the Canadian leading newspapers are under control is not plausible (2nd part). In all likelihood, the general public in Canada did not have a Manichean approach to the debate on continental integration and the rivalry existing between the various pressure groups is not representative of a similar gap among Canadian citizens (conclusion).

Too Close for Clarity

Too Close for Comfort opens up as an assessment of the North American community project, officially called the Security and Prosperity Partnership, popularized under the name of deep integration and often denigrated as Fortress North America, which is in fact the way Maude Barlow has chosen to entitle the first chapter of her monograph. In this inaugural part, the author endeavours to relate the genesis of the scheme which she also calls the Waco Pact – as it was first introduced in March 2005 in Waco, Texas. What is interesting in these opening lines is that Maude Barlow does not even bother to analyse the content of the venture before rejecting it altogether. The main reason why she dismisses the SPP is that it is backed by the wrong people who, the reader quickly understands, are her political enemies (3).

One can of course defend Maude Barlow and argue first that the supporters are for the most part closely linked to a government that has managed to antagonize nearly the entire earth’s population. In this respect, her charge against a project endorsed by the Bush administration does not come as surprising. Second, one can also support Maude Barlow’s choice bearing in mind that the SPP is not an agreement – although Maude Barlow sometimes refers to it as such (11, 159) – and that there is

no official text. It is therefore difficult to propose a detailed analysis of the terms and conditions of a partnership which has not been properly codified.

Despite the absence of a treaty, there have been numerous communiqués released on the subject, such as joint ministerial statements, or reports to leaders, or fact sheets – as the author is well aware (9,11). This appears more notably on the official website of the SPP, and it would have been worthwhile to try and construe them minutely so as to check if there really is some hidden meaning or scheme behind official intentions. After all, the constitution of Canada is not contained within one single consolidated document, but this has never prevented scholars from offering an extended exegesis of it. Such an approach would have given Maude Barlow's polemical essay much more weight as it would have striven towards more impartiality.

This is not the author's choice as she opts for an immediate head-on collision with the initiators of the partnership. One would have expected the opening salvo to be fired against George W. Bush in the role of the nefarious mastermind pulling the strings of deep deregulation in North America. But the writer turns to different tactics, first charging Canadian leaders and thus giving the reader a timely reminder that the idea of the SPP was born on the northern shore of the Saint Lawrence River before being exported down South. George W. Bush is therefore not the first target of Maude Barlow's barbs, even if the shadow of his friendship looms over the portraits of the prominent fellow-citizens she wishes to slate. This however does not mean that he will be spared as a whole second chapter is devoted to his presidency and the neo-conservative ideology he has supported and developed in the United States (34).

Meanwhile, the first victim of Maude Barlow's onslaught is Thomas d'Aquino, who, as head of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and therefore allied voice of its American counterpart, the Business Roundtable, is described as the enemy within. Then come John Manley and Paul Martin, respectively former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister and incumbent Liberal Prime Minister when Maude Barlow issued *Too Close for Comfort*. As leading members of a party which sits between the centre-left and centre of Canadian politics, but who have nevertheless accepted to side with George W. Bush in his attempt to strengthen Fortress North America, John Manley and Paul Martin spell political treason (3-5).

At the bottom of the list appears Stephen Harper, leader of the Canadian Tories and future Prime Minister who will inherit from a minority government in February 2006. Aptly perceived as a much more serious menace than his liberal opponents, the upcoming head of government epitomizes all that Maude Barlow and her followers despise:

If the Martin Liberals are dangerously open to the overtures of big business to create Fortress North America, Stephen Harper's Conservatives would represent a whole new threat to Canadian sovereignty if elected. This is because Stephen Harper is in very many ways, the Canadian George W. Bush. He is a fiscal and social conservative who would be at home with the American religious right that put Bush in the White House and that dominates the political landscape in the United States today.

Harper is a pro-American Hawk. [...] A Stephen Harper government, he said [...] would root its foreign policy in respect for the United States. Canada shares the same fundamental values in a dangerous world, he asserted, with a country that just “happens” to be the world’s sole superpower. (19-20)

But the feeling one gets when reading these paragraphs, most notably those dedicated to members of the Canadian Liberal Party, is that they reveal more a settling of accounts than anything else. Maude Barlow is a long-term activist on trade and justice issues. Before joining the Council of Canadians, she was a high-profile leader in the women’s movement in Canada, and eventually became the director of the Office of Equal Opportunity for women at the City of Ottawa. In 1983, when Pierre-Elliott Trudeau held office, she became the first ever adviser on women’s issues to a Canadian prime minister. She then ran as possible MP for the Liberal Party, but lost her primary and eventually left partisan politics (Barlow: 1998, 87).

There is obviously some amount of bitterness in Maude Barlow’s criticism of prominent North American leaders and it is plain to see that her main desire is to challenge them. What is striking in her monograph is the frequency with which she uses derogatory words to belittle their actions, showing that she is more interested in trying to offend her opponents than in objectively addressing their policies, which is corroborated by her presentation of John Manley (6). As Tzvetan Todorov has long pointed out, judgements passed on others tell a lot more about those who speak than about those who are spoken of. (Todorov, 28) In fact, the tone and sentences used by Maude Barlow point to the resentment of someone who knows that her political fight will always be limited to a never ending protest. It is very unlikely that she will ever belong to a governing body whose options can be implemented. She is therefore confined to a role of public prosecutor whose main function is to denounce, and she cannot be seen as an expert able to provide unbiased analysis.

In this respect, her monograph lacks intellectual value and becomes a book that only activists will buy to find out what they already know and what they want to read. There is so much manipulation in some of the passages that they lose all credibility. When Maude Barlow quotes Thomas Axworthy as a Canadian member of the Independent Task Force on the Future of North America and reports that he wrote: “I am not persuaded that the benefits of a common security perimeter are worth the risks in harmonizing visa and asylum regulations” (10), thus portraying him as giving a negative opinion on the building of a North American community, she somewhat distorts reality by omitting to mention the preceding sentence of his short comment which says: “There is much in this report that should command support, especially the goal of a North American community that includes a fully developed Mexico. I was particularly honored that the Task Force asked me to prepare a paper on education, most of which was endorsed.” (ITFR, 33).

Maude Barlow’s personal determination to relentlessly combat leading North American politicians and to express a point of view which dismisses any different approach from hers demonstrates that a critical assessment of the SPP – which is very much needed – is not the subject of the book despite the promises of the title. *Too close for Comfort* is essentially a lampoon against corporate and neo-conservative (North) America which is indeed perceived by the writer as an

impregnable fortress; the essay hardly addresses the relevance of a North American community in the sense that the possible advantages of such a project are never really examined. While one would expect the author to offer alternatives to the US-led North American integration, the ninth chapter of her monograph entitled “another path” only proposes, after two hundred and fifty pages of continuous indictment, the traditional antiglobalist vision of international relations and geopolitics, and is more concerned with Canada’s reputation among antiglobalists than with the creation of a possible North American entity, whatever the type (269).

Too Close for Comfort is just another contribution to the fight against transnational corporations to which Maude Barlow has devoted a considerable part of her life, as she makes it very clear in her foreword. This fight, she explains, has meant wins and losses. Her main victories have been the failure of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, her main defeats include the success of CUFTA and NAFTA. In this respect, the very first sentence of the foreword is very telling:

In many ways, this book is a culmination of several years of reflection and action. Along with colleagues in the Council of Canadians and other civil-society groups in Canada and around the world, I have been fighting the forces of powerful corporations and institutions for many years. John Ralson Saul called it a “coup d’état in slow motion” – a bid systematically launched thirty years ago by the wealthy and powerful to roll back decades of democratic progress. (ix)

The emergence of the SPP is therefore not an interesting crusade in itself, it is just an occasion to trigger new hostilities with corporate America, to get a long-expected revenge on big business lobbies. And indeed, what proves that continental integration is just a side aspect of the book is that digressions from this inaugural problem appear very quickly in the text. In fact, it is already brought in the first chapter, which moves away from the question of a Fortress North America to tackle other subjects such as the growing influence of right-wing evangelical churches in Canada (24).

Maude Barlow’s opus often gives the impression of being a catalogue of disparate claims on issues as various as US defence policy (chapter 3), homeland security (chapter 4), social programs (chapter 5), food and drug administration (chapter 6), energy (chapter 7). Of course, it would be an exaggeration to affirm that there is no link between these subjects and the topic of North American integration. But the main criticism which can be made is that these topics are not systematically examined – as they should be – in the context of transnational cooperation. They are more than often treated as national issues:

One by one, Canada’s cherished social programs are being picked off. From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney savaged Canadian social programs, eliminating universal child benefits, “clawing back” family allowance and old-age pensions, and removing government contributions to unemployment insurance. The 1995 Martin budget killed the Canada Assistance Plan, opening the door to massive provincial cuts to welfare, and rolled funding for health, education, and social assistance into one dramatically underfunded transfer payment. (127)

In the case of the social programs mentioned above, it is clear that they are a matter for internal debates. Whether Canadians slashed them because they intended to imitate, or were under the influence of their southern neighbour is an open question. Not everyone will agree. Many will claim that what was at stake was the reduction of a public deficit, like in so many other developed countries, including the more social-minded nations of Europe. The reduction of social programs was one of the ways that were chosen to address this problem. Whatever the answer, it nevertheless remains that Maude Barlow somehow confuses the possible influence of American politics on Canadian domestic issues and the immediate threat that America can represent in the framework of bilateral agreements which can generate conflicting interests for Canada and the USA (122).

Moreover, what best shows that the book suffers from an obvious lack of organisation or an absence of basic outline is the repetition, in the eighth chapter entitled "A rogues' gallery", of the criticisms already made in the second chapter of the work against George Bush and Karl Rove (40-44). Their only *raison d'être* is their extension to the entire top management of the Bush administration whose members are dealt with one by one. The question of the relevance of such a chapter is an essential one. What is the use of crucifying people, most of them famous neo-conservatives and Pentagon hawks, when almost everyone knows that they hardly inspire trust and confidence, and that, even at the time when *Too Close for Comfort* was published, they had already been judged by the international community? To chastise them as puppets of neo-conservative America brings nothing new to the subject, it amounts to going round in circles. These caricatures are just there to please a public of activists who will revel in reading those pages which add volume but not substance to the work.

Instead, a documented criticism of the impact of their neo-conservative philosophy on deep integration would have been welcomed. But as they have not really published anything seminal on the subject, it is an almost impossible task. And one therefore wonders why Maude Barlow did not chose to tackle the work of someone like Robert Pastor, vice-chair of the Independent Task Force on the Future of North America which she does not fail to deride (224), and who is cited in many studies as the forerunner of deep integration and a source of inspiration for George W. Bush. Curiously, there is not a word here on his study entitled *Toward a North American Community*, a work which has become the reference on the subject and which has earned him the right to be nicknamed North America's Jean Monnet.

Maude Barlow's book was a wonderful idea, an occasion to offer a good review of a very controversial project, but she falls into the trap of pleasing a lectureship that is already won over, and the challenging dimension of her opus fizzles out. All in all, it is undeniable that the chairperson of the Council of Canadians has succeeded in building a radical but certainly useful national citizens' movement against globalization and corporate rule. But despite repeated attempts to launch a nationwide debate on deep integration and the timeliness of the Security and Prosperity Partnership, she has failed to involve the man in the street as much as she had when she led the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment at the end of the 1990s. While she gained notoriety among the literati and

in the intellectual circles, she seemed virtually unable to radicalize public opinion and instead strove to find a culprit.

Fortress Media

According to Maude Barlow, the lukewarm response of the general public to her anti-SPP campaign is largely due to the influence of Canadian newspapers and news channels which are financially dependent on all-powerful corporations:

What is so shocking about these developments is that most Canadians are completely unaware of them. At no point have they been asked what they think. With the exception of ballistic missile defence, which generated considerable debate, all other aspects of the deep-integration agenda are unfolding in something close to secrecy. The only sector in Canada substantively influencing the Canadian government on the future of North America is the big-business lobby and its backers in the mainstream press. The voices of opposition to this agenda are regularly belittled even though they represent the majority opinion in Canada. (Barlow, 11)

It is certainly tempting and reassuring to explain that people do not adhere to your theses because of an information deficit. But accusing North American media of withholding information so as to keep the average citizen in the dark is somewhat difficult to believe. Anyone who enters “Security and Prosperity Partnership” as keywords in the search engines of leading Canadian national newspapers like *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star* or of major Canadian news channels like CBC or CTV will immediately be presented with dozens of relevant answers. It cannot be challenged that the subject has been given full media coverage and that the general public has heard from it. Now, asserting that people display more caution regarding the anti-SPP campaign because of a biased information which gives the corporate vision more than its due is maybe a more convincing argument (15).

As Jamie Brownlee has well documented, it is a long established fact that North American – and especially Canadian – newspapers, have regularly lost independence, and that their owners have every interest in backing the economic system which breeds them (Brownlee, 45). If the general public has displayed more moderation in the assessment of the SPP, it is partly because the mainstream press has offered a more qualified, and therefore maybe more influential or trustworthy – which does not necessarily mean more accurate – picture of the SPP. Of course, the reason for this more neutral presentation of facts could be ascribed, as Maude Barlow suggests, to a pressure on journalists who are dependent on giant media corporations and who are requested to give a fairer account of the SPP (13): this argument is often brought forward by activists, but it falls short of persuasion.

If one follows this line of reasoning, it implies that the press, to give a picture of the SPP deemed accurate by opponents like the Council of Canadians, would have to necessarily adopt the latter’s point of view. No journalist working for a mainstream newspaper and showing a professional conscientiousness would ever resort to such a practice that is loaded with subjectivity. If presenting a vision of the SPP that is not in keeping with the activists’ point of view is considered as distorting the truth, it goes

without saying that the mainstream press necessarily supports deep integration, even when it deals with the subject as objectively as possible. Such a way of presenting things is curiously counterproductive for opponents of the SPP who can easily be stigmatized by proponents of the SPP as conspiracy theorists (Moens, 8) and who will be unlikely to win some of the latter over to their cause. It is puzzling that Maude Barlow chooses such an approach which makes her run the risk of losing reliability, especially when she plays the exaggeration card:

This is an important moment for Canada. Well below the radar screen and unknown to most Canadians, a serious commitment has now been undertaken by their government to create a North American fortress with a common economic, security, resource, regulatory, and foreign-policy framework. It is being driven by the mutual interests of big business on both sides of the border, and the foreign policy and security hawks in the White House who want a compliant and well behaved Canada. While obviously sensitive to the growing antipathy in Canada toward the Bush administration, the Martin government, in its heart, is supportive of the call for deeper integration. Steadily and incrementally, it is advancing the agenda of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. (30)

What is even more bewildering is that in overplaying the danger represented by deep integration, and in accusing the media of ignoring that threat, she plays into the hands of American conservative watchdogs like Judicial Watch which has consistently denounced the secretive nature of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (Corsi, 61-62). Indeed, although the far-right in the United States is not opposed to a North American Union for the same reasons than their Canadian leftist neighbours – their main fear is the opening of the Mexican border and the unchecked influx of Hispanic immigrants, it nevertheless remains that they use some common arguments, often based on fear-mongering. The consequence is that it tends to create an artificial common front against the SPP, as if there were some kind of consensus against the project among a strong minority of socially aware North American citizens, even though a considerable part of the opposition to continental integration came from George Bush's right (287).

To put it differently, the Council of Canadians' and Barlow's distancing from the stance of the American far-right on the loopholes of the SPP is not always evident, as it is the case when she explains that China's will to control the production of tar sands in Athabasca upsets the American government and American conservatives (199-202). While she exposes the contradictions of a US policy which favours more and more deregulation but which is at the same time much more protectionist on security and energy issues, she never really clarifies the position of the Council of Canadians on the subject, ie whether it would accept some Chinese presence in Canadian or North American energy corporations or whether it is opposed to it. The will to thwart the projects of the Bush administration therefore lead those very different oppositions on both sides of the border to some kind of unholy collaboration, like that of Mel Hurtig, founding father of the Council of Canadians and *World Net Daily*, a conservative American journalism website which provides primarily Christian Right-oriented news and editorials (Corsi, 54-56).

This is an important issue because in *Too Close for Comfort*, Maude Barlow justifies the absence of a landslide opposition to deep integration in the United States by the

concentration of media ownership in the hands of a sprinkling of giant corporations which control what Americans see on television, dramatically affecting the diversity and quality of available information. To make her point, Maude Barlow takes the example of FOX News as the paragon of the news channel which unashamedly broadcasts government opinion without the slightest critical change, as she recalls was the case during the Gulf War. What is interesting is that she reaches the following conclusion:

Many Americans get their news from FOX. According to Neilson Media Research, FOX is the cable-news leader with a viewership almost two and a half times that of CNN. Small wonder then that so many Americans believed the lies that George Bush and company told about the war. [...] The relationship between the major media corporations and the White House is disturbingly close. [...] The major networks, which help distribute the VNRs, collect fees from both the government agencies that produce segments and the affiliates that air them. (59)

But what is not quite right in Maude Barlow's ideal ideological world is that the apparently more critical CNN has indeed proposed a very strong criticism of the Security and Prosperity Partnership, but this critical examination has come from one of the most populist – in fact originally a fiscal conservative – and protectionist anchors, namely Lou Dobbs. In his program *Lou Dobbs tonight*, he has consistently pinpointed the weaknesses of the SPP, but his barbs have not been influenced by a generous, social vision – similar to that of Maude Barlow (268) – of what future societies should be like. On the contrary, economic nationalism and extreme nativism have been the hallmarks of those right wing critiques of the SPP (Foster).

There is no denying that Maude Barlow's fight to prevent the SPP from becoming an uncontrollable administrative machine is useful, but the type of excessive criticism in which she indulges undermines her purpose, notably when she claims that the Canadian mainstream press is biased, almost comparing it to those American news corporations under the influence of the extreme right. What is worse is that on this particular point, and all through her essay, Maude Barlow denies herself as she does not hesitate to quote leading mainstream newspapers whenever they give some credence to her political analysis (8).

When dailies like the *Globe and Mail* give her the opportunity to cite information that will prove useful to her study, she does not question the veracity of their sources, and accepts their reports as fairly reliable (144, 198). Yet, as soon as the opening pages of her monograph, she had wasted no time in deprecating those nationwide newspapers. This can finally be considered as a major error of judgement because it is the quotations from those recognized mainstream newspapers which give Maude Barlow's opus some scientific value in the absence of proper bibliographical references annexed at the end of her work.

Conclusion

Despite Maude Barlow's strong commitment to generate a grassroots movement against continental integration, the prospect of a Fortress North America has not so far triggered mass demonstrations in Canada, even if some high-profile events like

the Montebello Summit in 2007 have certainly succeeded in attracting considerable public attention. Indeed, as the national poll on attitudes towards trade and the Security and Prosperity Partnership conducted by the Environics Research Group in April 2008 has confirmed (Council of Canadians), Canadians have not been contemplating the issue with their eyes wide shut, but the general public's response to the SPP has definitely been more balanced than that of the watchdogs. Denizens have probably been unable or unwilling to adopt a clear-cut position when tackling a technical process whose ins and outs they do not necessarily master, which does not mean that they blindly welcomed the propositions and aspirations of the corporate world either.

In fact, it seems that the general public has been particularly sensitive to the way the mainstream press in Canada has tackled this crucial issue, appreciating its moderation and following its pragmatism: people certainly listened to watchdog groups when they regretted a lack of transparency in a political or diplomatic process; and they obviously agreed when civil society organisations told them that they should not abide by their powerful neighbour's whims and instead watch their own national interests. Yet they also refused to acquiesce when their American counterparts were portrayed as leaders of an axis of evil, and were not sensitive to undue exaggeration; they expressed doubt when they realised that watchdog groups did not really propose alternatives or when these alternatives were not realistic. They obviously understood that the project of a continental integration implied more than a short-term policy conducted by a hated leader who only wished to please the American business community. The proof that the SPP was not simply the product of a Machiavellian government is that despite all the reserves of Barack Obama during the presidential campaign, the project is still under assessment by the new administration in Washington and there is every reason to believe that it will be renewed, maybe only in a different form (Carlsen).

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