

Posted December 18, 2007 by Dr. Steve Suppan

(IATP's Steve Suppan is reporting from Mexico City, where he met with Mexican farmers protesting the final implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. This is the second of two posts)

December 14th

Mexico City

Angel de la Independencia

Victor Suarez, of the National Campaign for Food Sovereignty, opened the press conference at 11 a.m. under an intense sun that quickly sun-burned the winter white skin of this Minnesotan. Victor described the week's events and introduced the speakers, beginning with IATP, then Professor Suzanne Gzech, a professor of law at the University of Chicago and a human rights activist, followed by Dr. Roberto Escalante Semerena, Director of the Faculty of Economics of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

We read the solidarity letter out loud and then summarized a press handout describing the origin of the letter at the October 24 strategy workshop that followed the "Lessons of NAFTA" conference and the gamut of individuals and Canadian, U.S. and international civil society and farmer organizations that signed the letter. We explained that the letter was part of a modest work plan, agreed at the October 24 workshop on agriculture, NAFTA, migration and the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP).



We also described the bill presented by Representative Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) to the U.S. House of Representatives that would require the United States to withdraw from NAFTA unless extensive reforms were negotiated to the agreement. As the U.S. Congress winds up its 2008 session to focus on the November elections, the bill will become a forum for discussing the increase in economic exiles resulting from NAFTA's failures, in contrast to the right wing demonizing of migrants.

No longer speaking on behalf of the solidarity letter signers, in my statement I argued that there was no legal reason that a renegotiated NAFTA could not exclude the foods in the "basic basket" from the elimination of tariffs scheduled to take place on January 1, 2008. We said NAFTA must be legally consistent with the World Trade Organization agreements, including the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) for which a Special Products designation is under negotiation for reasons of enhancing food security, rural development and livelihoods. If the Special Products provision becomes part of the renegotiated AoA, NAFTA will have to contain something like a Special Products provision to be consistent with the AoA. We urged the press to ask Mexican trade negotiators to present their position on Special Products and how it would apply to the foods in the "basic basket."

Susan Gzech gave a brief analysis of the deteriorating situation of migrant and human rights in the United States, and the precarious position of undocumented Mexicans in the United States. Her remarks resonated with a public that had protested earlier in the week about the Mexican Congress' approval of the removal of rights guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution. The new laws were put forward as part of the Calderon administration's implementation of the SPP's plan to 'extend the U.S security perimeter' and 'thicken' the U.S.-Mexican border with behind the border measures. The new law allows 'preventative detention' of individuals for up to 80 days without accusing the

detained of a crime and allows the Mexican police to search homes without a court warrant. Columnists wrote in *La Jornada* that the new law was the beginning of "hard dictatorship."

Dr. Escalante Semerena, gave a blistering economic analysis of NAFTA, based on the work of several macro and agricultural economists. He said that 2008 was projected to be another very bad economic year for most Mexicans. His analysis came the same day as the United Nations Commission on Latin America published its annual report on Latin American economies. Mexico's level of economic growth in 2007 was about the same as the weakest economies in the region, Haiti and Nicaragua. The chief investment bank of Spain reported that the sale of Mexican private and state companies in the name of Foreign Direct Investment had not benefited Mexico.

Victor concluded the press conference with a challenge to President Calderon Hinojosa to use his powers to suspend the removal on tariffs on white corn and beans on the basis of the Mexican Constitution and Mexico's ratification of several United Nations human rights instruments. Victor said that there would be another drastic increase in the price of basic foods after Calderon administration regulations take effect on January 1. The National Campaign will carry out several actions between now and January 1 "to avoid the disaster." Further Campaign action will be determined at a December 19 meeting, the same day that a protest in front of the Mexican consulate in New York will demand an end to agricultural liberalization under NAFTA. He then declared the fast, "a dynamic fast" whose purposes were known throughout the country, closed.

