

NAFTA Final Stage Blows Up U.S.-Mexican Border

On Jan. 1, 2008, the final stage of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—the flagship agreement of British free-trade policies among the United States, Mexico, and Canada—went into effect. As of that date, Mexico was forced to end all tariff protection of its most essential food production, including corn, beans, sugar, and powdered milk.

This will lead to mass unemployment and starvation in a country already ravaged by globalization and free-trade economics; and it will drive millions more Mexicans to attempt to cross the U.S. border in desperation, at exactly the time that about a million per year are now being *expelled* from the U.S. back to Mexico, and anti-Mexican hysteria

and even lynch mobs are being whipped up in U.S. border states.

Six million Mexicans left the countryside in the first 14 years of NAFTA's implementation, as 5 million jobs in agriculture were wiped out, even before this final blow. Poverty became concentrated in communities where only the elderly, women, and children now live, since the men went to the United States in search of jobs. One peasant a day loses his life trying to cross the border. And hundreds of thousands of others are being driven into the waiting arms of the drug cartels, which today control entire sections of the country, especially along the border.

Starvation is looming, because Mexico already imports 40% of the food its people eat. In 1997, Mexico produced 250,000 tons of beans, but only 50,000 in 2007. And in 2008, the prices of basic necessities are expected to rise by at least 30%, because of the scheduled increase in diesel fuel, gasoline, and electricity rates.—*Dennis Small*

of “regime change”—this time, against his neighbor Colombia. Compare three statements issued on Dec. 18:

- As the Heads of State of the Southern Cone Market of the South (Mercosur) meeting in Montevideo issued a measured statement urging calm in Bolivia, rejecting “all violent actions, which seek to harm the stability of the government and other entities elected by the people,” Chávez declared that the United States should not force “us” [!] to make a “violent revolution” in Bolivia.

- The FARC issued a communiqué declaring the Uribe government “illegitimate,” and stating their willingness to reach a humanitarian agreement to release hostages—whom they have held for years in concentration camp-like conditions in the jungle—on the condition that the government pull out of two municipalities in Colombia, and if negotiations center on the dismantling of the current regime—i.e., regime change. The same communiqué stated that the FARC would free Clara Rojas and her son, Emmanuel, conceived with a FARC guerrilla and born in captivity, and former Senator Consuelo González Perdomo, who had been held even longer than Rojas, if they would be received by Chávez or his representative.

- Lining up with Chávez, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega called FARC chief Manuel Marulanda his “brother,” and declared Colombia to be an “occupied” country, and the Uribe government to be “neo-imperialist.”

That was followed by Chávez's Dec. 26 press conference announcing that his government had worked out elaborate arrangements with the FARC for the release of the three specified hostages by the end of the year: Venezuelan aircraft,

painted with Red Cross insignia for the occasion, would fly representatives of the Red Cross and seven countries serving as “guarantors,” plus media, into Colombia. The FARC would then provide the coordinates of where in the jungle the hostages would be released, to be flown to Venezuela, and received by Chavez, personally.

The guarantors for the operation assembled, with Argentina's ex-President Néstor Kirchner at the head of the delegation. Others included a top aide of Brazil's Lula da Silva, Marco Aurelio Garcia; Bolivia's Vice Minister of Coordination with Social Movements, Sacha Llorenti; a former minister sent by Ecuador's Rafael Correa; the ambassadors of France and Cuba to Venezuela; and a former interior minister of Venezuela. Switzerland joined the operation later. The Colombian government was represented by its Peace Coordinator.

After four days of such theater, the FARC conveyed to Chávez the news that the release was off. Chávez echoed the FARC's charge that the Colombian government was responsible for the failure, and the international guarantors traipsed back to their respective countries, attempting to put a good spin on their participation in the farce, as recriminations between Colombia and Venezuela rose to new heights.

Only a few days later, was the Dec. 24 letter from commander Marulanda to the FARC made public, telling his troops to prepare for a general offensive, and confidently asserting that soon, Uribe would have an even harder time preventing “certain governments” from recognizing the FARC as a legitimate belligerent force—thus triggering the long-sought formal division of Colombia.