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Human Events^{ONLINE}™

Bush Administration Quietly Plans NAFTA Super Highway

by Jerome R. Corsi

Posted Jun 12, 2006

Quietly but systematically, the Bush Administration is advancing the plan to build a huge NAFTA Super Highway, four football-fields-wide, through the heart of the U.S. along Interstate 35, from the Mexican border at Laredo, Tex., to the Canadian border north of Duluth, Minn.



Once complete, the new road will allow containers from the Far East to enter the United States through the Mexican port of Lazaro Cardenas, bypassing the Longshoreman's Union in the process. The Mexican trucks, without the involvement of the Teamsters Union, will drive on what will be the nation's most modern highway straight into the heart of America. The Mexican trucks will cross border in FAST lanes, checked only electronically by the new "SENTRI" system. The first customs stop will be a Mexican customs office in Kansas City, their new Smart Port complex, a facility being built for Mexico at a cost of \$3 million to the U.S. taxpayers in Kansas City.

As incredible as this plan may seem to some readers, the first Trans-Texas Corridor segment of the NAFTA Super Highway is ready to begin construction next year. Various U.S. government agencies, dozens of state agencies, and scores of private NGOs (non-governmental organizations) have been working behind the scenes to create the NAFTA Super Highway, despite the lack of comment on the plan by President Bush. The American public is largely asleep to this key piece of the coming "North American Union" that government planners in the new trilateral region of United States, Canada and Mexico are about to drive into reality.

Just examine the following websites to get a feel for the magnitude of NAFTA Super Highway planning that has been going on without any new congressional legislation directly authorizing the construction of the planned international corridor through the center of the country.

- NASCO, the North America SuperCorridor Coalition Inc., is a "non-profit organization dedicated to developing the world's first international, integrated and secure, multi-modal transportation system along the International Mid-Continent Trade and Transportation Corridor to improve both the trade

Assembly committee: Government Affairs

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Submitted by: Saraine Hansen

competitiveness and quality of life in North America.” Where does that sentence say anything about the USA? Still, NASCO has received \$2.5 million in earmarks from the U.S. Department of Transportation to plan the NAFTA Super Highway as a 10-lane limited-access road (five lanes in each direction) plus passenger and freight rail lines running alongside pipelines laid for oil and natural gas. One glance at the map of the NAFTA Super Highway on the front page of the [NASCO website](#) will make clear that the design is to connect Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. into one transportation system.

- [Kansas City SmartPort Inc.](#) is an “investor based organization supported by the public and private sector” to create the key hub on the NAFTA Super Highway. At the Kansas City SmartPort, the containers from the Far East can be transferred to trucks going east and west, dramatically reducing the ground transportation time dropping the containers off in Los Angeles or Long Beach involves for most of the country. A [brochure on the SmartPort website](#) describes the plan in glowing terms: “For those who live in Kansas City, the idea of receiving containers nonstop from the Far East by way of Mexico may sound unlikely, but later this month that seemingly far-fetched notion will become a reality.”
- The U.S. government has housed within the Department of Commerce (DOC) an “SPP office” that is dedicated to organizing the many working groups laboring within the executive branches of the U.S., Mexico and Canada to create the regulatory reality for the Security and Prosperity Partnership. The [SPP agreement](#) was signed by Bush, President Vicente Fox, and then-Prime Minister Paul Martin in Waco, Tex., on March 23, 2005. According to the DOC website, a U.S.-Mexico Joint Working Committee on Transportation Planning has [finalized a plan](#) such that “(m)ethods for detecting bottlenecks on the U.S.-Mexico border will be developed and low cost/high impact projects identified in bottleneck studies will be constructed or implemented.” The report notes that new SENTRI travel lanes on the Mexican border will be constructed this year. The border at Laredo should be reduced to an electronic speed bump for the Mexican trucks containing goods from the Far East to enter the U.S. on their way to the Kansas City SmartPort.
- The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is [overseeing the Trans-Texas Corridor \(TTC\)](#) as the first leg of the NAFTA Super Highway. A 4,000-page [environmental impact statement](#) has already been completed and [public hearings are scheduled](#) for five weeks, beginning next month, in July 2006. The billions involved will be provided by a foreign company, Cintra Concessions de Infraestructuras de Transporte, S.A. of Spain. As a consequence, the TTC will be privately operated, leased to the [Cintra consortium to be operated as a toll-road](#).

The details of the NAFTA Super Highway are hidden in plan view. Still, Bush has not given speeches to bring the NAFTA Super Highway plans to the full attention of the American public. Missing in the move toward creating a North American Union is the robust public debate that preceded the decision to form the European Union. All this may be for calculated political reasons on the part of the Bush Administration.

A good reason Bush does not want to secure the border with Mexico may be that the administration is trying to create express lanes for Mexican trucks to bring containers with cheap Far East goods into the heart of the U.S., all without the involvement of any U.S. union workers on the docks or in the trucks.



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Pursuing the 'North American' Agenda

The hottest issue at the grassroots is illegal immigration and what our government is not doing to stop it. The question most frequently heard is, Why doesn't the Bush Administration get it? Maybe the Bush Administration doesn't want to stop the invasion of illegal foreigners and wants to declare them all legal through amnesty lite and guest-worker proposals. Maybe the Bush Administration is pursuing a globalist agenda by means of a series of press releases (without authority from Congress or the American people). Consider this chronology.

On March 23, 2005, President Bush met at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, with Vicente Fox of Mexico and Paul Martin of Canada in what they called a Summit. The three heads of state then drove to Baylor University in Waco, where they issued a press release announcing an agreement to form the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP).

On May 17, 2005, the Council on Foreign Relations issued a 59-page document outlining a five-year plan for the "establishment by 2010 of a North American economic and security community" with a common "outer security perimeter" to achieve "the freer flow of people within North America." This document is full of language spelling out an "integrated" strategy to achieve an "open border for the movement of goods and people" within which "trade, capital, and people flow freely." The document calls for "a seamless North American market," allowing Mexican trucks "unlimited access," "totalization" (the code word for putting illegal aliens into the U.S. Social Security system), massive U.S. foreign aid, and even "a permanent tribunal for North American dispute resolution."

Tying this document into the Bush-Fox-Martin March 23 Summit, the CFR stated that the three men on that day "committed their governments" to the North American Community goal, and assigned "working groups" to fill in the details.

On June 9, 2005, Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Richard Lugar held a friendly committee hearing that featured Task Force member Robert Pastor, a professor at American University and author of the 2001 book *Toward a North American Community*. He revealed further details of the plan for a "continental perimeter," including "an integrated continental plan for transportation and infrastructure that includes new North

American highways and high-speed rail corridors."

Pastor asserted that President Bush endorsed North American integration in the Guanajuato Proposal of February 16, 2001, in which Bush and Vicente Fox promised that "we will strive to consolidate a North American economic community." Bush followed up on April 22, 2001 by signing the Declaration of Quebec City in which he made a "commitment to hemispheric integration."

On June 27, 2005, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff attended an SPP meeting in Ottawa, Canada, at which he said "we want to facilitate the flow of traffic across our borders." The White House issued a press release endorsing the Ottawa report and calling the meeting "an important first step in achieving the goals of the Security and Prosperity Partnership."

In July 2005, the White House let it be known that it is backing a coalition called Americans for Border and Economic Security organized by former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie. Its purpose is to conduct a political-style campaign to sell the American people on a guest-worker program wrapped in a few border-security promises and financed by coalition members who each put up \$50,000 to \$250,000.

On March 31, 2006, President Bush met at Cancun, Mexico for a spring frolic with Vicente Fox and the new Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Their press release celebrated what they called the first anniversary of the Security and Prosperity Partnership, and Bush demanded that Congress pass an immigration bill with a worker permit program.

On May 15, 2006, Bush made a nationally televised speech in which he enunciated the amazing *non sequitur* that we can't have border security unless we also have a "comprehensive" bill including legalization of illegals now in the United States and the admission of new so-called guest workers.

Thanks to the investigative work of Dr. Jerry Corsi, we have learned that SPP's more than 20 working groups are already quietly operating in the NAFTA office in the U.S. Department of Commerce, which refuses to reveal the groups' members because, in the words of SPP spokesperson Geri

Word, the Bush Administration does not want them “distracted by calls from the public.” Corsi discovered in June 2006 that SPP issued a “Report to Leaders” on June 27, 2005 that shows SPP’s extensive interaction with government and business groups in the three countries.

On June 15, 2006, SPP’s North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), consisting of government officials and corporate CEOs from the three countries, met to “institutionalize the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) and the NACC, so that the work will continue through changes in administrations.”

What’s Up to Date in Kansas City?

Grassroots Americans of all parties and economic classes rose up out of their political apathy a few months ago and forced President Bush to reverse his administration’s decision to allow a Middle East government to own America’s major ports. But the push for foreign ownership continues: the next port scheduled to be taken over is Kansas City, Missouri.

Even though public schools stopped teaching geography a couple of decades ago, most Americans (especially residents of the Show Me state) are surprised to learn that Kansas City (where the only waves are “amber waves of grain”) is a port. We are also surprised, and shocked, to discover that Mexico will be running its own facility.

The plan has been in the works for at least three years, but it is now coming to light because of the diligent use of Missouri’s Sunshine law by concerned citizens. Joyce Mucci and Francis Semler forced the release of the emails from Kansas City to Mexico, including one admitting that “The space [in Kansas City] would need to be designated as Mexican sovereign territory.” SmartPort spokesmen are now running away from this written admission, blaming “the problems and pressure the media attention has created.” However, the stubborn sovereignty issue won’t go away; the plan does involve setting up Mexican customs officials in Kansas City.

The mechanism for this deal is a “nonprofit” business economic development corporation called Kansas City SmartPort Inc., whose president is Chris J.F. Gutierrez. The deal calls for Kansas City to lease the valuable property at 1447 Liberty Street.

As laid out on SmartPort’s website, the plan is to enable cheap-labor products made in Communist China to travel in sealed “containers nonstop from the Far East by way of Mexico,” through “a ships-to-rail terminal at the port of Lazaro Cardenas in Mexico,” then up “the evolving trade corridor” to Kansas City, Missouri, where they would have their first inspection. A Kansas City SmartPort brochure explains further: “Kansas City offers the opportunity for sealed cargo containers to travel to Mexican port cities with virtually no border delays.”

A key purpose of the project is to take jobs away from U.S. longshoremen in Los Angeles and Long Beach who earn

\$140,000 a year and replace them with Mexican laborers at \$10,000 a year. U.S. truck drivers and railroad workers will likewise be replaced by Mexicans.

The port of Lazaro Cardenas on the west coast of southern Mexico is controlled by Hutchison Whampoa, the same giant Hong Kong shipping firm that owns the ports at both ends of the Panama Canal. The Chinese-made goods will be carried by Kansas City Southern Railway de Mexico directly to Kansas City, where freight will be distributed east and west and on to Canada.

Kansas City Southern was originally just a belt rail around Kansas City but, after buying various Mexican rail companies and tracks, KCS now controls a 2,600-mile artery from Lazaro Cardenas to Kansas City. KCS’s president, Michael Haverty, was one of only five U.S. businessmen who met with Presidents Bush and Vicente Fox, along with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, at their Cancun Summit in March.

Mexico was at first expected to pay for the big, expensive machines to conduct high-tech gamma-ray screening for drive-through inspections of containers, but Mexico declined the honor. SmartPort has applied for a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (*i.e.*, to get the U.S. taxpayers to pay for the machines).

The Kansas City city council has already earmarked \$2.5 million in loans and \$600,000 in direct aid (of taxpayers’ money) to SmartPort, which would build and own the facility and then sublet it to the Mexican government. The cost could go as high as \$6 million because Kansas City has an existing lease that runs through 2045 on the same property with the 107-year-old American Royal, which uses that land for its annual livestock/rodeo/barbecue event.

The last piece in finalizing this project is getting the U.S. State Department to approve the Mexican operation on U.S. soil by signing off on what is called the C-175 document. It has already been approved by U.S. Customs.

Meanwhile, NASCO (North America’s SuperCorridor Coalition), another non-profit business organization, has taken on the mission of building an “international, integrated and secure, multi-modal transportation system” from Lazaro Cardenas through Kansas City and up to Winnipeg, Canada. This will allow Mexican trucks to haul goods along a 12-lane superhighway through the heartland of the United States.

The NAFTA Super Highway

It’s not just American ports that are fast slipping into foreign ownership; it’s highways, too. A Spanish company, Cintra Concesiones de Infraestructuras de Transporte, S.A., has bought the right to operate a tollroad through Texas and collect tolls for the next 50 years.

Called the Trans-Texas Corridor (TTC), on which construction is planned to begin next year, this highway would bisect Texas from its border with Mexico to Oklahoma. Hear-

ings held by the Texas Department of Transportation this summer attracted hundreds of angry Texans.

Plans call for a ten-lane limited-access highway to parallel I-35. It would have three lanes each way for passenger cars, two express lanes each way for trucks, rail lines both ways for people and freight, plus a utility corridor for oil and natural gas pipelines, electric towers, cables for communication, and telephone lines.

Central to this plan is a massive taking of 584,000 acres of farm and ranch land at an estimated cost of \$11 to \$30 billion, property then lost from the tax rolls of counties and school districts. After the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Kelo v. City of New London*, no one need worry about the power of eminent domain to take private property.

The Trans-Texas Corridor will be the first leg of what has been dubbed the NAFTA Super Highway to go through heartland America all the way to Canada. This would be a major lifeline of the plan to merge the United States into a North American Community. Mexican trucks will be able to drive sealed containers up the fast lanes of the NAFTA Super Highway, inspected only electronically if at all, and making their first customs stop in Kansas City.

In response to recent articles in conservative publications about the sovereignty, freedom and economic dangers that will result from President Bush creating the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) in Waco in March 2005, the SPP has issued an unconvincing rebuttal. This SPP document starts by declaring that "our three great nations share a belief in freedom, economic opportunity, and strong democratic institutions." That's false; Mexico is a corrupt country where a few families control all the wealth while the rest of the people are kept in abject poverty with no hope of economic opportunity.

The document states that SPP's mission is to make "our businesses more competitive in the global marketplace." That globalist doubletalk means producing U.S. goods with cheap foreign labor, thereby destroying the U.S. middle class.

The document states that SPP wasn't "signed" by Bush at Waco. But when Bush went to Cancun in March 2006, he proclaimed the first anniversary of whatever he had agreed to in Waco in 2005, and he sent Michael Chertoff to Ottawa to take "an important first step" toward whatever Bush did or didn't sign in Waco. The document denies that SPP's working groups are secret, but SPP won't release the names of who is serving on them. The document denies that SPP will "cost U.S. taxpayer money" because SPP is using "existing budget resources" (from the fairy godmother?).

Thanks to the internet, we can often find out more about the doings of the Bush Administration from the foreign press than from the U.S. media. An article written in Spanish from a Mexican perspective one year ago fully described the plan for the "deep integration" of the three North American coun-

tries. Economist and researcher Miguel Pickard explained that although the plan is sometimes called NAFTA Plus, there will be no single treaty text and nothing will be submitted to the legislatures of the three countries. The elites plan to implement their shared vision of "a merged future" through "the signing of 'regulations' not subject to citizens' review."

Pickard revealed a series of three meetings of a new entity called the Independent Task Force on the Future of North America (ITF). After secretly conniving in Toronto, New York and Monterrey, the ITF called for a unified North American Border Action Plan (*i.e.* open borders among the three countries), and the three countries then signed "close to 300 regulations." The United States was represented at the ITF by Robert Pastor, who has been working for years to promote North American integration. Pickard revealed that Pastor is in "constant dialogue" with Jorge G. Castaneda, Vicente Fox's foreign relations adviser.

Pickard is convinced that George W. Bush is "vigorously pushing" the idea of a "North American Community." Pickard concluded that the schedule calls for beginning with a customs, then a common market, then a monetary and economic union, and finally the adoption of a single currency (already baptized as the "amero" by Robert Pastor).

Is America for Sale?

Conservatives believe that private industry does a better job than government; right? Conservatives are for divesting some government functions so private industry can run them more efficiently; right? Many state and local governments take this idea seriously and, unnoticed by the American public, have been selling off some of our infrastructure to foreigners.

Then suddenly the news hit the fan about the proposed sale of 22 East and Gulf Coast port operations to Dubai Ports World, a maritime company controlled by a Middle East government. When devotion to private enterprise ran up against American sovereignty and national defense, not only conservatives but the American people opted for the latter. The anti-Dubai uproar swept across all party and economic lines because there is a limit to whom we want to sell our essential transportation systems.

A federal agency known as CFIUS (Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States) is supposed to be guarding our national interests when foreigners seek to buy U.S. properties. CFIUS operates in secret, so the public is in the dark about its procedures. CFIUS is apparently also in the dark about what the American public thinks and didn't foresee that the Dubai Ports deal would be controversial. The foreign purchase of U.S. infrastructure has been proceeding at a rapid pace, both before and after the Dubai Ports flap.

The scholar Frank Gaffney discovered that "out of more than 1,500 cases of foreign acquisitions reviewed since 1988, CFIUS has only formally rejected one." Homeland Security

admits that 80% of our 3,200 terminals nationwide are operated by foreign companies and countries.

In June, a Spanish firm paid \$1.3 billion for a 50-year lease to operate a 10-lane toll road through the heart of Texas. The same month, an Australian company bought a 99-year lease on Virginia's Pocahontas Parkway. Also in June, an Australian-Spanish partnership paid \$3.8 billion to lease the Indiana tollroad for 75 years. Last year, Chicago sold a 99-year lease on the eight-mile Chicago Skyway to the same buyer for \$1.8 billion, and the tolls are expected to double. Almost weekly, we learn about other American properties that have been sold or leased-long-term to foreign companies. The tolls from the U.S. side of the tunnel between Detroit and Windsor, Canada, belong to an Australian company.

Why the rush to sell our transportation systems to foreigners? Like most actions that are hard to understand, "follow the money" explains all. State and local governments pocket the money up front and get to spend it here and now, so politicians can cover their runaway budget deficits and enjoy the political rewards of spending for new facilities. They ignore the fact that U.S. citizens must pay tolls to foreign landlords for the next two or three or even four generations.

The foreigners like the deals because they know that, unlike the rest of the world, American law enforces contracts and the U.S. government doesn't nationalize industries. The foreign companies can raise the tolls without having to cope with objections from local customers.

These deals leave a lot of unanswered questions. Texas ranchers are concerned about the use of eminent domain to cut a wide swath through their properties in order to build a very-limited-access corridor on which foreign trucks and trains will transport Chinese goods in sealed containers, uninspected until they reach Kansas City. The Texas governor is already talking about more toll roads through Texas.

Indiana legislators are concerned that the Spanish firm could rake in \$133 billion over the 75-year life of the Indiana toll road lease for which Indiana received only \$3.8 billion. The Indiana Governor is now seeking an I-69 toll road from Evansville to Indianapolis which critics claim will destroy vast Hoosier properties: 5,100 acres of farmland, 1,600 acres of forest, 140 acres of wetlands, 400 homes, 76 businesses, and 135 existing roads. A foreign company could collect tolls for decades into the future.

Orange County, California, was burned by its contract with a French company that bought part of state Route 91 for \$130 million. When Orange County found that the fine print in the contract prohibited it from building more roads, it had to buy back the lease for \$207.5 million.

The U.S. government blessed this rush to sell off American infrastructure on April 30, 1992, when the first President Bush signed Executive Order 12803 called "Infrastructure Privatization." It directed federal departments and agencies

to encourage state and local governments to "privatize infrastructure assets." Infrastructure assets were defined to include "roads, tunnels, bridges, electricity supply facilities, mass transit, rail transportation, airports, ports, waterways, water supply facilities, recycling and wastewater treatment facilities, solid waste disposal facilities, housing, schools, prisons, and hospitals."

Bush's order didn't put any restrictions on who the purchasers could or should be, American or not, or friend or foe. The second President Bush is now acquiescing in European demands to open up U.S. airlines to foreign ownership.

Is America for sale?

Further information: www.eagleforum.org/topics/NAU/

Buchanan's Challenge to Americans

What is the United States of America? Is it merely an accident of geography, or a job market for the world, or a multiethnic, multilingual lot of people who agreed to live under a Constitution? Patrick Buchanan believes that America is fundamentally a nation "held together by bonds of history and memory, tradition and custom, language and literature, birth and faith." Those bonds of brotherhood and ancestry existed before our Constitution was written, and sustained us through wars and economic depressions.

In his newest book, Buchanan challenges us to ponder our national identity, which already existed in the hearts of Americans when the Founding Fathers proclaimed the sovereignty of "we the people." Because we are now in critical danger of losing our identity, the apt title of his book is *State of Emergency*.

Buchanan agrees with Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington that the "central issue of our time" is the migration into America of millions of people who come from very different cultures and refuse to adapt to ours. Buchanan calls the unprecedented entry of legal and illegal foreign born during the last ten years a tsunami, unlike any wave ever seen in the history of the world. The melting pot metaphor is a thing of the past. Today we are admitting people who don't want to be part of the nation called the United States; they want a land that looks like the UN General Assembly. Buchanan's book will convince you that we are, indeed, in a *State of Emergency*.

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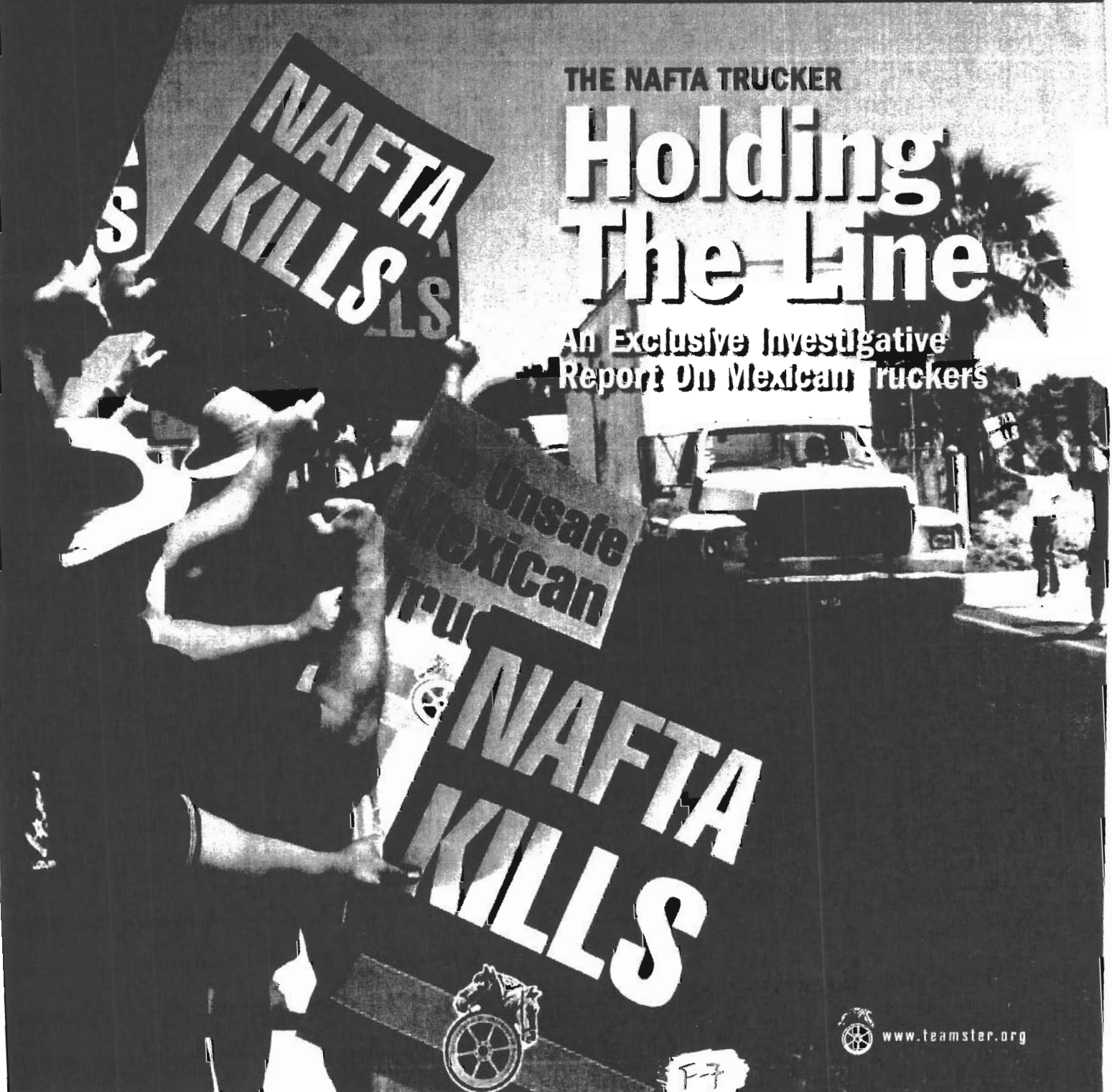
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TEAMSTER

THE NAFTA TRUCKER

Holding The Line

An Exclusive Investigative
Report On Mexican Truckers



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THE NAFTA TRUCKER

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THE LINE

Investigative Reporter Charles Bowden's Story in the November 1999 Issue of *The Teamster* Told of Exploited, Exhausted, Unsafe Mexican Truck Drivers—Seven Years Later, Nothing has Changed

THERE IS A PLAN NO ONE TALKS ABOUT VERY MUCH, ONE THAT FLOATS OVER THE HORIZON LIKE AN APPROACHING STORM AT SEA.

In this business dream, the Pacific ports of the United States will be shifted south to new massive anchorages in Mexico even though this increases the shipping distance by 30 percent for all the Asian tonnage. These new ports will be linked by major train and truck arteries—NAFTA Corridors—to the cities of the United States and Canada. Mexican trucking companies will be bought (and are being bought up now) by American firms and Mexican truckers will deliver the freight and freely drive all U.S. highways. In this plan, the shipping of the United States leaves union ports and the long haul trucking leaves union drivers.

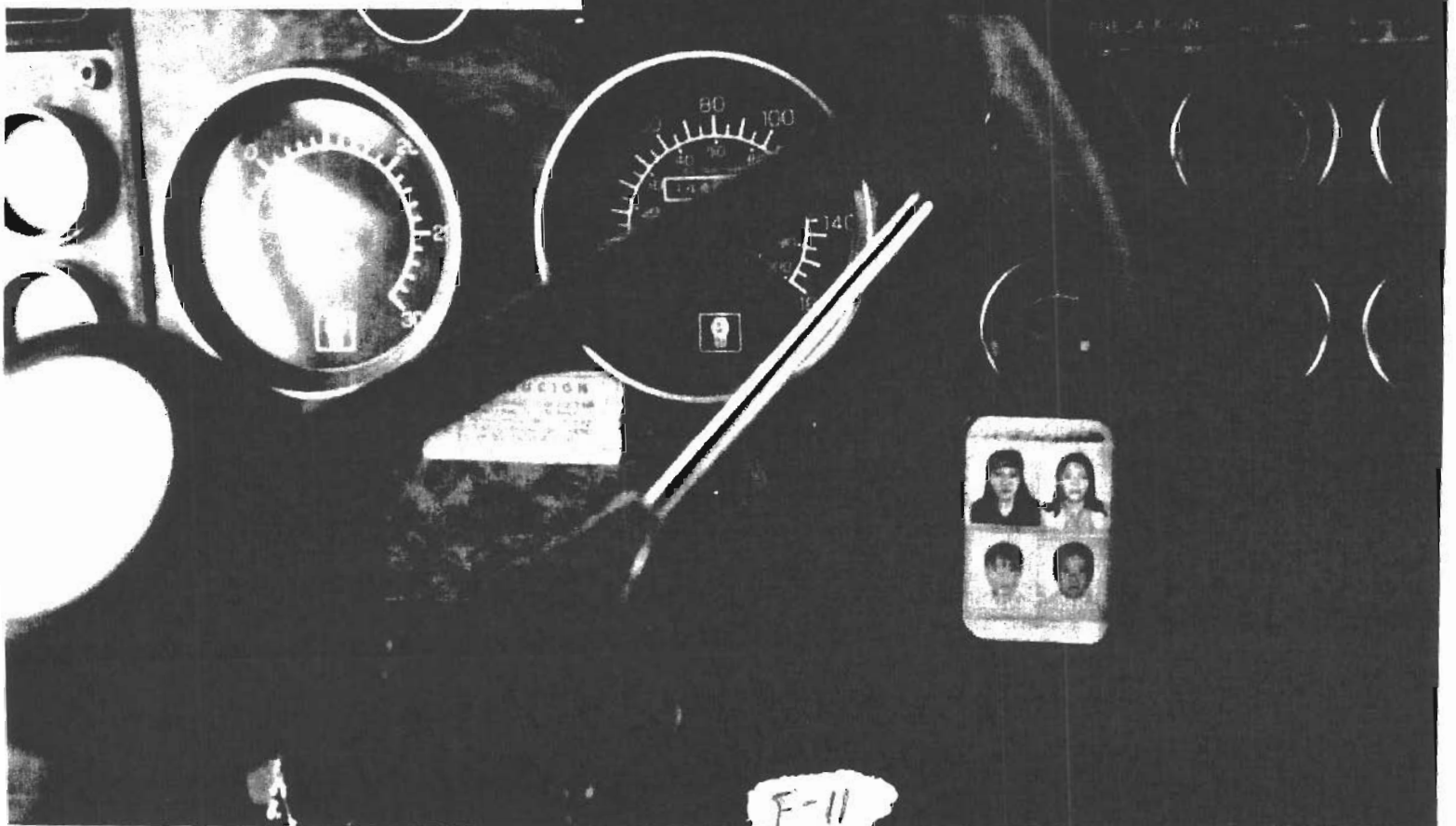
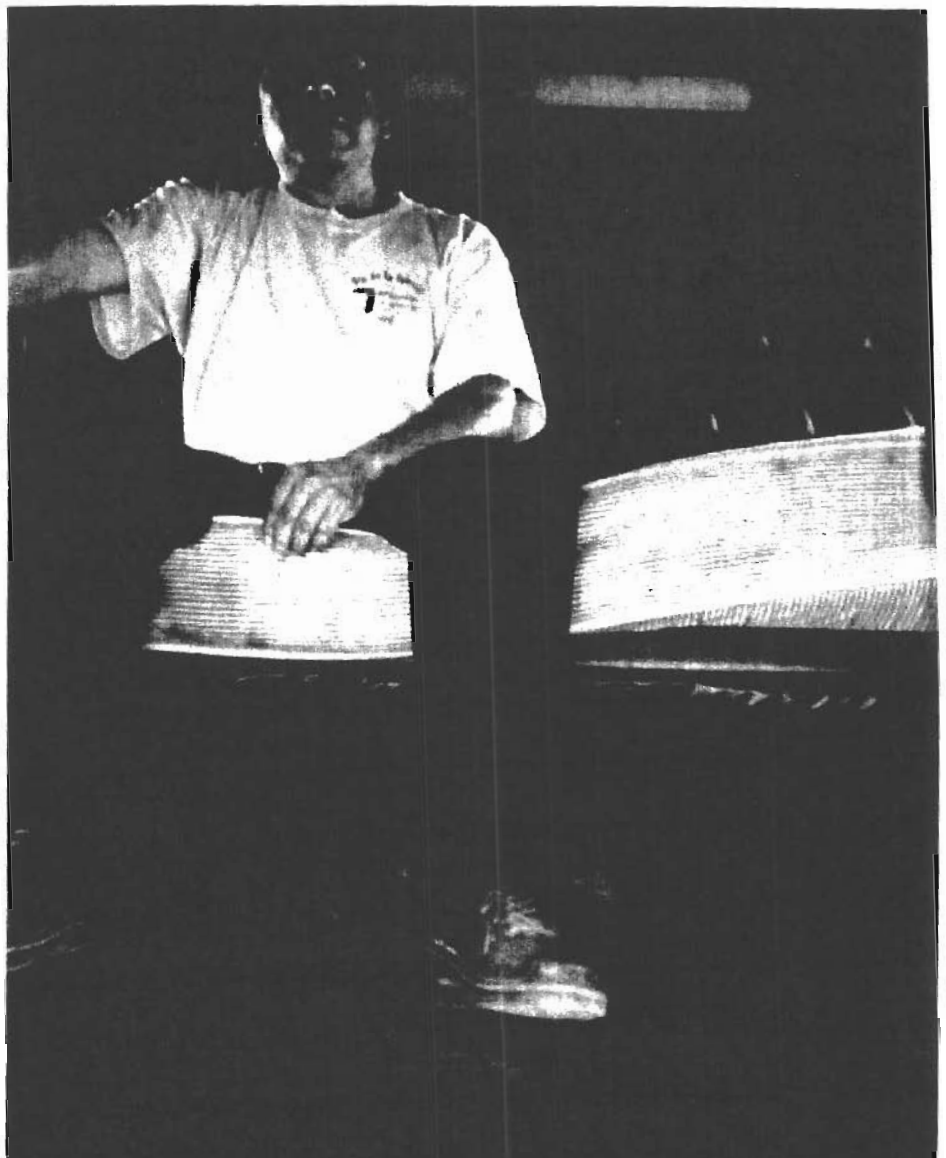
An enlarged I-35 will reach north from the sister cities of Laredo/Nuevo Laredo 1,600 miles to Canada via San Antonio, Austin, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Kansas City, the Twin Cities and Duluth and I-69 will originate at the same crossing and streak north to Michigan. Each corridor will be about 1,200 feet wide. Six lanes will be dedicated to cars, four to trucks and in the middle will be rail and utilities. The goods will come from new Mexican ports on the Pacific coast. At the moment, at least five such corridors are on the drawing boards.

This is the story of some of the drivers who will be used by this plan. They know nothing of this scheme. They are too busy simply surviving to study such matters.

BY CHARLES BOWDEN /// PHOTOS BY JULIAN CARDONA

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"I stand in front of the yard of Trans Mex Swift, an American-owned Mexican trucking company. The traffic of the World Trade Bridge roars past. In less than an hour, four truck tires explode. Mexican truckers are not coddled with good rigs or good tires. One semi pulls over. Both tires on the left rear back axle are gone and the trucker stares at rims resting on the pavement. One tire, he explains, went about 150 miles ago, but he had no money with which to buy another one. Now both are gone."



Professional Secrets

The five men sit at the truckstop table about 20 kilometers below the Rio Grande at Laredo-Nuevo Laredo on the Texas border. They, or their sons or grandsons, may someday be shock troops on the NAFTA Corridors. Just a few hundred yards from where the men eat and smoke, the major highway coming from the Mexican south forks. One road leads into Nuevo Laredo, the other arcs west and connects just west of the city with a trucking center on the U.S. side by means of the World Trade Bridge. This new bridge and dedicated truck highway is an early link in this NAFTA Corridor. At the moment, 5,800 trucks enter and leave this border crossing each day, a trickle compared to the traffic that will pour north once the new ports, rails and roads come on line by 2025.

Their small lunch is finished, an empty liter of beer stands before one driver, and at the moment, they smoke and laugh and talk. For a Mexican trucker, life is an endless highway and the moments for conversation and fellowship can be few and far between.

They don't want their names used because they don't want trouble and life on the roads of Mexico is trouble enough.

"The longest distance I drive," said a driver about 30 in a black T-shirt, "is from Ensenada to Cancun, 4,500 kilometers. Five days and six nights alone. Tomatoes. The company won't pay for a second driver."

Ah, but how can a man stay awake and drive for five straight days?

The table erupts in laughter. The man facing the empty liter of beer smiles and says, "Professional secret."

The younger man in the black T-shirt offers one phrase, "Magic dust."

There are more smiles and mention of "special chemicals."

And then they are off, a torrent of words and quips and smiles, and a knowing discussion of that jolt when a line of cocaine locks in. They are all family men who run the highways at least 25 days a month and they are adamant about two

things—that nobody can run these long hauls without cocaine and crystal meth, and now and then some marijuana to level out the rush. And that the biggest danger on their endless runs comes from addicted Mexican truck drivers, which means all truck drivers.

Dangerous Drivers

The men earn about \$1,100 a month. In Mexico, the cost of living is roughly 80 or 90 percent that of the U.S. The only real bargain in Mexico is labor. Many other items cost more than the U.S.—the telephone rates are among the highest in the world and a sack of cement or a board foot of lumber costs more than in any American town.

None of the drivers at the table has driven in the U.S. save for short crossings where they dump the load and instantly return on special routes like the World Trade Bridge.

The man with the empty beer explains "We make almost nothing—less than \$300 a week. I work 48 hours non-stop. I drive 2,400 kilometers per trip and get no time for turnarounds."

And every man at the table agrees on their biggest problem—the government.

And by that they mean the police, especially federal, who rob them at will.

"If you drive to Mexico City," another driver adds, "you are robbed, for sure. Police are the first to rob you. If you report a robbery, the police try to make you the guilty person."

And now the table is rolling, about the bad equipment they are given, about the fact that the owners often stall them on payment, about how there is no escape from the job, that they all know drivers who are still out there on long hauls at 70, how they have all been robbed and hijacked, have all killed people with their trucks and, given the nature of Mexican police, have all fled such accident sites, that they are all doomed to spend their lives on an asphalt treadmill. And so they take pride, enormous pride, in the fact that they can survive the life that has been dealt them.

"Dust in the Air"

The basic Mexican trucker is living the life that American truckers once tasted before the Teamsters fashioned over-the-road contracts.

There are warm moments in this life. Women.



The men talk with smiles of cachimbas, which means fireplaces. In earlier days on the road, there would be wooden shacks with fires going, roadside brothels. Mexico now has four-lane roads for many truck routes and stouter buildings, but the term cachimba has stuck for truckstops where women and drugs are freely available.

One man says, "Don't print that. If you do, all those American truckers will want to drive down here."

A woman costs about \$20 and drugs are like dust in the air. A Mexican trucker can get anything at a cachimba but decent food. They all agree that the most beautiful women are on the West Coast route that snakes through the narco state of Sinaloa.

For a moment, the men are all smiles and then this moment passes.

"The worst thing," one says with some bitterness, "is not being home. We all have two or three Sanchos," meaning strangers who sleep with their wives when they are gone.

No Sleep at All

Francisco Samuel Angiana is around 40 years old and he is out of sorts as he lingers at a truck stop in Santa Ana, Sonora, about 60 miles south of the Nogales, Arizona crossing. This is yet another NAFTA corridor, a sketch on some future map that will eventually be the route for torrents of Mexican truckers moving freight from the planned Mexican ports.

He was robbed the night before at a truckstop in Caborca, a narco town on the Mexican federal highway that links Baja, California with the Mexican mainland. He points to the hole in his dashboard where his CB radio and regular radio once rested. He is on his basic run from Tijuana to Mexico City. Normally, he is allowed 72 hours for this route, but sometimes he does the express run of 48 hours and then he gets no sleep at all.

"I have 20 years experience," he adds, "Here you make the rules and take a lot of amphetamines."

All over the country, a strange figure has appeared in the last five years or so, La Santisima Muerte, Most Holy Death. She is skeletal, wears a long robe, carries a scythe and holds the whole world in her hand. She is recognized by no church or government. But she is known to all who move down these roads...

Semis constantly pull over, engines idling, and the truckers walk to the statues and pray. They leave candy bars, fruits, small coins and burning cigarettes. They ask La Santisima to spare their lives, to protect them on the dangerous roads, to bring them home to their women and children.

But he tries to live cleanly and so he personally uses massive vitamin doses and various power drinks of caffeine and herbs to keep him rolling. A crucified Christ hangs in one corner of his cab and when he drives he stares at portraits of his wife and three children to keep him moving. On the seat beside him is a laptop computer—he is constantly monitored by GPS and he is never told what his cargo is for security reasons. He drives at least a 130,000 miles a year, is almost never home and earns maybe \$1,100 a month. And he is very intelligent and once planned to be a lawyer before the reality of the Mexican economy put him behind the wheel of a semi.

Pawns in a Game

He has been robbed before and tries to be ready for such moments. He hauls out a small baseball bat, and his knife. He demonstrates how he can do a karate kick to the head while seated behind his steering wheel. He is a small man in jeans, blue shirt and cowboy boots and he repeatedly shows me this practiced kick to within an inch of my head.

Then he brings out his infrared binoculars. At night they prove useful, he

explains. He can see lights ahead, stare out through them, and if he sees a federal police roadblock, then he pulls over and tries to find a way around the cops lest they also rob him. He also carries two sets of identification because you never really know who you are dealing with out there on the road. He's been hijacked twice. He points to the photographs of his family and says, "They give me the energy to keep going. If you are alone, no one helps you. It is you and your truck."

He adds softly, "The hardest part of my job is staying alive."

He has never heard of the Teamsters Union. But he has a brother in the United States who drives a truck for Wells Fargo.

"He is constantly telling me to come to the U.S.," Francisco says, "That you only have to work certain hours there."

But he stays in Mexico.

Francisco is a proud man all but killing himself on Mexican roads. Now he faces a 1,000-mile leg to Mexico City without the security of his CB. He will drive a gauntlet of Mexican cops and bandits. He'll make his haul, have a few brief moments with his family, and then return to the road.

He keeps a gallon of water and a liter of apple juice on the floor where he can reach them. He will never stop rolling until he dies. It is very hard to see him and the other truckers as the enemy. They are pawns in a game that has never been explained to them.

As the truckers in Nuevo Laredo explain their lives to me, lives typical of Mexican truckers like Francisco, a demonstration of 3,000 drivers takes place at the World Trade Bridge. The truckers protest the 90-minute wait they face to cross the bridge, a delay that cuts into their earnings since they are not paid by the hour. No one at the table mentions this since no one at the table believes anything will ever get better.

La Santisima

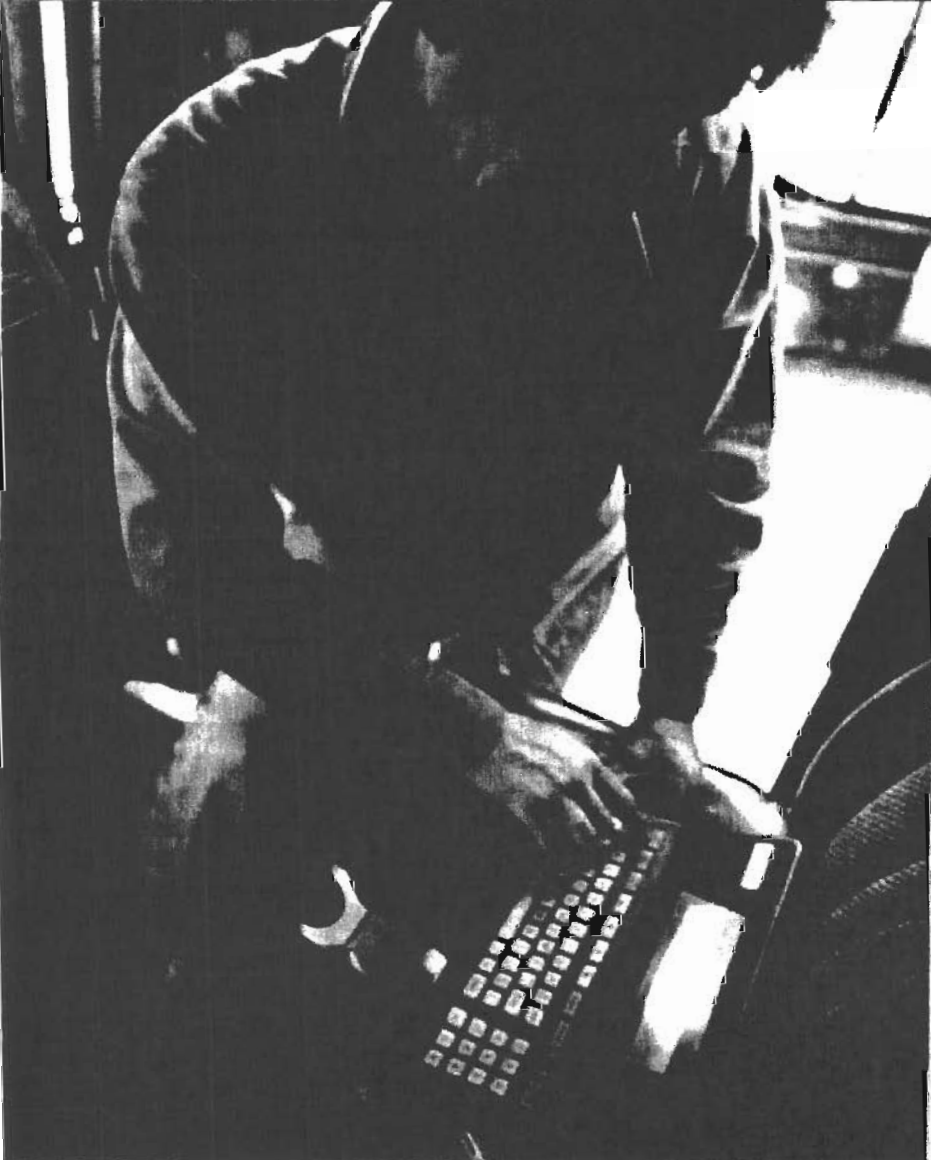
I stand in front of the yard of Trans Mex Swift, an American-owned Mexican truck-



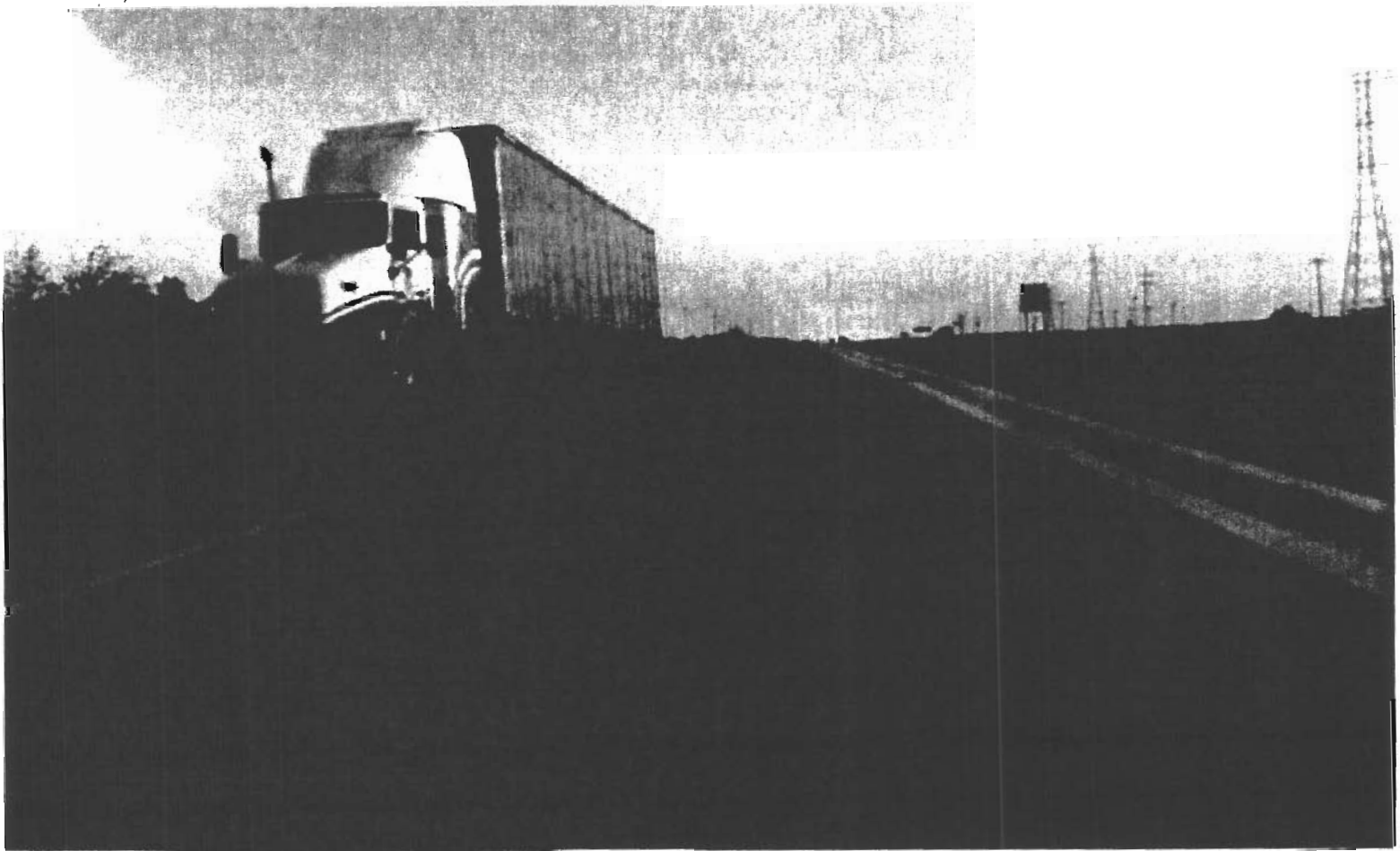
Fighting For Safe Borders

The Teamsters Union continues to be the major advocate supporting regulatory action and legislative initiatives to ensure that only those foreign trucks that meet all U.S. vehicle safety and emissions standards be permitted access to our nation's highways.

The lack of an adequate drug and alcohol testing program, the inability of DOT safety inspectors to have access to Mexican facilities to conduct safety fitness reviews, the fact that hours-of-service and logbook regulations are not enforced, are just some of the vehicle and driver standards that need to be addressed before Mexican trucks are permitted to travel beyond the commercial border zones.



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False Promises, Lost Jobs

The Legacy of the North American Free Trade Agreement

When Congress was debating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, supporters of the trade pact swarmed to Capitol Hill promising job growth and an economic boon for U.S. workers. However, more than a decade of statistics has proven what the Teamsters and other opponents said at the time—that NAFTA would prove a disaster for working families everywhere.

While the pro-NAFTA crowd promised that the trade deal would create 170,000 jobs annually, the U.S. has lost 3 million jobs in manufacturing alone since its passage—one in six jobs in that sector. According to the government's own program to track workers who lose their jobs as a direct result of NAFTA, more than a half million Americans were put out of work specifically due to that trade deal.

Trade Deficit

Flowery predictions about increased trade surpluses for the United States have also wilted over time. NAFTA supporters claimed that the deal would create a \$9 billion trade surplus with Mexico within two years. However, the U.S. actually built a \$15 billion trade deficit with Mexico in that time period—a figure that has more than doubled in ensuing years.

"If there's a positive side to the disastrous legacy of NAFTA, it's that it has made it a little harder for the free trade cabal to wrap their lies around subsequent job-killing deals," said Jim Hoffa, Teamsters General President. "While the House and Senate still have a majority who continue to support the free trade agenda, their ranks have shrunk over the years—sometimes due to members of Congress changing their minds and sometimes due to voters changing their member of Congress."

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