Jackhammering Globalization:
Resisting I-69,
the NAFTA Superhighway
I-69 in the Midwest

Within Indiana, I-69 is a proposed new terrain highway providing a direct connection between Indianapolis and Evansville. While several roads already connect these two cities, proponents of I-69 claim that the new highway would cut down travel time by 25 minutes (realistically closer to 10). The corporations and government agencies pushing the I-69 agenda argue that if the highway is built, southwestern Indiana's economy will experience immense and rapid growth. In reality, these 10 minutes mean nothing to the local people but billions of dollars to corporations.

I-69 Proposed Route

I-69, in its current "preferred" route, would be intensely destructive to all of Indiana. In terms of economics, I-69 is slated to cost the state two billion dollars, two billion dollars that the state does not have. From a social perspective, it will bring about the forced relocation of hundreds of families and the seizure of thousands of acres of old family farms. Equally devastating in its environmental impact, it will cut down around 1150 acres of forest and destroy more than 300 acres of rich wetlands. Additionally, in order to "minimize" the impact of I-69 on the endangered Indiana Bat, the state is already logging its habitat to encourage it to find greener pastures.

But this is only within Indiana. I-69, with its stated purpose being to "connect the three North American trading partners of Canada, the United States and Mexico by means of an Interstate highway located in the states of Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas," is the proposed realization of a NAFTA super-highway. This NAFTA highway, in conjunction with the proposed Plan Puebla Panama, would bring about economic, social, and environmental wreckage.
I-69, Plan Puebla Panama, and Capitalist Globalization

In the years since it has been instated, NAFTA has brought about job losses in the U.S. and increased exploitation of persons and resources in Mexico, as well as a loosening of environmental policies throughout the free trade area. I-69 would only serve to augment NAFTA’s capacity for destruction by providing a straight shot for job migration and movement of capital.

While Mexico’s low wages and labor standards grant it preferred status as a center of production within the free trade area, the inclusion of the rest of Central and South America in the free trade zone through the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) would threaten this position. Workers in countries with even lower wages and labor standards would be made all the more available for corporate exploitation. To counter this threat, Mexico has thrown its support behind the Plan Puebla Panama, a highway connecting the Mexican state of Puebla directly to Panama, making Mexico additionally attractive to corporate investors. The combination of I-69 and Plan Puebla Panama would create a direct highway system from the Canadian border through the entirety of Mesoamerica.
Plan Puebla Panama is hailed as a way to foster economic growth in rural Mesoamerica, not only as a transportation project but as a “development” project. The facts prove otherwise: Of the $20 billion projected cost, 90% is specifically directed towards transportation infrastructure. The governments and corporations pushing Plan Puebla Panama are not concerned with sustainable economic development, but with the creation of a system of roads to replace the increasingly obsolete Panama Canal and allow the quick transportation of commodities produced in the sweatshops of Mesoamerica to consumers in the Global North. Whatever “development” does come with Plan Puebla Panama will address not human needs, but the whims of the global capitalist economy: hydroelectric dams being built on indigenous lands in southern Mexico and Guatemala will not power indigenous communities, but rather additional maquiladora sectors; the biological reserve promoted as the “greener side” of Plan Puebla Panama is not being designed to counteract the environmental devastation that Mesoamerica will experience as it is forced to industrialize, but is rather being underwritten by the Grupo Pulsar, a multinational biotech firm that hopes to pirate the genetic diversity of the region; Plan Puebla Panama is not promising open borders with its highways, allowing people the same freedoms accorded to capital, but rather the militarization of borders, allowing Mexico to protect the privileged status it gained with NAFTA, even as the free trade area is expanded by the passage of the FTAA.

These road projects are being built to suit the purposes of capital. As the economy becomes more global, infrastructure is needed to facilitate the transportation of commodities across borders. Highway development also continues a hidden subsidy to the automobile industry, an essential element of capitalist production in the U.S. and around the world. We should hold no illusions that I-69 will benefit people in the Midwestern U.S.: after all, building more roads does not decrease traffic congestion, but encourages additional use of cars, thus causing an equivalent level of congestion but a raised level of pollution. Building more roads will not improve the quality of life for poor people in Central America: it will instead further their exploitation by facilitating the creation of maquiladoras and corporate robbery of natural resources. Roads are the veins of capital, the life support system for corporate globalization. They should become a primary target as we confront global capitalism and strive to create another world.
Call to Resist I-69: Roadless Summer

May - August 2005
Indiana

I-69 - a superhighway project stretching from Canada, through the Midwest U.S., to Mexico - is an important component of both NAFTA and the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Planned to run from Michigan to Texas, and eventually connecting to the highways of the notorious Plan Puebla Panama, it is projected to pave over tens of thousands of acres of wilderness and displace many hundreds of people.

I-69 can still be stopped.

This summer, people from across the country will converge in Indiana, where the construction of I-69 has been contested and delayed for more than a decade. Embracing a variety of approaches, we will finally put a stop to I-69 and deal a crucial blow to the FTAA and the PPP.

To learn more, email Roadblock Earth First! at roadblockef@yahoo.com

Resources

Road Block Earth First! (contact RBEF! for literature, posters, and research help)
www.roadless-summer.org

BLA (The consulting firm that is a major advocate for I-69 as well as being responsible for planning I-69’s route)
www.blainc.com

Environmental Impact Statement (BLA’s state-commissioned study)
http://deis.i69indyevn.org/FEIS/Summary/ChapterSUM_01.html

ACERCA (Excellent resource on Plan Puebla Panama and free trade issues)
www.acerca.org

FTAA Resistance (Great resource on many different issues surrounding corporate globalization and action against it)
www.ftaareresistance.org