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MIAMI

Union leaders protest summit

South Florida union leaders rally members to join demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas meeting Nov. 17-21.

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AFL-CIO South Florida President Fred Frost, leading a group of union workers Friday at Jackson Memorial Hospital, officially launched what is expected to be a series of massive protests against this month's trade summit in Miami.

The union, which represents more than 100,000 people in South Florida, is part of a coalition of activists planning a march through downtown Miami on Nov. 20 -- the first day ministers from 34 countries will gather in Miami to discuss the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Police estimate 25,000 people will participate in the demonstration, with thousands more taking part in other protests during the week.

"We'll be marching with truck drivers and electrical workers, nurses and teachers, healthcare workers and Teamsters, all kinds of working people," Frost said.

The message they hope to send the Bush administration: "The FTAA isn't fair trade," he said.

The FTAA opposition -- a label that covers everything from established labor unions and environmental organizations to informal "affinity" groups of students and self-described anarchists -- is hoping to cause enough of a disturbance to stop the FTAA meeting and keep Miami from becoming the FTAA's headquarters.

The FTAA ministers will meet at the Hotel Inter-Continental Nov. 17-21 to discuss creating the world's largest trading zone, covering the entire Western Hemisphere except for Cuba.

Protesters are planning three marches, a People's Gala -- a musical festival at Bayfront Park Amphitheater -- and several teach-ins on topics like "sustainability and democracy" and "globalization in the African world."

Friday, Frost demanded the FTAA place greater emphasis on the rights of workers, immigrants, the environment and democracy. Working people have

been shut out of trade talks, he said.

"Trade agreements should be about people, not just corporate profits," Frost said, standing before a group that included representatives of South Florida Jobs with Justice, the Service Employees International Union, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The union also is organizing a drive for signatures on ballots calling for a halt to the FTAA. The ballots will be sent to the Bush administration.

"We're not against trade, we just want fair trade," Frost said.