

Citizens Trade Digest, March 22, 2006

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1) US-Oman Free Trade Agreement Could Come to Congress Soon

The Oman Free Trade Agreement could come before Congress this spring. While the deal is economically of very small significance, it will engender a significant Congressional fight because it combines the NAFTA/CAFTA model with Oman's exceptionally substandard labor conditions. Workers in Oman are forbidden to freely organize unions and to engage in collective bargaining.

"There's no pass on this one," said AFL-CIO Policy Director Thea Lee. "We're going to vigorously oppose this FTA." Friends of the Earth's David Waskow notes that OFTA goes even further than NAFTA and CAFTA in giving foreign investors the right to challenge U.S. environmental protections.

Congress Should Reject the Oman Free Trade Agreement

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/oman_talking_points.pdf

Oman FTA Inadequate Labor Provisions & Oman's Severely Sub-Standard Labor Law and Conditions

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/oman_labor.pdf

Report of the Labor Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations and Trade Policy on the Oman FTA

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/omanLACreport_11152005.pdf

2) Peru Free Trade Agreement

The Peru Free Trade Agreement may also face a Congressional vote in the coming months. PFTA was intended to be part of a greater Andean Free Trade Agreement to include Colombia and Ecuador. The Bush administration has also completed a deal with Colombia, but remains undecided whether the two (and a possible deal with Ecuador) should be brought to Congress separately or together. If the administration decides to lump them, Congress is unlikely to see legislation before the election. However if it decides to do Peru alone – a decision that would be aimed at maintaining momentum for NAFTA-model trade deals – Congress could receive legislation anytime after the PFTA is formally signed on April 6.

Opposition to PFTA has been voiced among key Ways and Means Democrats including such as Charles Rangel (D-NY), Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Sander Levin (D-MI), as well as by the Teamsters, AFL-CIO,

Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Defenders of Wildlife, and Earth Justice. The State Department's annual country report cites major problems with labor practices in Peru, including half of Peruvian workers receiving less than minimum wage, rampant illegal child labor, and widespread use of temporary worker contracts designed to prevent unionization. Rep. Rangel, the top Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, said he "cannot believe our government would move forward with a free trade agreement that ignores these problems so clearly outlined by our very own State Department."

Peruvian civil society is also mobilizing against PFTA. A national strike has been announced by agricultural organizations for March 29th and 30th.

TAKE ACTION:

Oppose the Peru/Andean Free Trade Agreement

http://www.democracyinaction.org/CTC/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=2232

Stop the administration from trading away our environment

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/sierraclub_peruftaactionalert_022006.pdf

Key Reasons to Oppose the Peru FTA

<http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/reasonstoopposeperufta.pdf>

Letter from US Environmental Groups Opposing the US-Peru FTA

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/letter_envirogroupsopposeperufta_03102006.pdf

Rep. Rangel & Rep. Cardin Point to Neglect of Bush Administration to address Labor Rights in the Peru FTA

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/wm31_democrats/060310_bush_administration_cannot_fail_to_address_labor_rights_in_peru_fta.html

Colombia, US-Trade Partner Violates Labor Rights Says US State Department Study

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/bloomberg_colombiaustradepartnerviolateslaborrights_03082006.pdf

Report of the Labor Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations and Trade Policy

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/peruLACreport_02012006.pdf

A Free Trade Agreement Made to Order for the Pharmaceutical Industry

<http://www.aislac.org/pdf/noticias/2006/AISLACanalysisUS-Peru-FTA.pdf>

3) Ecuador's Indigenous Groups Fight Free Trade

Ecuador's largest indigenous organization, CONAIE, has mobilized major protests throughout Ecuador since March 13 to object the free trade agreement with the United States. Their neighbors, Colombia and Peru, have already signed free trade agreements, and the next round of negotiations for Ecuador is scheduled for March 23 in Washington, DC to conclude by early April. The controversy has led to the resignation of Ecuador's interior minister, as well as fear of another coup. Leaders of the movement announced that protests will persist and intensify if government does not withdraw from these talks and submit the pact to a national referendum. Although protests have led to violent police clashes and a state of emergency declared in four provinces, CONAIE shows no intention of altering their position.

Ecuador Quells Indian Trade Protest

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/ap_ecuadorquellsindianprotests_03202006.pdf

Ecuadorian Indigenous Groups Announce Protests Will Continue & Grow Around FTA

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/conaie_announcement_03202006.pdf

Ecuador's President Urges Calm; Free Trade Protest Lead to Resignation of Interior Minister
http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/ap_ecuadorprotests_03162006.pdf

4) CAFTA's Shaky Implementation Process

Despite the administration's aggressive push to pass CAFTA, the deal has yet to be implemented in the majority of CAFTA countries. On March 1, El Salvador became the first and – and thus far only – country to put the agreement into effect. To mark the date, protesters mobilized throughout the country culminating in a non-violent march in San Salvador. Resistance against CAFTA also continues within the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua as legislators complain about revisions required to domestic laws in order to meet CAFTA's obligations. Nicaragua and Guatemala are expected to be the next countries to implement the pact in April. 10,000 anti-CAFTA civil society groups in Guatemala flooded the streets on February 24 in anticipation of this dreaded move.

And Costa Rica's legislature has yet to even ratify CAFTA. The recent presidential elections proved free trade to be the most divisive issue among voters. The anti-CAFTA candidate Otton Solis came so close to defeating pro-CAFTA candidate Oscar Arias (who was expected to win by a landslide in early February) that a manual recount was necessary. Finally, the dispute over February 5th's presidential election closed a month later after the recount showed Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias ahead by a slim margin. However, CAFTA continues to be widely unpopular and Otton Solis vowed to persist in his efforts to derail its ratification.

Several Countries Balking at CAFTA Plunge

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/nyt_severalcountriesbalkingatcaftaplunge_03012006.pdf

Salvadorans Protest Trade Deal

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/ap_salvadoransprotesttradealwithus_02282006.pdf

Dodging a Bullet in Costa Rica

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/time_dodgingabulletincostarica_03082006.pdf

5) Other Free Trade Talks Emerge

In a feverish race to close as many free trade agreements before the close of President Bush's fast track authority, which allows trade legislation to be decided by simply a yes or no vote without amendments or comments, new countries, such as Malaysia and South Korea, have entered into trade talks with the United States. Others, such as those with the United Arab Emirates and Thailand, have been temporarily postponed.

South Korea, U.S. to Start Trade Talks in June

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/reuters_skoreaustostartfreetradetalks_03062006.pdf

Thailand Delays Free Trade Moves

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/wsj_thailanddelaysfreetrademoves_03032006.pdf

US-UAE Delay Talks as Bush Cites 'Concern' on Ports Deal

http://www.citizenstrade.org/pdf/bloomberg_usuayedelaytradetalks_03102006.pdf