

AFL-CIO Delegates Approve Resolution Calling for Halt to WTO Talks Pending Review

By Gary G. Yerkey

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Delegates attending the AFL-CIO national convention in Pittsburgh, Pa. threw their support behind legislation introduced in June aimed at forestalling the revival of the World Trade Organization negotiations and at pressuring the Obama administration into holding off on any new trade agreements.

President Obama said in a speech Sept. 14 that his administration remains committed to pursuing “expanded trade and new trade agreements.” He said it is “absolutely essential to our economic future” (176 DER A-9, 9/15/09).

But the delegates at the AFL-CIO convention unanimously approved a resolution on Sept. 15 calling for a halt to the adoption or negotiation of new trade agreements “until we review the record of existing trade agreements and build a comprehensive new trade policy that will support the creation of good jobs at home.”

The resolution said that such reform should apply both to bilateral agreements and to any new talks at the WTO.

‘Strategic Pause.’

“We should use the strategic pause to review the performance of past trade agreements and recommend renegotiation where necessary,” the resolution said, adding that legislation (H.R. 3012) introduced by Rep. Michael E. Michaud (D-Maine) (120 DER A-8, 6/25/09) and soon to be introduced in the Senate by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) “lays out such a review and reform.”

The AFL-CIO delegates also called on Congress to introduce and pass a comprehensive trade bill that would give the administration the tools it needs to address the “imbalanced” trade relationship between the United States and China.

“The Chinese government has violated its international obligations with respect to workers' rights, human rights, currency manipulation, illegal subsidies and intellectual property rights, among other things,” the resolution said. “The Obama administration must address all these issues, as well as systematic workers' rights violations, in its bilateral dialogue with the Chinese government.”

U.S. officials have said that President Obama is likely to raise at least some of these concerns with Chinese President Hu Jintao when the two leaders meet on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh on Sept. 25.

Obama will also have an opportunity to raise the issues when he travels to China on an official visit this November.

Buy American for Green Energy

The resolution approved by the AFL-CIO delegates on Sept. 15 also called for adopting and applying—“consistent with our obligations under trade agreements and the [WTO]”—the “Buy American” provisions of the U.S. stimulus package, especially those related to government procurement associated with new investments in infrastructure, transportation, and green energy initiatives.

Obama said on Sept. 16 after a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who has raised concerns about the “Buy American” provisions on behalf of Canadian companies, that the two sides were working to resolve the dispute, and that it appears “there may be ways to deal with this bilaterally, but also potentially multilaterally” (see related report in this section).

He said that, in the meantime, there is “no prospect” of a trade war between the United States and Canada, which, the president said, continue to have a “robust” trading relationship.

Harper said at a joint press conference with Obama that the two leaders will be giving “more detailed direction” to their negotiators “in terms of the kinds of options they should look at” to resolve the dispute over the “Buy American” provisions.