

**FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS MINISTERIAL IN MIAMI:
AN ACTION PLAN TO OPPOSE THE FTAA**

Nine years ago, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was put in place, linking the economies of the United States, Canada and Mexico. NAFTA eliminated trade barriers between the three North American countries and locked in a new regime of trade, investment and immigration rules—permanently altering the ability of state, federal and local governments in the region to regulate the economy and dramatically tilting the continental balance of power toward multinational corporations and away from working families, communities and domestic producers.

The results have been predictable but devastating in all three countries: stagnant or falling wages, intractable poverty, growing inequality and the erosion of good jobs. Violations of North American workers' fundamental human rights, including the right to organize and bargain collectively, have continued, unaffected by the weak labor side agreement. Environmental problems have been exacerbated, not improved, by increased trade and investment flows in the absence of enforceable regulations. Small farmers in Mexico have been devastated by competition from subsidized agricultural imports.

For the United States, the promised improved market access in Mexico never materialized. Instead of gaining a huge advantage in selling American-made goods to Mexico, as NAFTA proponents had promised, the United States has found itself importing from both Mexico and Canada much more than it exports. The result has been an ever-widening trade gap – the U.S. trade deficit with Mexico and Canada has ballooned almost tenfold: from \$9 billion in 1993 (the year before NAFTA went into effect) to \$87 billion in 2002. Hundreds of thousands of high-paying American manufacturing jobs have been lost as a result of this failed trade policy.

Astonishingly, in the face of this dismal record, the U.S. government is forging ahead with negotiations toward a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), a free trade agreement that would expand the failed NAFTA model to the rest of the western hemisphere (to include all 34 countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and North America, with the exception of Cuba). FTAA negotiations, which have been going on for several years, are scheduled to finish in 2005, when the agreement would come to a vote in each country. The U.S. Congress would vote on the FTAA under fast-track rules, meaning that it would not have a chance to amend the agreement, but could only vote it up or down.

As we said in our earlier policy resolution on the FTAA (February 2001), "If the negotiations continue along their current path, they will yield an agreement that undermines workers' rights and environmental protections, exacerbates inequality in the hemisphere and constrains the ability of governments to regulate in the interests of public health and the environment. The

AFL-CIO vigorously opposes the continuation of an FTAA negotiation process crafted along these lines.” Recent developments in service sector negotiations, both under the multilateral General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and in bilateral free trade agreements, are also cause for deep concern.

We support a hemispheric social and economic integration process that includes responsibilities, not just rights, for companies; protects workers’ rights and the environment; provides enforceable and effective protection against destabilizing import surges; and promotes sustainable, equitable and democratic development. While the FTAA ministers still have an opportunity to alter the course of the negotiations to respond to the concerns of the hemisphere’s workers and civil society, there is no evidence to date that such a reversal is even being considered.

On November 20th and 21st of this year, the trade ministers of the hemisphere will meet in Miami to launch the final stage of FTAA negotiations. This ministerial meeting presents a crucial opportunity for global justice advocates from all over the hemisphere to join in opposition to this failed trade model. Now is the time for the American labor movement to mobilize a grassroots education and outreach campaign here in the United States to build awareness about the FTAA and to educate our elected officials and candidates in preparation for the 2004 elections. Our actions now will determine the FTAA’s future and thus the direction of economic development in the region for years to come.

Popular opposition to the FTAA throughout the hemisphere is growing. The Hemispheric Social Alliance, a coalition of labor, environment, development, religious, indigenous, women’s and family farm organizations, is organizing a popular consultation campaign throughout the hemisphere. Millions of people are rejecting the FTAA. Ten million Brazilian voters overwhelmingly opposed the FTAA in a plebiscite last year, and 1.8 million Mexicans are expected to submit ballots against the FTAA by March. ORIT, the regional federation of labor unions, representing over 40 million workers in the western hemisphere, has unequivocally rejected an FTAA modeled on NAFTA. But ultimately, the U.S. Congress will play a key role in determining whether a flawed FTAA will be foisted on a reluctant hemisphere or not.

The ministerial in Miami and the elections in 2004 provide important opportunities to defeat the flawed FTAA. To take advantage fully of these opportunities, we are launching a campaign to educate our members, our elected representatives and the public about the dangers posed by the FTAA model and about our proposals for an equitable alternative. We will also continue to monitor negotiations toward a Central American Free Trade Agreement and other bilateral deals to ensure that our concerns are addressed and to keep pressure on the negotiators and our elected officials.

This fall, the AFL-CIO and our allies will ensure that trade ministers in Miami hear the voices of popular opposition to their failed free trade model, and we will demand progress in implementing our program for social, political and economic development in the Americas. We

will carry this message to the public and to our elected officials beyond Miami, to demand that the FTAA and other trade issues be debated in the 2004 elections.

In order to build toward victories on the FTAA in Miami and beyond, the AFL-CIO and our affiliates will do the following in our FTAA campaign:

- Develop and disseminate popular materials on the FTAA and coordinate with allies to educate union members on the FTAA in a variety of ways, including town hall meetings, speaking tours and other local events;
- Ask American union members to join the millions of others in the hemisphere expressing their opposition to the FTAA by signing hundreds of thousands of postcards (print and on the Internet) to be delivered at the ministerial in Miami and encourage our allies to join the postcard campaign;
- Work with our global allies and community groups in Miami to highlight international solidarity and opposition to the FTAA at the November ministerial and demonstrate our shared vision for a more just alternative;
- Focus public scrutiny on the big corporations pushing the FTAA and expose their attacks on worker, environmental and consumer protections through free trade rules; and
- Through the AFL-CIO issues mobilization structure, including our state federations and central labor councils, we will work with Congress, state and local officials and political candidates to build broad-based political support for an alternative to the FTAA and to democratize the debate on trade leading up to the 2004 elections.

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