

Speakers at Rally on the Range draw large audience against pact  
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EVELETH - It was billed as an old-fashioned workers labor rally, but the message carried was current: No Free Trade of Americas Agreement.

The rally at the Range Recreation Civic Center in Eveleth Friday was part of protests across the country against the proposed international agreement, which speakers said is going to cost lots of American workers their jobs. Some organizers are continuing to march in Miami against FTAA.

"We want fair trade, not free trade," said Ida Rukavina, a rally organizer.

The agreement is "free for the corporations not to pay living wages," she told a receptive audience of hundreds of Steelworkers and other supporters of workers.

United Steelworkers of America District 11 Director Dave Foster ripped into multi-national corporations, which are moving American jobs to other countries.

"We've had a lot of bad news in this country and bad news on the Iron Range," he said, later referring to the shuttered EVTAC Thunderbird Mine taconite facility in the background.

Now is a time of crisis, but also of opportunity to tell of the Bush Administration's "failed trade policy," Foster said.

Steelworkers going to a World Trade Organization protest against cheap steel imports in Seattle, Wash., in 1999 were beaten by police after peaceful protests were suspended. Now, "we are a union of social causes," he asserted.

Foster cited several worker layoffs, including one Minnesota woman forklift operator working for \$17 an hour being laid off, and her job being taken to a Mexican plant, where the worker there will be paid much less. They "all are victims of the administration's trade policies," Foster said, to roars and applause.

Noting the news Wednesday that EVTAC may likely reopen with a Chinese steel group buying pellets to go to make steel in China, Foster said that "proves American Steelworkers can compete with steelworkers anywhere in the world."

He added, however, that "we've got the worst labor laws of any industrialized country in the world."

The crowd headed out to march to the closed gates of EVTAC about a half-mile away, returning to hear U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton, D-Minn., who noted the repeated phrase describing the FTAA as "NAFTA on steroids."

"I say it's a trade policy on crack," Dayton said.

Trade is not free when corporations don't have to pay good wages for jobs or when it costs retirees their pensions. " ... And it's wrong for America and it's un-American," he said.

The country already has a free trade zone, between all 50 states, Dayton said. "We want jobs for Americans first and that should be America's trade policy," he added.

Several speakers made references to the late U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, who died in a plane crash, along with his wife, Sheila, and their daughter, several staffers and two pilots near Eveleth, a year ago.

"I've got to admit, it's a little hard to be in Eveleth with Oct. 25, 2003, approaching," said Larry Weiss of the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition.

Robber barons and business trusts of a century ago have been updated: "We've now got a global robber baron era," Weiss said, where corporations are "running roughshod" over global working people.

State Rep. Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, reminded listeners of the era of John F. Kennedy in a space race to the stars, and of Martin Luther King Jr.'s fight for civil rights. "We're in a race to the bottom," he said of the proposed FTAA's impact on workers.

State Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, had the last word on the current world business climate, and local connections. "We've had a global economy on the Range for a hundred years," he said, when workers left their homelands in Europe came here, where they were "promised a better life."

Rukavina reached in to his pocket as he told of having a Steelworkers union card. But while he didn't have a card on him for some time, "I've always carried it in my heart," Rukavina said.