

Trade Winds from Peru to Portland

By Jonah Sandford
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Local labor leaders and a human rights activist from Mexico urged Oregon's congressional delegation to vote against a [new free trade agreement](#) with Peru.

Today's downtown rally, organized in front of the Edith Green/Wendell Wyatt Federal Building by the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign, featured Centolia Maldonado Vasquez, a community leader with the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations from Oaxaca, Mexico. She spoke of the devastating effects NAFTA has had on Oaxaca, including "transnational companies installing themselves in our community" and subsequently polluting and decimating water and crop supplies.

Vasquez urged the U.S. Congress to "consult with Mexico's indigenous peoples, farmers, small business owners and migrants about the impact that NAFTA has had on them" before signing similar agreements with other countries.

Several Portland-area labor leaders also spoke out against any new free trade agreements, including Joe Kear, business representative for the International Association of Machinists. Kear cited a drastic loss of jobs at Portland's Freightliner plant, claiming half its work force has been laid off because their jobs moved to Mexico after NAFTA went into effect in 1994.

"These trade agreements are being negotiated without looking out for American workers," said Kear.

In between speakers, a crowd of 25 or 30 people chanted things like "Congress, get off it. These trade deals are for a corporate profit," and "Columbia, Korea, Panama, Peru. Workers say no, what about you?" Columbia, Korea and Panama are other countries with free trade agreements in the works.

The rally took place as Congress prepares to vote on the Peru Free Trade Agreement in early November. Democratic Rep. Peter DeFazio is the only Oregon congressman who has committed to voting against the agreement.

Democratic Rep. Earl Blumenauer as well as Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, and Gordon Smith, a Republican, favor the agreement, according to rally organizers. That leaves Oregon Reps. David Wu and Darlene Hooley, both Democrats; and Greg Walden, a Republican, all on the fence.

Four people, protesting the proposed agreement outside Blumenauer's office last month, were arrested.