



July 5, 2011

Dear Member of Congress:

As President of the Communications Workers of America, I urge you to oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Colombia has institutionalized an economic system which eliminates workers ability to be a worker, let alone have collective bargaining rights. Of the roughly 18 million workers in Colombia, fewer than three million (15 percent) are classified as workers, they have no rights or protections due to obstacles in law or practices tolerated by the government. Roughly 4 in 100 workers are members of a labor union and only 2 percent are covered by collective agreements. Eighty-five percent of the workforce has been stripped of their rights by legislation defining their work place or type of work as “cooperatives” or forms of temporary employment even when they are quite permanent.

While the Administration and the Colombian Government have negotiated an Action Plan to restore some bargaining rights, the Action Plan is not enforceable. At minimum, the plan must be in the implementation agreement. There has not been demonstrable progress to believe that it will even be implemented.

The Colombia Free Trade Agreement legitimizes American workers competing in a global economy with countries whose workers have no rights. Further, over the past twenty-five years, nearly 3,000 union activists and leaders have been murdered in Colombia – many after being kidnapped and tortured. This is more murders of trade unionists than all other countries combined. Even under the microscope of a Free Trade Agreement, fifty-one trade unionists were murdered in 2010, an increase over 2009. The conviction rate for union murders and other violence is in the single digits. This type of rampant violence against workers must stop before a Free Trade Agreement becomes effective.

In the United States we also are struggling to maintain collective bargaining. This Agreement moves us in the wrong direction by sanctioning an economic system designed to prevent effective bargaining rights, and all rights for workers.

Trade between countries cannot be free when workers don't have rights. I urge you to vote NO on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. This vote will be scored in our CWA Key Congressional Vote Review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry Cohen', is written in a cursive style.

Larry Cohen  
President