

**Labour and Parliamentary Forum: The Role of Trade Unions, Civil Society and Parliaments in Integration and Free Trade Processes, Miami, November 18, 2003 (ORIT)**

**Organised by the Organizacion Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT)**

Delegates to this forum marked a minute of applause in memory of Luis Anderson, President of ORIT who died on the weekend.

**Excerpts from Brother Anderson's prepared speech delivered by Victor Baez, ORIT.**

Why is there no room in the negotiations for the men and women who produce the wealth of the continent? The FTAA presents a serious democratic deficit. These trade agreements lack legitimacy because they do not take into account our experience and because they do not involve meaningful consultation. Absent from these discussions are deliberations about agriculture, underdevelopment, labour, the environment and free trade zones... The patience of the poor is running out.

**Roberto Gonzalez, Diputado Nicaragua**

This exclusionary neoliberal agenda is bringing together labour and social movements and the one thing it provides us is the possibility of labour co-operation. If there is free trade, then why isn't there free unionization? ... Why is the labour issue the only thing that is discussed when everything else is agreed upon?

**Elina Garcia, Diputado Mexico**, spoke of the deeply negative impact of NAFTA. Given that wages are lower now than at the time NAFTA was signed, there is a continual flow of Mexican workers over the U.S. border. Yet, migration is not being dealt with in the FTAA negotiations. In the northern border region, moreover, the free trade zones continue to be areas filled with toxic garbage. Workers are paid pitiful wages and have no labour rights. There is an average of one worker who dies each day trying to cross the border illegally into the United States. Agricultural workers were the big losers in the NAFTA. There is a feminisation of poverty and violence and the labour side agreements have been an absolute failure. Now, with the FTAA, Mexico still faces serious problems, not only with respect to the trade in goods, but now in education and public services. What has been the response to opposition? Political repression and political prisoners. Supposedly we changed regimes in Mexico. We need to renegotiate the NAFTA and ensure respect for labour rights in any trade and investment deal. The issues of migration must be dealt with, and we must fight for sustainable development for the benefit of society as a whole.

**Jack Layton, NDP** discussed the Liberal party's broken promise to cancel the free trade agreement if they were elected. He discussed the growing concern in Canada about free trade deals that minimise the rights of citizens to participate in decision-making processes while advancing the rights of corporations through tribunals. He also discussed the danger of increased privatization of public services. As Jack said, "We must fight back against any deal that gives to investors what we thought only belonged to people, and that is citizenship. And to do that, we need to create a new superpower of citizens movements in community after community"

**Alberto Arroyo, (Red Mexicana de Accion Frente al Libre Comercio)**

There is absolutely no compatibility between labour rights and free trade processes. By definition free trade excludes the rights of citizens. Liberty sounds great, but it refers only to the freedom in the market to buy and sell goods. In these free trade agreements, the subject is the market, not persons. The market is the space where we compete with one another to deregulate our future, our rights, our dignity, and our historic advances. This is the law of the jungle. It is extreme. It has no limits.

In reality, free trade leaves the market free of rules. It treats labour in the very same way as pears and apples are treated. We don't have any more rights than the goods that are traded. But free trade ensures the rights of capital, but not for the rest of society. These trade and investment treaties only consider the international rights of capital. Everything is changed into the dynamics of the market.

If we think back to 1994, how did the labour accord arise? Through the Clinton Administration, they were advanced as a result of the opposition of social movements in the United States. But Mexico disagreed vehemently. Mexico argued that with higher labour and environmental standards, we would never be able to compete. Low labour and environmental standards are, after all our competitive advantage.

So, to return to the issue: In the FTAA it is not possible to integrate the rights of the population. Not with this kind of economic integration. In these negotiations there is no consideration for health and safety, child labour or the minimum wage. Not even these things can be dealt with under the side agreements. Violations have to be "continuous" and a company from another country has to bring the case forward.

13 years ago, I have to say, unfortunately, that US labour leaders said there was no possibility of developing alliances with us in Mexico. They said we worked for nothing, were their enemies and were taking our jobs. Now this has changed and we have developed solidaristic relations.

There is something else that has changed, and that is the fact that in the past there was a limit to the level of exploitation, since the companies needed a market to sell their products. But now, they don't sell in our markets. The consumers are in the United States and in Europe.

What has happened in Mexico? Yes, our exports have increased, but what we export most of all are migrant labourers. And our imports of foreign capital have increased, but who is sending this money into Mexico? Workers' remittances!

**Pablo Solon, Hemispheric Social Alliance, Bolivia**

The United States has opened the doors to Bolivian textiles as compensation for its participation in the war against drugs. If however, the exports rise past a certain point, only textiles made with US primary products may be imported. If Bolivia rejects the FTAA, then its market access under this program will be terminated. If Bolivia does not support the anti-terrorist activities of the US government, its market access under this program will be terminated. If it submits its disputes with the multinational water companies to international tribunals, its market access will be terminated. ... What is the benefit to Bolivia? Exports worth only \$23 million per year. How

much employment? About one thousand jobs a year that pay only \$8/ week. And some don't even pay that. We have to fight to make sure they pay even that. So, this is why we are here. We are not against free trade. We have the right to trade, but in our opinion, the FTAA is meant to promote a sale of our industries to benefit U.S. exports, such that our industries close in key sectors.

If our economy is 1500 times smaller, then we need the FTAA to make conditions 1,500 times more favourable for Bolivia. That's what a real level playing field would look like. Liberalisation must be a lot slower for smaller countries, and we need a Compensation Fund that does not operate under the rules of the International Monetary Fund. .... The FTAA protects the investors. Under the proposed rules, Bolivia would not be able to denounce or charge an international corporation that didn't fulfil its contract.

### **Rosa GuillEn, H S A Peru**

This is not the kind of development we want, but the right of people to develop our own communities. Through agriculture we develop our sovereignty and also human relations and social organisation in harmony with nature. So it is not possible for us to simply talk about the technical aspects of production in our region. Our region was able to feed Europe as it industrialized, after all. The culture of corn is not simply about creating wealth; it is actually a whole *culture*. So, when Canada and the United States subsidize agriculture, and they are not subsidizing small producers but big corporations, they are destroying our culture...

There's something else going on too. In the past peasant and indigenous lands were taken in conquest, but now we are talking about new areas brought under the control of mines for international markets. These are rich agricultural lands that are being destroyed. We are not permitted to leave poverty. Our resources are being taken for the benefit of large corporations. These corporations are being given new privileges. It looks like development, but the fruit of the development does not come to our nation or our region. It goes instead to the trans-national corporations who want more and more. ...

The language of the FTAA hides privilege for the corporations who want to take over our national companies, and end up destroying our anti-poverty measures, and the few employment possibilities we have. They want to privatize our industries, and our services for profit. And this destroys the economic and social rights of our communities. Are there no other possibilities than this FTAA?