

fered by themselves and their families, and the failure of the Mexican government to enforce its health and safety legislation. The NAO hears complaints under the NAFTA labor side agreement.

At the hearing Bruno Lopez spoke of the death of his son who was born with spina bifida, and of being told by his doctor he could not give a blood donation to help save his son because Bruno's blood was poisoned. The factory nurse, Isabel Morales, testified that five women had miscarriages at work in a one-month period. She said the company instructed her to give them aspirin and send them back to work. She also told of workers being so disabled by repetitive strain injuries that they couldn't pick up even the smallest things. A doctor testified about 14 newborns with serious birth defects or serious health problems; 13 of these babies died during infancy or immediately after birth."

The US NAO decision in early April 2001, did find that Mexico had failed to protect these workers, however the remedy calls for the same fruitless ministerial consultations that have produced no justice in previous cases rather than calling for trade sanctions which are permitted in health and safety complaints.

Formerly a Canadian company, based in Waterloo, Ontario, Custom Trim is now owned by the Florida-based Breed Technologies. The company's Waterloo plant once employed 1,400 workers. Today, the factory is closed.

What you can do:

1. Don't be fooled by promises that free trade deals promote democracy or real economic development. Don't be fooled by unenforceable labor or environmental "protections" tacked on at the last minute to trade deals. Educate yourselves on real alternatives as put forward by the Alliance for Responsible Trade (www.art-us.org) and the Hemispheric Social Alliance (<http://www.art-us.org/HSA.html>)
2. Become a member of the Cross Border Network for Justice & Solidarity, and participate in campaigns to support workers organizing in the maquilas. To contact us, call 913-677-2158 or email: jancel@igc.org.
2. Join the growing movement against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Join the Greater Kansas City Fair Trade Coalition (913-310-0031 or nefffw@umkc.edu)
3. Tell your Congressional representative to oppose fast track, now called Trade Promotion Authority, which derails citizen input into trade deals and turns trade policy over to the global corporations. Call Congress now at 1-800-393-1082.

Dispelling the Myths of Free Trade



"Trade is freedom. Trade yields freedom because of the marketplace and its promise and its potential. . ."

President George W. Bush

Myth and Reality

When the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was passed, politicians promised Americans that it would lead to real economic development and expanding democracy in Mexico.

Workers in Mexico's northern maquiladora region, however, can speak with experience about the real consequences of free trade, and freedom would not be the first words to come to their lips. The maquilas were the pilot project for NAFTA and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

After 35 years of open borders and unregulated foreign investment in assembly-for-export factories, Mexico's northern border is still a democracy-free zone for workers. Today, there is not one independent, democratic union in all of Mexico's more than 3,000 maquila factories that employ over a million workers.

Nor has increased trade and foreign investment led to better human rights or sustainable development. North America's

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original free trade zone is still a dangerous and unhealthy place to live and work. Exposure to toxic chemicals is a serious and sometimes fatal health hazard for workers, their children and communities near the maquila factories.

Women workers continue to experience discrimination and harassment. Forced pregnancy testing and firing of pregnant workers are still common. Lack of child care facilities, excessive hours of work and forced overtime deny women the ability to care for their children. Late work shifts and a lack of transportation expose them to possible violence.

One Big Maquila

While the maquiladoras have been with us for 35 years, NAFTA has transformed Mexico into one big maquila. Since NAFTA was introduced in 1994, investment in Mexico's maquilas has boomed in the border region and spread to other parts of the country.

Between 1994 and 1999, the number of maquilas increased from 2,000 to 3,000, and the number of maquila workers from 546,000 to over 1.3 million. Of the 4,200 maquilas projected to be in operation in 2005, 45 % are expected to be in non-border cities.

Yet, despite the investment boom to the border maquilas, and despite the lowest unemployment rates in the country, hourly wages have fallen faster there than in the rest of the country. Between 1990 and 1998 average border real wages fell from 97¢ an hour to 71¢ while the average work week has increased from 40.9 hours to 42.4.

No Effective Protections

The NAFTA labor side agreement was promoted as a tool to protect workers from the negative consequences of free trade. The labor side agreement allows workers and interested third parties in the three countries to file complaints when a government is failing to enforce its own labor legislation.

The side agreement does not allow workers to file complaints against corporations for their labor rights violations. While the side agreement has provided an opportunity for workers to tell and publicize their stories, it has failed to provide real remedies for worker rights violations. Why? Because the NAFTA side agreement has no teeth. It has no serious enforcement mechanisms.



Maquila worker housing—Tijuana

No to the FTAA

FTAA is based on NAFTA with similar or weaker labor rights and environmental provisions. It will be a disaster for workers, women, communities and the environment throughout the hemisphere.

We need a different kind of trade agreement that puts human and sustainable development, the rights of workers, women and communities, and the environment ahead of the narrow interests of multinational investors.

Case #1: Election Fraud at Duro, No Democracy for Maquila Workers On March 2, Mexico's democratically elected government of Vicente Fox staged a fraudulent election at the Duro Bag manufacturing factory in Rio Bravo, Mexico, robbing the workers of the right to be represented by the union of their choice.

Instead of participating in a secret ballot vote held in a neutral location, workers were forced to publicly declare their vote inside the factory and in front of representatives of the company and the "official" government-affiliated union, the CROC.

This is in direct violation of the May 18, 2000 Joint Declaration signed by the labor ministers of Mexico and the US, in which Mexico pledged to promote "the use of eligible voter lists and secret ballot elections in disputes over the right to hold the collective bargaining contract."

The afternoon before the Duro vote, workers were ordered to stay overnight at the factory together with management personnel, leaders of the CROC and hired thugs recruited from other parts of Mexico by the official union. The next morning, the workers were forced to walk through a gauntlet formed by the thugs, and then had to publicly declare which union they supported. Not surprisingly, only four workers dared to vote for the independent union.

Weeks before the vote, groups of workers were ordered by management to attend captive audience meetings in the factory where they were interrogated by the leader of the official union, and told that if they voted for the independent union they would be fired and the factory would be closed.

To date, over 150 Duro workers have been illegally fired for supporting the independent union.

Case #2: Custom Trim Workers

On December 12, 2000, 20 former employees at the Custom Trim and Auto Trim factories in Valle Hermoso and Matamoros, Mexico testified at a hearing of the US National Administrative Office (NAO) about the tragic health and safety problems suf-