



...Working Together for Global Economic Justice

May News:

1. [Colombia Free Trade Agreement: What's Going On??](#)
2. [UNITE HERE! Editorial: The Real Costs of Free Trade](#)
3. [Columbus High Schoolers Sponsor Fair Trade Petition](#)
4. [Did You Know....?](#)
5. [Next Meetings](#)

1. Colombia Free Trade Agreement: What's Going On??

Here are the facts:

- President Bush sent the Colombia FTA to Congress on April 8th without the customary consent of Congressional leadership;
- Because the agreement was originally negotiated under Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority, a special set of rules for U.S. bilateral trade agreements, Congress is required to conduct an up-or-down vote on it within 90 legislative days;
- In response, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi conducted a vote of the House on April 10th which suspended the 90-day rule by a 224-195 vote;
- The House resolution also suspends the Fast Track rule that prohibits amendments to the trade pact;
- It is noteworthy that Fast Track law also specifies that the procedures and timetable are rules of Congress and can be changed by Congress.

Those are the facts!

So what has been happening since these April events?

The Administration continues to accuse Speaker Pelosi of foul play, contending that the Colombia FTA is economically advantageous to the U.S. and to Colombia. As the pressure for this deal has increased, so have the assertions, the most duplicitous being that the pact is essential to U.S. national security. President Bush has injected the necessity of passing this trade bill into every speech and press event that he has held over the past several months. The Administration is now claiming that a vote against this trade deal is a vote for Venezuelan Hugo Chavez. There was even an effort to use last week's National Caucus of State Legislators committee meeting as an opportunity to attempt to pass a resolution calling on Congress to pass the Colombia FTA. (The state legislators voted down this very unusual and controversial effort by nearly a 2:1 ratio.)

So why all this urgency from the lame-duck Administration?

Well, for starters, it is vital to know that not a single labor, environmental, faith or consumer group endorses this trade agreement!

Colombia's human rights record is abysmal, largely due to the high incidence of labor-related violence, which is the worst in the world. Other considerations: Colombia historically has failed to protect the rights of its Indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations. Colombia is a very bio-diverse country and host to pristine but unprotected rain forests. A large number of family farmers in Colombia stand to lose their livelihoods when it becomes financially advantageous for multi-national corporations to profit from importing U.S. agricultural products to Colombia rather than relying upon local products. This will result in a drastic increase in coca

crops in a country where we are already spending millions of dollars to eradicate drugs.

Much of the violence rampant in Colombia is perpetrated by paramilitary groups. The paramilitary groups are engaged in the open destruction of the guerilla groups. Both groups are heavily involved in drug trafficking. While Colombia President Uribe has attempted to disassociate himself from the paramilitaries, he has openly declared warfare upon the guerilla groups. Recent international reports and legal actions have demonstrated that the paramilitary groups are thoroughly entrenched in the current Colombian government and in fact may be responsible for the illegal election of as much as a third of the Colombian Congress. A recently jailed "para" claims that the paramilitary hold on the Colombian government goes far beyond just the Congress. It has also been revealed that the paramilitary groups receive financing from the Colombian government, which means that you and I are helping to finance them.

Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world for advocates of workers' rights. Over the past 20 years, 3000 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia. According to the AFL-CIO, "the government has successfully prosecuted less than 3% of these cases." Even now, with the close international scrutiny of these events, these murders continue at a rate of more than one per week. One of the largest trade efforts in Colombia is from teachers. There are many credible stories of teachers being murdered in Colombia in front of their young students, and even a case where an entire third-grade class was tortured and murdered. There are many first-person accounts of murders taking place by paramilitaries at Colombian-based plants and offices of Coca-Cola, Citicorp, and Drummond Company, an Alabama coal producer. Earlier this year, Chiquita Brands International pled guilty in U.S. federal court to funneling nearly \$2 million to paramilitaries, resulting in an untold number of civilian deaths.

The Colombian violence spilled over to its Ecuadoran neighbor earlier this Spring in a poorly-reported international incident when paramilitaries crossed the border to conduct a raid that resulted in 25 deaths. Ecuador alleges U.S. involvement in the massacre conducted upon sleeping camp members. While U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice leveled charges of "irresponsible" at Ecuador, Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa angrily told President Bush to either send U.S. troops to the border to help or "shut up," accusing the administration of failing to understand what is happening in Latin America. Colombia has since apologized for the incident, but Ecuador has refused to resume diplomatic relations with Colombia.

While the pro-free trade and pro-corporate press stories far outweigh the pro-fair trade ones, it is difficult to sort out all the complexities of the Colombian situation. Given the severity of abuses perpetrated in Colombia, do we really want to press for a 90-day up-or-down vote of an agreement that may increase the U.S. GDP by a miniscule 0.0000472 percent? (By the way, this works out to about a one-time penny increase to every wage-earner in the U.S.!) (See this Reuters report [here](#).) Do we want to risk legitimizing Colombia's corrupt government at all when there is pretty solid evidence that by so doing, Colombia will almost certainly lose ground in its textiles, apparel and food industries, even though they may gain by exporting petroleum, minerals and other natural resources? Who will gain from those potential exports? Certainly not the workers of Colombia and certainly not the environment!

We have ample evidence of NAFTA's failures to justify withdrawing ALL subsequent NAFTA-style trade agreements that are modeled upon it and that have misused Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority. There is also plenty of evidence to demonstrate that the documented problems in Colombia make the Colombia FTA the most potentially destructive trade agreement to come out of this administration.

One more important point: Being anti-NAFTA does not make you anti-trade! This spin is rampant right now, partly in criticism of the Democratic presidential candidates who have spoken out against NAFTA and the Colombia FTA. It also doesn't make you a "protectionist." It means you are willing to protect the environment, workers' rights, food safety and our sovereignty, rather than protecting corporate profits.

Please take the time to weigh in with your Congressperson in opposition to the Colombia FTA no matter when it is permitted to come to a vote by calling 866-338-5720 and asking for the office of your Congressperson. If your Congressperson is Tubbs-Jones, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Space, Sutton or Wilson, please commend them for taking a stand against the Colombia FTA. (It's important to give confirmation to those representatives who are trying to do the right thing!) If one of these is not your representative, please let him or her know you are a constituent who opposes the Colombia FTA and that you expect them to reconsider their stand on this trade agreement.

[Return to Top](#)

2. UNITE HERE! Editorial: The Real Costs of Free Trade by Vann Seawell, UNITE HERE! Ohio State Council Director and OCFT Board Member

Not a day goes by when we don't hear about the consequences of NAFTA style trade policies on U.S. workers, their families, their communities and state and local governments where tax base erosion has led to reduced (and eliminated) public services. On the other hand, rarely do we hear about the consequences of NAFTA style trade policies for workers in other countries where production is transferred in the global marketplace.

Case in point: who knows about the case of Rocky Shoes & Boots in Nelsonville here in Ohio? For many years, workers in Nelsonville made shoes and boots for the U.S. market - often for police and fire departments - not to mention for outdoor recreation. These workers were initially represented by the United Shoe Workers which, after a series of union mergers, became UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees). Their union contract provided good wages, comprehensive health insurance, defined benefit pension plan and other benefits. However, in 2001, the company closed its Nelsonville facility, laid off all its production workers and outsourced production to third party contractors.

One such third party contractor is Quan Tak Footwear Company Limited in Guangzhou, China (a subsidiary of Shing Tak Footwear Group Limited, Taiwan). In January 2008, 4,000 Quan Tak (non-union) workers in Guangzhou went on strike over unpaid wages going back to 2002. According to worker accounts, Quan Tak employees are required to work until 10 pm or later each day but, at 8 pm, the time clock machine is turned off. As a result, workers leaving after 8 pm do not have time worked after 8 pm counted or paid. Thus, the reason for the work stoppage.

The moral of the story here is that U.S. Workers and Chinese workers are both victimized by U.S. trade policies that allow companies (like Rocky Shoes) the ability to close (or downsize) their U.S. manufacturing operations and transfer that work to other countries with impunity and without regard to the economic and social consequences in either country. Further, in the specific case of Rocky Shoes, U.S. taxpayers are, in effect, subsidizing U.S. job loss and worldwide exploitation through purchases of products (e.g. work boots by local police departments with tax revenue) that are made in other countries under conditions like those at Quan Tak Footwear in China.

Only when U.S. trade policies are required to take into account the economic and social costs involved in international trade as well as provide mechanisms to insure that economic and social benefits will be created as a result of trade, will the typical Rocky Shoes/Quan Tak Footwear story be a thing of the past.

For more information on Rocky Shoes and what can be done about these all too typical cases, see the joint February 28, 2008 press release of the Ohio Conference on Fair Trade, Sweatfree Communities and UNITE HERE! Rocky Shoes sweatshop abuses shed light on failed trade model amid primary contest, and resources found at www.ohiofairtrade.org and www.sweatfree.org.

[Return to Top](#)

3. Columbus High Schoolers Sponsor Fair Trade Petition

One Saturday afternoon in April, OCFT members Tara Brown and Karen Hansen spent time talking Fair Trade with the high school students that comprise the Council Fellows (youth group) of the Columbus Council on World Affairs. As a result of this time, and the study that the Fellows have conducted over the past year, the young people created the Conscientious Consumer Pledge. In this pledge, the students vowed to stop engaging in "zombie-like consumerism" and to take into consideration the environment, human rights and citizen-directed community development when exercising their "power of the purse" and by supporting fair trade businesses.

OCFT wishes to commend the Council Fellows and their director, Stephanie Calondis Geiger, for their thoughtful work throughout Central Ohio and Columbus-area high schools. Please join us in supporting their efforts by signing onto their pledge today at: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/notazombieconsumer>.

[Return to Top](#)

4. Did You Know....?

- o ... that the General Union of Port Workers of Iraq sent a letter of support and solidarity to the ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union) U.S. West Coast dock workers, commending them for their May 1st dock strike in observance of May Day and in opposition to the occupation of Iraq? In their letter of support, the Iraqi port workers condemned both the "pro-occupation" and "barbarism" of the U.S. administration, and the violence of the sectarian gangs "who are the product of the occupation, (and who) have been trying to transfer their conflict into our ranks." The Iraqi workers also stated that "the labor movement is the only element in the society that is able to change the political equations for the benefit of mankind." The Iraqi port workers went on to say that the Iraqi government is pro-occupation and that they are attempting to intervene in workers' affairs "by imposing a single government-certified labor union." They also accused their government of promoting privatization and "an oil and gas law to use the occupation against the interests of the workers."
- o ... that Policy Matters Ohio released a report earlier this Spring about labor law violations and serious health concerns at a Chinese major supplier of fluorescent light bulbs to General Electric. The report revealed that the Chinese arm of the Topstar corporation requires workers to put in up to 64-hour weeks and do not educate workers on the dangerous toxicity of the mercury in the product they are handling. (<http://www.policymattersohio.org/GoodBulbsBadJobs.htm>)
- o ... that the American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition released a press piece in February announcing that Ohio's job losses in the 2000s are the worst in our state since the Great Depression? The report, prepared by Dr. Charles McMillion, President and Chief Economist of MGB Information Services, states: "One would think that America's 3.4 million job losses in the U.S. manufacturing sector and another 700,000 job losses in the information sector -- the two sectors of the U.S. economy most exposed to international competition -- since the end of 2000 would provoke a more immediate and detailed policy response from the administration, all presidential candidates and the Democratic and Republican leaderships in Congress, but unfortunately, that has not been the case." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Ohio has lost over 236,000 manufacturing jobs and over 21,000 information sector jobs since the end of 2000. The report expressed concern over the industries and jobs that are increasing in Ohio. "These jobs are almost entirely in less productive/lower paying industries -- including the low-end of the 'Professional and Business Services' category -- that can not create export earnings to offset the cost of imported oil, autos, computers, clothing, etc. But with rising health care costs a serious obstacle for US business and households alike, it is troubling that the vast majority of new jobs in Ohio are in private and public health care bureaucracies."
- o ... that the Department of Homeland Security has waived "Buy American" rules to utilize Chinese steel in the construction of the security fence along the U.S.-Mexico border? Many Congresspeople, both Republican and Democrat, have co-sponsored The American Steel First Act that would require the use of American steel in all U.S. infrastructure projects. Rep. Charlie Wilson from Ohio is one of the co-sponsors of this legislation.

[Return to Top](#)

5. Next Meetings

Our next OCFT meeting will be Monday, May 19th, at 12 noon (for 1 hour) at the Ohio AFL-CIO, 395 E. Broad Street in downtown Columbus. This general meeting is our annual meeting and we would love to have you join us! RSVPs are required because lunch will be served! Andy Gussert, Executive Director of Citizens Trade Campaign in Washington DC, will also join us for this meeting! If you would like to attend, please call Karen at 614-280-3631.

Schedule of 2008 meetings:

- o June 23
- o July 28
- o August 25
- o September 22
- o October 27
- o November 24

Want to be added to or removed from the OCFT mail list?

Just email Karen at khansen@695online.com or OHFairTrade@yahoo.com .

Karen Hansen, State Coordinator

(614) 280-3631

OhioConference on Fair Trade

PO Box 06595

Columbus, OH 43206

To unsubscribe from the Ohio Conference on Fair Trade list please click [here](#)