



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Striving for Fair Trade Opposition to Unjust Trade Agreements

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At the LCWR national assembly in August 2003 a resolution was ratified to oppose the Free Trade Area of the Americas: "As members of LCWR we oppose the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) because of its inevitable negative impact on people who are poor, and on the environment."

EXPERIENCE

The FTAA is essentially an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into Central America, South America and the Caribbean. NAFTA, a trade agreement between Canada, Mexico and the United States, took effect in 1994 and has devastating effects on working families and the environment. In the United States where many of our sisters serve in parishes, schools, hospitals, clinics, social services, etc. they have seen thousands of people lose their jobs because the factories have moved to Mexico or another country where labor is cheaper. More than 765,000 jobs have disappeared.

In Mexico, our missionary sisters tell us that manufacturing wages fell 21 percent from 1995 to 1999,

thus increasing the percentage of Mexicans living in poverty. The environment has suffered, especially in the maquiladora zones along the Mexico-US border where the increased pollution and improper disposal of chemical wastes have dramatically raised the rates of hepatitis and birth defects.

NAFTA has been a disaster for small farmers in Mexico. The price they receive for their corn has plummeted 45 percent in three years as agribusiness giants dump their subsidized corn there. Since NAFTA is definitely not working, why expand it to the rest of the Western Hemisphere?

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SOCIAL ANALYSIS

In late November 2003 the trade ministers of 34 countries from Canada to Tierra del Fuego, excluding Cuba, met in Miami, FL to finalize the terms for the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Much to the disappointment of the United States, an agreement was not reached because the negotiators were unable

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to bridge the wide gaps that had opened between the United States and some of its southern trading partners, chiefly Brazil and Argentina who were seeking concessions on agricultural tariffs and subsidies. Meanwhile a more flexible framework, which allows member countries to opt in or out of various provisions of the agreement and to negotiate multilateral pacts within the broader treaty framework, was approved.

While some may see this as a setback for the US version of “free trade,” the United States has not been deterred, but has developed the strategy of “divide and conquer,” whereby the United States has now begun a series of bilateral free trade talks with several Latin American countries and pushed for completion of the regional trade agreement, the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). On December 17, 2003 at the final round of negotiations in Washington, DC the United States strong-armed Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala into signing the CAFTA agreement. Costa Rican negotiators walked out of the talks over issues of opening their telecommunications and insurance markets.

REFLECTION

As women religious we go to Scripture to receive inspiration and guidance in responding to the economic injustices we see and experience in our present day world. The Prophet Isaiah challenges us in chapter 58:6-11 “This is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the

yoke; setting free the oppressed...” Jesus, too, in the Gospel of Luke sets an example for us: “to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Catholic social teaching also serves as a guide. In *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II declares that the key to the judgment of any economic system is the way workers are treated : “In every case a just wage is

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the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socioeconomic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly.” (# 19) In *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* John Paul condemns actions and attitudes in economics “which are opposed to the will of God,” especially the “all consuming desire for profit and the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one’s will upon others.” (# 37) In summary, the dignity of the human person and working for the common good must be foremost in all economic dealings. Trade agreements must be fair and just to all those affected by its terms, and negotiations must be open to public, grassroots input and debate.

ACTION

1. Keep abreast of the latest developments with regard to the trade agreements being negotiated by the United States, especially with special attention to CAFTA and the FTAA ongoing debate.

(www.witnessforpeace.org)

2. Learn about an alternative grassroots globalization called “Alternative Agreement for the Americas” written by citizens’ groups from across the Western Hemisphere that offers a picture of what socially responsible and environmentally sustainable trade would look like.

(www.globalexchange.org)

3. Write, e-mail, fax or phone your Senators and Representative stating your opposition to the CAFTA Agreement and urging them to vote NO when it comes up for a vote this spring. (Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121)

4. Lobby your Senators and Representative, either when they are in their home offices or in Washington, stating your reasons for opposing unjust free trade agreements and the need to promote fair trade agreements among nations.

5. Write articles and letters to the editor for your local newspaper explaining the detrimental effects of free trade on middle-income families and the poor, and stress the need for *fair* trade based on the “Alternative Agreement for the Americas.”