



Congressman Ed Towns: Don't Sell Out AGAIN on Free Trade! Protect Jobs and Keep Cocaine Off of Our Streets!

The Nov. 19, 2004, congressional floor speech of Bed-Stuy Congressional Representative Edolphus Towns (D-N.Y.) left no doubt that he opposed a proposed Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The lengthy statement described, in detail, why CAFTA would harm most people in the affected nations. Yet nine months later, on July 27, Towns cast a decisive vote in favor of CAFTA that allowed the controversial trade pact to eke through the U.S. House of Representatives 217 to 215. Although the CAFTA text was unchanged between Towns' 2004 speech and the congressional vote on the six-nation expansion of NAFTA, Towns provided one of the deciding votes in favor of the trade agreement. Had he stuck with his opposition to CAFTA, the agreement would have been defeated on a 216-216 tie vote.

In Towns' anti-CAFTA floor statement, titled "Multinationals Will Emerge as Main Winners from CAFTA Ratification," Towns argued that CAFTA's "underlying principle is the aggressive protection and expansion of individual and corporate investor rights. These privileges come at the expense of environmental protection, legislative independence, and a nation's right to autonomously determine social and economic policy. Despite the assurances of its proponents, the Central America Free Trade Accord (CAFTA) [sic] is not likely to translate into a significant improvement for the region's atrocious labor rights record because it does not institute the fixed penalties and incentives required for such a profound change. The absence of such provisions is especially distressing in Central American societies that, in a twisted and deadly caricature of respectable collective bargaining, have historically witnessed hundreds of labor leaders gunned down and intimidated by hired hands on the payrolls of land owners and factory managers." The four-page statement goes on to argue that CAFTA was negotiated in an un-transparent way, on "uneven ground," will offer "no new labor protections," and will "handcuff [...] the state" from promoting economic development.

Despite these strong words – one of the fiercest and most eloquent criticisms of CAFTA given by a member of Congress – Towns cast a decisive vote in favor of CAFTA, a deal strongly opposed by labor unions, environmental groups, and human and animal rights advocates. Thanks to Towns's vote, a Canadian mining company with a US subsidiary is taking advantage of the rights granted to investors under CAFTA to sue El Salvador for \$100 million dollars for refusing to allow the company to mine for gold with deadly chemicals like arsenic and cyanide near the nation's largest river, putting El Salvador's largest source of drinking water at risk.

Towns struck again in 2007 when he voted for the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement, despite warnings from human rights and environmental groups that the agreement would contribute to violence, instability, and ecological destruction. Peruvian President Garcia wasted no time in using the Agreement as a pretext to issue legislative decrees that amounted to a massive land grab -- turning indigenous lands over to extractive industry corporations by gaming the decision making process by which decisions by indigenous communities are recognized. This resulted in an indigenous uprising that resulted in a massacre in Bagua, Peru in June 2007. The Washington Office on Latin America and Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch also warned that as tariff-free US agriculture exports entered the Peruvian market subsequent to the passage of the trade agreement, Peruvian farmers would be left with no choice but to grow coca, ramping up cocaine production for export to the United States. Sure enough, according to a June 2011 United Nations report, cocaine production has surged in Peru, and Peru will soon overtake Colombia as the world's largest cocaine exporter.

In September, Congress is expected to vote on free trade agreements with Panama, South Korea, and Colombia. According to MSNBC's Dylan Ratigan, "As you learn of these deals, each one stinks worse than the next." The Korean agreement threatens to export 159,000 US jobs, while the Colombia agreement, like the Peru agreement will wipe out family farmers and increase coca-production, putting more money in the hands of Colombia's right-wing narcoterrorist paramilitaries. The Panama agreement will lock in Panama's status as a tax haven for US corporations, allowing them to continue to avoid paying their fair share of taxes at a time when social programs are being slashed to close the budget deficit. Towns has failed to state a position on these agreements, leading advocates for fairer trade policies to believe that he again intends to vote for corporate profits and against the public interest and is staying silent to avoid criticism.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ✦ Email, call, fax, and write to Representative Towns' legislative assistant on trade and let him know that Representative Towns should not repeat his mistake in voting for DR-CAFTA and the Peru Free Trade Agreement by voting for the Panama, Colombia, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements. The Honorable Ed Towns, 2232 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-5936 Fax: (202) 225-1018 Email: lars.hydle@mail.house.gov
- ✦ Contact your Representatives, Senators, and President Obama to urge them to OPPOSE the Colombia, Panama, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements. You can find their contact information at <http://contactingthecongress.org> by calling (718) 218-4523.
- ✦ Volunteer with TradeJustice NY Metro! To find out how you can take action against these trade agreements, contact us:

TradeJustice New York Metro

34-21 Crescent Street, Astoria, NY 11106 Phone: (718) 218-4523 Email: info@tradejustice.net Web: <http://tradejustice.net>
(portions of this flyer were adapted from a press release by Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. Read the press release and other information on Town's CAFTA sellout at <http://tradejustice.net/Towns>)