

# Women Say NO! to Free Trade

## 10 REASONS WHY WOMEN ARE SAYING NO TO FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

### 1. *Promotion of the privatization of public goods and services.*

Women will assume the costs of such services to ensure healthcare, education and food for their families and themselves, doubling their workload in and out of the home.

### 2. *Disenfranchisement of women.*

It is a lie that the fair trade agreements create jobs for women. The policy of decentralization and the closing of small and medium-sized businesses due to unfair competition from multinationals leads to the displacement of women from the formal labor market and forces them to join the informal job market without any type of labor protection.

### 3. *Employment without regard to labor legislation.*

The fair trade agreements consolidate a plan of sweatshop expansion, which views women as cheap labor and fails to guarantee decent working conditions. An example of this is the case of the NEWTEX, TAINAM, LAITEX corporation.



Women protest CAFTA at massive rally in San Jose, Costa Rica, in Sept. 2007.

### 4. *Obstacle to immigration.*

The fair trade agreements are concerned only with the free movement of goods and property, not of people. They obstruct the ability of female workers to seek employment in other countries.

### 5. *Destruction of local agricultural economies.*

The primacy of agribusiness production, in which multinational produce food for profit, leads to the destruction of the small production units which supply domestic markets and in which



The World Trade Organization failed, according to its spokesperson: "so far the current text has not yet being accepted by anyone"

women are overrepresented.

### 6. *Destruction of the environment and biodiversity.*

Any national regulation aimed at preserving the environment will not be honored if it constitutes a barrier to trade and investment. Corporations will have the right to sue nations in international tribunals if environmental protection measures would reduce their profits.

### 7. *Institutionalization of violence and militarization of society.*

To safeguard the interests of the multinationals, nations resort to mechanisms of repression and violence against their citizens. Those greatest affected are women: as women, wives, life companions, daughters.

### 8. *Worsening poverty and inequality.*

Free trade agreements favor the exclusive enrichment of multinational corporations and the economic elite of a country, worsening the profound economic and social inequalities that exist.



# IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT OF THE "FREE TRADE" AGREEMENTS

At the global level, "free trade," as it is inaptly called, has in the last 20 years become the justification for governments to unleash economic policies and measures which have increased the concentration of wealth in a few hands and generated the highest poverty levels. World Bank figures show that in the year 2001, 1.2 billion people subsisted on less than \$1 per day; that more than 113 million children did not attend school, the majority of them being girls. Moreover, more than half a million women die each year during pregnancy or labor. This overview should motivate us to reflect much more deeply on the purported benefits of neoliberalism for poor countries, and to question the impacts of the fair trade agreements on the people. An example of this is the North American Fair Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by Mexico, the United States and Canada (known by the acronym TLCAN in Spanish). Its impacts in the eight years since its enactment are analyzed below.



In Mexico, the official propaganda promised that with NAFTA or TLCAN there would be "more and better jobs." However, statistics show that unemployment has risen, as the model not only fails to create sufficient jobs to absorb the existing workforce, but eliminates jobs due to the closing of businesses.

The jobs created are tenuous, however: there is scarce inclusion of the female working population in social security; nearly two-thirds of workers have no credit benefits; a high percentage of workers earns less than the minimum wage; and real wages are plummeting (NAFTA: objectives and results 7 years after. Alberto Arroyo Picard, 2001).

In the textile industry, there has been an increase in productivity; however, this has not translated into improved wages. Production goals imposed are met, but workers do not receive fair compensation for a day's work or a wage adjusted to the cost of living. Moreover, real average wages fell by 12% and labor costs fell by 33.2%.

In the agricultural sector, the official propaganda promised U.S. ranchers and farmers that NAFTA would open new export markets for them and create the bases for a permanent solution in this sector.



However, a survey conducted by Public Citizen in June 2001 shows that NAFTA has caused a reduction in profits for small farmers, as prices have fallen due to the inundation of agricultural products in their respective countries without a concomitant reduction in prices for consumers. It has also lead to the destruction of agricultural farms in the United States. In Mexico, small producers have migrated to the cities or to the north.

In agroindustry, multinational corporations moved their plants to Mexico to take advantage of the \$3.60 a day minimum wage, and to exploit the use of pesticides prohibited in the United States.

In summary, agricultural workers are exposed to miserable working conditions due to the lack of political will on the part of the Mexico Government to enforce current labor legislation.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Call, fax, email and/or send a letter to your Representative, Senators, and President Obama to vote against the Panama, Colombia, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements. The Bush administration negotiated these agreements before leaving office, but before they can go into effect, Congress must pass legislation to implement them. President Obama intends to send these agreements to a vote in Congress in September 2011. You can find your elected officials' contact info at <http://contactingthecongress.org>
- Volunteer with TradeJustice New York Metro. Call or email us for details on how you can get involved.
- Contribute to support our efforts. Donate to TradeJustice NY Metro via Paypal at <http://tradejustice.net/donate>

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