

BINATIONAL CONFERENCE

December 2-3, 2017 — Carson Calif.



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Registration: <https://hermandad.campaignrep.com/civCRM/event/info?reset=1&id=3>

Open Letter to AFL-CIO and Progressive Trade Groups on the Need to Call for NAFTA Cancellation

December 11, 2017

Attention:
AFL-CIO
Public Citizen
Sierra Club
Citizen's Trade Campaign

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We write you this Open Letter on the occasion of the December 13 National Day of Action that you are organizing with the aim of "replacing NAFTA with a treaty that puts the interests of workers first."

We write you this letter in the name of the Organizing Committee of the **Binational Conference to Cancel NAFTA, Tear Down the Wall of Shame / End All Deportations, Stop Privatizations, and Promote Labor Rights on Both Sides of the Border**, which was held in Carson, Calif., on December 2-3, with the participation of more than 200 unionists and activists from the United States and Mexico. The first all-day session was held at California State University-Dominguez Hills and was hosted by the university's Modern Language Department and the CSUDH chapter of the California Faculty Association; the second half-day session was held at the hall of the United Steelworkers Local 675.

We wish to share with you the conclusions of our conference and to urge you to convene a Trilateral Day of Mobilization to demand: Cancel NAFTA, Tear Down the Wall of Shame / End All Deportations, and Halt and Reverse All Privatizations and Deregulations of Public Services and Enterprises Under NAFTA. Such a Day of Mobilization could take place at the time of the next round of NAFTA renegotiations.

First a few words about our Binational Conference: There was strong participation from important sectors of the U.S. labor movement. Representatives from four central labor councils in California — San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, and the 800,000-member Los Angeles Federation of Labor (and its Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Rusty Hicks) — addressed the gathering.

Numerous union locals — including United Teachers of Los Angeles, SEIU 1000, SEIU 87, AFT 2279, and UAW 551 from Chicago/Northern Indiana — endorsed and participated in the discussions and deliberations. The California State Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) and its local chapter in Sacramento were among the main sponsors and organizers of the conference, along with Hermandad Mexicana-La Original.

From Mexico there was a delegation of trade unionists, workers and students from Mexicali, Tijuana,

and Ciudad Juarez — as well as a farmworker organizer from San Quintin (Baja California) who was able to obtain her visa. However, two sizable delegations from Mexico were not granted their visas. This included a six-person delegation of unionists from the healthcare, education, and oil sectors from the state of Chiapas and neighboring states.

Also unable to attend were five leaders of the Alianza de Organizaciones Sociales and the National Democratic Independent Union of Farmworker (SINDJA) from San Quintin. Delegations from the Mexican Electrical Workers union (SME), the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT), and the Union Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT) — all of whom endorsed the Conference Call — were unable to attend at the last minute because of pressing demands on the home front.

The Binational Conference voted to endorse and urge support throughout the labor movement for the resolution adopted by the San Francisco Labor Council on August 14, 2017, which states, in part: *“Repealing NAFTA is the necessary first step, the very pre-condition, to opening new negotiations — with the full input of trade unions, environmental groups, and other community organizations in all three signatory countries — that could lead to a trade deal that actually benefits working people in all three countries.”* [See Attachment.]

Why this insistence on cancellation?

Throughout the Binational Conference, speaker after speaker in the plenary sessions and in the workshops explained that NAFTA must be cancelled; it is not amendable. From beginning to end, they affirmed, NAFTA is a weapon of destruction of the labor force and its organizations, and of the environment, in all three signatory countries.

By failing to openly call for cancellation of the agreement, the labor movement and its allies are allowing President Trump to present himself as the defender of the U.S. workers, a status that will only help him secure the continuation of his destructive policies. Trump is giving lip service to our concerns about the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) system, outsourcing, and labor rights — all vital issues — but he is not about to reform NAFTA in the interest of working and oppressed peoples.

We think it is misleading and demobilizing to assert, as the November 14, 2017, statement by the AFL-CIO leadership does, that the Trump administration’s proposals, while not fixing NAFTA’s many shortcomings, are “a step in the right direction” and represent a “bright proposal in times of extreme challenge for North American families.”

Trump, who is supporting a federal “right-to work” law and has come out in favor of dumping “agency fee” in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME*, is not about to support labor rights or living-wage jobs, as he professes. The labor standard that Trump is proposing to include in NAFTA is one that was included in the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) and that has proven to be totally useless in terms of protecting labor rights. [See the report by Sandra Polaski, former Deputy Director-General for Policy of the International Labor Organization, in the GIGI Brief, October 2010, published by Boston University’s Global Development Policy Center.]

Trump’s real objectives were laid out in the 18-page document submitted this past July 17 by his NAFTA renegotiation team. It puts forth the administration’s objective of “modernizing” the NAFTA agreement with the aim of expanding the power and profitability of the U.S.-based transnational corporations.

The document states that, *“the United States will seek to obtain more equitable, secure and recipro-*

cal market access.” — “The United States will eliminate all discriminatory barriers that unfairly limit access to markets for U.S. goods.” — “The United States will establish rules that reduce or eliminate barriers to U.S. investment in all sectors in the NAFTA countries.” — The United States will require that all State-Owned and Controlled Enterprises (SOEs) not cause harm to another Party through the provision of subsidies.”

All U.S. administrations over the past 23 years (since NAFTA was first signed) have plundered Mexico in the name of the above-mentioned objectives. They have demanded that Mexico amend its Constitution and reverse all laws that codify attributes of national sovereignty in the name of eliminating “barriers to U.S. trade and investment.”

For example, Mexico has been forced to put an end to cooperative ownership of land in the *ejidos*, as enshrined in the 1917 Constitution. It has also been forced to put an end to “State monopolies” — such as the State-owned telecommunications, transportation, and oil corporation (Pemex). It has been forced to destroy collective-bargaining agreements and trade unions. (All of these were deemed “barriers to trade.”) Mexico has been forced to open its market to farm products from the U.S., which has decimated Mexico’s agricultural production. Today, 45% of what is consumed in Mexico in terms of beans, corn, rice, sugar, and wheat comes from the United States.

All these measures are responsible for the mass migration to the United States of millions of Mexican peasants, workers, and youth. They have been forced to migrate in order to feed their families.

What Trump is now seeking to do is impose even more draconian measures upon Mexico in this “new NAFTA.” On Sept. 2, 2017 — for example — Reuters Business News sent out a dispatch under the title, “NAFTA Negotiators Seek to Enshrine Mexico’s Energy Reforms’.” It reads, in part:

“MEXICO CITY (Reuters) — U.S., Canadian and Mexican negotiators are zeroing in on ways to enshrine Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto’s sweeping energy reforms into a modernized North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico’s chief negotiator said on Saturday.

“The 2014 reforms wrung control of the country’s oil and gas sector from State hands, opening it up to private investment, and incorporating them into the 23-year-old NAFTA as a way to help preserve them for the long term. When NAFTA was enacted in 1994, Mexico’s energy sector was closed, and Peña Nieto’s reforms ended a decades-long monopoly for national oil company Pemex [PEMX.UL] and ensured competitive oil auctions. Incorporating them into NAFTA would help shield them from any future governments that may want to reverse them.”

A message sent to the Binational Conference from unionists and activists in Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz who did not get their visas to travel to the conference, underscores the anti-worker character of the NAFTA “renegotiations.” They write:

“This year, the so-called ‘renegotiation’ of NAFTA began; its aim is simply to impose new clauses to continue deepening the dismantling of the rights and gains of the working class, especially in Mexico.

“Under NAFTA, there is now a process of rapid privatization of public health systems (ISSSTE, IMSS, SSA) and public education. These attacks are carried out in accordance with the destructive orientations of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and OECD. All call for increased privatizations of the public services of lighting, security, sanitation — and now the government is moving quickly to privatize water services in cities and communities in the framework of the so-called Law of Public-Private Partnerships.

“Following the dictates of Big Business aimed at destroying the gains achieved during decades of working-class struggle, hundreds of thousands of workers in Mexico have lost their jobs, while their collective-bargaining agreements and their unions have been destroyed. More than 15 million young people do not have access to education and work; they are left prey to the drugs economy, or to jobs in semi-slavery conditions with miserable wages, or to enlistment in the police and army of containment and repression against the people’s resistance movements.”

While the new NAFTA is largely the continuation and deepening of the attacks on working people promoted over the past 23 years, there are some new features. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer declared that one of the main purposes of the renegotiation was to “update” the agreement.

“NAFTA was negotiated 25 years ago,” Lighthizer said, “and while our economy and businesses have changed considerably over that period, NAFTA has not.” In particular, he said “digital trade” had barely begun when the agreement took effect. New provisions were needed to address this digital trade, as well as intellectual property rights, regulatory practices, state-owned enterprises and labor regulations.

UC-Santa Barbara Global Studies Professor William I. Robinson explained the meaning of these new provisions in his keynote speech to the Binational Conference. *“Far from protectionism, by renegotiating NAFTA and other aspects of the global trade regime, the United States is acting to break down national barriers to service and digital trade that is now at the cutting-edge of the global economy; that is, it is promoting the next generation of globalization.”*

To sum up: The Binational Conference concluded that NAFTA is not amendable and must be canceled. It also called on the governments covered under the NAFTA agreement to halt and reverse all the anti-working class measures — especially all the privatizations and deregulations of public services and enterprises — taken in the name of NAFTA. What is needed urgently in all three signatory countries, the conference asserted, are measures to renationalize and re-regulate everything that was privatized or deregulated under NAFTA over the past 23 years.

A Trinational Day of Mobilization around these demands is needed. It could take place at the time of the next round of NAFTA renegotiations. If you were to issue such a call around the above-mentioned demands, this would represent a big step forward for working people and all the oppressed in Mexico, the United States and Canada — and beyond.

For our part, as per the decisions of the Binational Conference, we will continue to advocate for this orientation throughout the labor movement and among all the community organizations concerned with these issues.

In Solidarity,

The Organizing Committee of the Binational Conference

P.S. A full report on the Binational Conference Decisions and Action Proposals will be available soon and will be sent to you promptly.



Resolution Adopted Unanimously by the Aug. 14, 2017, Delegates Assembly of the San Francisco Labor Council (AFL-CIO):

Cancel NAFTA! Tear Down the Wall of Shame / Not One More Deportation! Support Workers' Rights and Struggles in Mexico, the U.S., and Canada!

Whereas, there is a stepped-up attack on immigrant workers — documented and undocumented — in the United States, and NAFTA has been used to pit U.S. workers against Mexican workers to benefit multi-national corporations from the U.S. and around the world, and

Whereas, the escalating attack on immigrant workers and people of color is a threat to all workers and to organized labor in the United States; the immigrant community and their children in schools are being terrorized by ICE and by the racist attacks on immigrants, and

Whereas, NAFTA has been used to privatize railroads, telecom, oil, education and the dismantling of Mexico's agricultural industry, causing forced migration of tens of millions of people from their homelands in Mexico, and

Whereas, the US and other multi-nationals corporations have colluded with the Mexican government, using NAFTA to prevent unionization at the 1,500 maquiladora factories in Mexico, and

Whereas, the privatization of land has forced hundreds of thousands of indigenous people off their indigenous homeland, with as many as 80,000 farmworkers and their families forced to move outside their communities, towns, and cities, to Northern states in Mexico to find work often under horrible, inhumane working conditions that are designed to enslave people/workers, as is the case of the Driscoll's corporation in Baja California, Mexico and other subsidiary farms, and

Whereas, the Trump administration is increasing the militarization of the border of the United States and Mexico — and proposing to extend the Wall of Shame all across this border — thus dividing families and children from their parents, relatives, and grandparents, who have not been in reachable contact in many cases for over 20 years, and

Whereas, the Trump administration has said that the Mexican people are responsible for the failure of NAFTA, and the US will renegotiate NAFTA to allow US multi-nationals and businesses to expand, exploit, and renegotiate this agreement without the input of unions, human rights, environmental organizations, or health and welfare coalitions, and

Whereas, the same companies and multi-nationals that pushed NAFTA will be in charge of renegotiating NAFTA to benefit these same corporations and to further the expansion of the "Guest Worker" programs, and to further privatization and deregulation, and

Whereas, the Sacramento Central Labor Council has endorsed this resolution.

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council calls for full unionization and full labor rights for workers in Mexico, the United States and Canada and for building direct worker-solidarity and labor actions against NAFTA and against the global multi-nationals thieving off the poorest labor force, and

Be It Further Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council calls for united solidarity action of workers in Mexico, United States, and Canada for the cancellation of NAFTA. Repealing NAFTA is the necessary first step, the very pre-condition, to opening new negotiations — with the full input of trade unions, environmental groups, and other community organizations in all three signatory countries — that could lead to a trade deal that actually benefits working people in all three countries, and

Be It Further Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council calls for an end to the massive ICE attacks on immigrant workers, documented and undocumented, in the US — with not one more deportation, and

Be It Finally Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council calls upon all its affiliates, all statewide labor councils and the AFL-CIO, along with all of labor's community partners, to support this call and to urge solidarity actions around the above-stated demands on August 16, 2017, the day that the Trump administration has called for the talks on NAFTA renegotiation to begin in Washington.

Resolution submitted by:

SMART UTU 1741, Olga Miranda (SEIU 87), Rudy Gonzalez (Teamsters 856), Rodger Scott (AFT 2121), Bob Price (AFT 2121), Allan Fisher (AFT 2121), Alan Benjamin (OPEIU 29), Ana Fisher (AFT 2121), Tom Lacey (OPEIU 29), Bob Price (AFT 2121), and Richard Meghoo (SF Taxi Workers Alliance)