

Canadian Labour Congress

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President
Committee of Governmental Representatives on Civil Society Participation
c/o Tripartite committee (ref: Civil Society)
ECLAC
1825 K. Street NW, Suite 1120
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Sir or Madam:

On behalf of the 2.3 million members of the Canadian Labour Congress, I am writing to express our deep concern regarding the mechanism for civil society participation, developed as part of the process leading to the Free Trade Area of the Americas. We do not believe that the original mandate of this committee, that of promoting genuine participation of civil society, will be facilitated through the submission of mailed in, "constructive" briefs on trade matters.

Since the First Summit of the Americas (Miami, 1994) the Canadian Labour Congress has participated with sister labour organizations, affiliated with the Interamerican Regional Workers Organization (ORIT), in attempts to build structures for an eventual dialogue with government on the social aspects of economic integration in the Americas. Through established Labour and Social Forums and a Working Group on Economic Integration, we have endorsed a number of concrete proposals that would begin to facilitate a "social dimension" to the trade agreement. These proposals included the establishment, within the official process, of a Working Group on Social Issues and granting the Labour Forum the same degree of access to the official process as that of the Business Forum.

Our approach to efforts to broaden *trade liberalization* in the Americas now includes participation with other civil society sectors and social movements in the hemisphere in a Hemispheric Social Alliance which, as you probably are aware, sponsored a *Peoples' Summit of the Americas* in Santiago, bringing together close to 1,000 men and women and from which we launched an alternative platform of *fair trade* in the Americas. I refer you to the document *Alternatives for the Americas*, which sets forth our shared views on several aspects of economic integration.

Unfortunately, the hoped-for dialogue on important labour and social issues has continually been rejected by the trade ministers, and the current "suggestion-box" type of mechanism has been established in its place. Business interests continue to be the only civil society sector to have privileged access to the official process through government supported and sponsored Business Forums of the Americas which meet prior to trade ministers meetings. All other civil society sectors have been excluded from active participation, merely invited to mail in written briefs. Some governments have made a special attempt to publicize this mechanism, others have not bothered to do so.

-2-

We wish to draw to the attention of the trade ministers of the Americas the fact that antidemocratic, exclusionary, market oriented free trade agreements no longer will automatically be the norm. Civil societies of the OECD countries were able to exert enough opposition to postpone a Multilateral Agreement on Investment from being completed at the OECD. US civil society organizations successfully vetoed "fast track" authority for the US Congress because it did not include labour and environmental guarantees that US citizens demanded.

Canadian Trade Minister Sergio Marchi spoke in Geneva, of the FTAA Committee of Governmental Representatives on Civil Society Participation as a model that the World Trade Organization could follow. In this sense the eyes of the world are upon you. We call upon the FTAA trade ministers to move the Committee on Civil Society on to a second stage of innovative actions that would truly provide a mechanism for ensuring that free trade in The Americas is built on principles of democracy, development and prosperity for all countries and all peoples of the Americas.

Sincerely,

Robert White President
President

c.c. Officers and Assistants
Executive Council
Social Policy Department
International Department
Luis Anderson, ORIT
Hon. Lloyd Axworthy
Hon. Sergio Marchi
Hon. Claudette Bradshaw