

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Citizen Groups Respond to NAFTA Side Agreements

On Tuesday, August 17, at 10:00AM at American Legion Hall, 212 Tompkins Street in Cortland the Tompkins/Cortland Labor Coalition, in cooperation with other labor, environmental, religious and community groups will hold a press conference. Representatives will respond to the latest announcement by the Clinton Administration that "labor and environmental side agreements" to the North American Free Trade Agreement have been reached and signed.

The Clinton negotiations have accomplished nothing. What stands now is the same old, unacceptable "Bush NAFTA". Even by President Clinton's own measuring stick these side agreements came up a miserable failure. Issues which the Clinton team committed itself to addressing in October 1992 were never even brought to the negotiating table. These include: protecting the family farmer, ensuring the safety of imported foods, ensuring the safety of U.S. highways, generating funding for the environmental costs of NAFTA and opening up the trade process to "citizen participation."

As for the issues which were supposedly dealt with, labor and the environment, the side agreements are meaningless. In the new agreements two commissions are to be set up on labor and environmental standards. According to the President these commissions will have the power to resolve any concerns Americans may have about losing jobs to Mexico because of the cheaper labor, fewer labor rights and poor environmental protections. We strongly disagree.

First, these commissions may **only investigate violations of law already existing within each country.** This will do nothing to bring Mexico up to U.S. environmental standards.

Second, even if violations are discovered a **2/3 vote of the commission is needed before a review can be initiated.**

Third, there are **no timelines** outlined for these reviews.

Fourth, these commissions have **no enforcement powers** to force violating countries to change their ways.

We continue see the NAFTA as a very bad deal for U.S., Mexican and Canadian workers and communities. The side agreements announced late last week will only hasten plant closings such as the one experienced in Cortland last year when Smith Corona moved to Mexico. NAFTA will drag wages and living standards in this country further and further towards those of Mexico and only a very few will benefit.

Some of our Congressional representatives have postponed announcing their positions on NAFTA until after the side agreements were completed. We now call upon Representatives Boehlert and McHugh to come out in opposition to this legislation and we call upon Representatives Walsh and Hinchey to reaffirm in the clearest terms possible that they stand in opposition to NAFTA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kathy Russell, Tompkins/Cortland Labor Coalition, 756-6948 or Coert Bonthius, Tompkins/Cortland Labor Coalition, 277-5670.