

Shutdown the OAS / FTAA General Assembly Meetings!

Call to Action - Protest the OAS / FTAA: detailed background information.

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Following the momentum of Seattle & Washington, the next big fight against corporate globalization will take place June 4 - 6, in Windsor, Ontario. As the extension of NAFTA, the FTAA will extend free trade over the entire Western Hemisphere.

WHAT IS THE OAS?

The OAS stands for the Organization of American States. It is a political forum that is based in Washington and involves the heads of state of all 34 countries in the Americas, with the exception of Cuba which has no voting rights. Its main priority is free trade and on its agenda right now is the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. As the extension of NAFTA, the FTAA aims to consolidate the entire Western Hemisphere into one free trade zone through "economic unification".

HOW DOES THE OAS AND THE FTAA FIT IN WITH OTHER BODIES SUCH AS THE WORLD BANK AND THE IMF?

The OAS and the FTAA also work to accelerate corporate globalization. The media often presents globalization as "global harmony" but the reality is that globalization is a very violent process. It enables transnational corporations to colonize less industrialized countries by taking over their domestic markets.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is the investment body of the OAS that funds development projects throughout the Americas. It is very similar to the World Bank in that it imposes structural adjustment policies on indebted nations.

HOW DOES THE OAS / FTAA AFFECT THE ENVIRONMENT?

The FTAA will also be WTO compliant. The World Trade Organization is an institution that corporations can turn to for enforcement of their "rights" when they want to violate laws that protect the environment. Canada already has 11 such lawsuits against it. For example, under NAFTA the US corporation Ethyl Corp won \$30 million by suing for its "right" to use the toxic gasoline additive MMT.

As trade liberalization accelerates and the environment deteriorates, the OAS is merely "planning for climate change".

HOW DO STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS AFFECT PEOPLE?

Structural adjustment programs allow transnational corporations to buy a country's public resources, such as health care, education, water, oil & gas...leading to excessively high user fees. The brunt of the costs are paid for by the poor, while wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of an elite few.

The purpose behind privatization is to extract the public's wealth in order to make banks and corporations wealthier.

In Bolivia, there are mass protests taking place against the government's decision to privatize the water system. Bechtel corp is now charging Bolivians \$20 / month for water, when the average income for a family is only \$100 a month.

As a consequence of privatization, only a small percent of the population will be able to afford basic services. Only those who are privileged by race, class and gender will be able to survive under such free trade.

Structural adjustment programs also create unstable economies. Under NAFTA, the Mexican peso plummeted causing widespread unemployment, shrinking wages and deteriorated working conditions. The OAS / FTAA Trade Ministers claim that lifting trade barriers will result in economic stability, but as NAFTA has already shown, this is not possible under free

trade.

The IDB's structural adjustment also force interest rates to go up in order to combat inflation. This means that workers are really vulnerable to sudden unemployment. Investors can basically park their money in a country when it's convenient, and then pull it out whenever they want.

In 1995, the IDB approved the privatization of Guatemala's health care and euphemistically called it the "Program to Upgrade Health Care Services". In 1997, the IDB approved a project which transfers ownership of Ecuador's water system to the private-sector. In 1994, the IDB approved the privatization of Nicaragua's energy, water supply and telecommunications sectors with their "Public Utilities Reform Program".

HOW DOES THE OAS AND THE IDB AFFECT THE LIVES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

Indigenous peoples, and in particular women, are exploited by the OAS and trade agreements. For example, the IDB funded a development project in Rio Negro, Guatemala for the construction of the Chixoy Dam. Not only did this project create environmental havoc, but in order to get the indigenous people off the land the IDB supported the Guatemalan military occupation of the area.

In the process, the indigenous peoples of Rio Negro were raped and massacred to make way for the project. Instead of stimulating economic growth, the project has further impoverished the nation. To date, the survivors of the massacre have still not seen the return of their land, as the IDB had promised.

Just last month, peasants in Ecuador set up roadblocks in 19 of the 22 regions in the country to protest against the privatization of health care. Most of the health care facilities in Ecuador have been closed since April. The government claims that there is a shortage in supplies and personnel, yet the country has an intake of over \$600 million in contributions each year.

The peasants are demanding to be included in the decision-making process as bodies such as the OAS exclude their involvement. The OAS only pays lip service to dialogue and the participation of civil society while it conceals its agenda with claims of promoting human rights and democracy.

DOES THE OAS DO ANYTHING TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AS IT CLAIMS?

No, in fact it accelerates poverty. Not only will people not be able to afford basic services like water and health care, but they will also be subjected to violations within the workplace as labour is deregulated.

To make way for privatization, structural adjustment programs force countries to cut social spending. Cutbacks also include the elimination of subsidies for basic goods, like bread. So the costs of items needed to survive goes up, while people are paid sweatshop wages by transnational corporations.

HOW DOES THE OAS AND FREE TRADE AFFECT LABOUR REGULATIONS?

Countries in the Americas, particularly Latin and Central America, will be prohibited from distinguishing between domestic and foreign investment. These countries will be forced to allow transnational corporations, typically US or Canadian based, to take advantage of them by violating basic labour and environmental standards.

Free trade produces a way for corporations to gain access to cheap, intimidated and submissive labour. Protection for workers is seen by the Organization of American States as an obstacle to development.

Private-sector development and structural adjustment programs ensure that so-called lesser developed countries become economically dependent on US interests.

An example can be seen in El Salvador. Workers at Mandarin International work in sweatshop conditions producing clothing for the Gap and Eddie Bauer. They are paid only \$0.56 / hr. When the women and child workers at Mandarin tried to organize a union in 1995, the first even in El Salvador under free trade, the workers were locked out of the factory or illegally fired. They were then threatened with physical punishment by armed "security guards" that the company hired. Women at the factory were also forced by management to take birth control pills.

HOW ARE WOMEN AFFECTED IN THE WORKPLACE UNDER FREE TRADE?

It is women and children who suffer the most from poverty, human rights abuses and restricted access to social services, all of which are greatly intensified under agreements such as the FTAA. In the workplace, women are subjected to routine sexual harassment and forced sterilization.

Indigenous women that are displaced the the IDB's development projects are often forced to move to towns in search of jobs. They are then forced to take work as low-paid domestic servants or seamstresses making products for foreign

corporations. In these positions, women face an increased risk of being sexually harassed and assaulted by their employers.

For example, conservative estimates in Brazil find that at least 10% of female domestic servants are assaulted by their employers as a means to maintain social control. Foreign investors often require that women submit to pregnancy tests or show proof of sterilization in order to be hired.

In Brazil, mass sterilization has resulted in the sterilization of over 27% of the female population. The National Labour Committee (NLC) estimates that over 500,000 women in the free trade zone of Central America and the Caribbean work in conditions where they are forced to take birth control pill while they make products for US markets.

Importantly, it is women of colour and aboriginal women who suffer the most from the OAS' agenda. As labour is deregulated and indigenous lands are both seized and militarized, imperialist trade pacts result in forced sterilization, military rapes of indigenous women, and the feminization of poverty.

WHAT DOES THE OAS PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION?

The OAS agenda includes reducing spending on education so that "only 75% of secondary school will be provided for by 2010" for member states, which includes Canada and the US.

Essentially privatization creates a two-tiered system for education. We can already feel the impact of free trade on education in Canada. There is a US conglomerate that is poised to open the first for-profit university in the province. The quality of education also deteriorates as it becomes just another marketplace.

THE OAS ALSO CLAIMS TO COMBAT DRUG TRAFFICKING.

The OAS's "War on Drugs" is an excuse to militarize regions and create a culture of fear that legitimizes police brutality. A lot of media coverage for the OAS / FTAA protests in Windsor are guilty of this kind of fear mongering. Article titles such as "Cops Fear for their Safety" have already appeared to misrepresent our intentions.

The Law and Order agenda and free trade also serve to create a vast pool of racist slave labour through the privatization of the Prison Industrial Complex.

IS WINDSOR GOING TO BE LIKE WASHINGTON AND SEATTLE?

We are trying to build upon the momentum of a movement which is growing against corporate globalization. Windsor however, is not the same as Washington. It is a working class town and the people there deserve to have it left intact. Our goal is the shutdown the OAS / FTAA General Assembly meetings, not a working class town like Windsor that the OAS exploits.

WHAT KIND OF RESISTANCE IS BUILDING AGAINST THE OAS AND FREE TRADE?

Resistance is erupting all across the Americas. This month for example, 3000 women from across Brazil took to the streets to protest against free trade by throwing genetically-altered soybeans at the US embassy.

The OAS / FTAA Shutdown Coalition has been formed, made up of labour, human rights, environmental activists and others, with the purpose of shutting down the meetings in Windsor.

This June, the OAS / FTAA General Assembly will be meeting in Windsor, Ontario to decide, behind closed doors, on the fate of all 750 million people living in the Americas. They have agreed to complete negotiations of the FTAA by 2005, with substantial progress toward building the FTAA by 2000.

HOW CAN PEOPLE GET INVOLVED: For more information, contact: Hotline: 416-643-0837 www.shutdownoas.org, stopftaa@tao.ca

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