

Opposition to the Dominican Republic– Central American Free Trade Agreement

Submitted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council

AMERICA'S WORKING FAMILIES join with our brothers and sisters in Central America and the Dominican Republic in strongly opposing this flawed United States–Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). We need a vision of trade that makes moral and economic sense for all workers, but CAFTA is not it.

CAFTA will only speed the loss of good jobs at home and exacerbate inequality and exploitation of workers in Central America and the Dominican Republic. Cynically sold as a boost for development and democracy in Central America and a job creator in the United States by its corporate promoters, CAFTA is utterly devoid of compassion and opportunity for those who need it the most—the 37 million Central Americans struggling in poverty and the millions of hardworking immigrants in this nation most vulnerable to layoffs and mistreatment.

Flawed trade deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the proposed CAFTA widen our trade deficit, subject domestic laws protecting our workers, consumers, public services and health to challenge by foreign corporations and do nothing to promote democracy, workers' rights or the building of a middle class in developing nations that can purchase our exported goods and services. NAFTA has cost U.S. workers over 900,000 jobs and job opportunities, but it also hurts workers who have not been displaced. Employers used the leverage of their new mobility and rights under NAFTA to crush workers' union organizing drives and win concessions at the bargaining table, driving down wages and working conditions for American

workers; the incidence of employers' threats to close and relocate factories grew under NAFTA.

Few workers in Central America today can exercise their internationally-recognized rights to form unions and bargain collectively. Anti-union violence is common, and employers routinely fire workers attempting to exercise these rights while governments fail to act. Far from addressing or rectifying these concerns, CAFTA actually weakens the labor rights conditions included in current U.S. trade programs, leaving Central American and Dominican workers more vulnerable than ever. CAFTA represents a major step back from the U.S.–Jordan Free Trade Agreement, which the AFL-CIO endorsed.

We applaud those members of Congress and senators who have announced their public opposition to this CAFTA, including Republicans and Democrats with a long record of support for working families. We would especially like to note the courage of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the leadership of the New Democratic Coalition and many lawmakers with a record of support for free trade agreements in opposing this flawed deal.

To secure the defeat of this flawed CAFTA, the AFL-CIO and our affiliates pledge to:

- Continue to develop and disseminate popular materials on CAFTA and coordinate with allies;
- Ask union members to continue to contact their members of the House and senators and urge them to oppose CAFTA;

- Show solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Central America and the Dominican Republic by supporting their efforts to reject CAFTA;
- Focus more public scrutiny on the big corporations pushing CAFTA and expose their attacks on worker, environmental and consumer protections through free trade rules; and
- Through the AFL-CIO political mobilization structure, including our state federations and central labor councils, work to hold elected officials and candidates from both political parties accountable for their position on flawed trade deals such as CAFTA and work to craft viable alternatives to the failed trade policies of the United States since the 1990s.