



GREAT LAKES UNITED

NEWS RELEASE

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GREAT LAKES COALITION BLASTS NAFTA TRADE PACT

CLEVELAND, OHIO -- Great Lakes United today joined environmental, labor, and community organizations in the Greater Cleveland area to strongly oppose passage of the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA.

At a morning news conference leaders of the organizations said that NAFTA not only threatened to weaken environmental and worker protection laws and standards in place in the Great Lakes region, but could also pose a threat to the autonomy of Great Lakes Governments if used as intended to supersede local policy making power.

Great Lakes United (GLU), an international coalition of 150 groups from across the Basin collectively representing over a million residents also released its annual resolutions at the news conference including one which throws the weight of that coalition against NAFTA.

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An international organization dedicated to conserving and protecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River
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Great Lakes United hails the recent U.S. District Court ruling which bars the Clinton administration from continuing with NAFTA until an environmental impact statement can be completed as a step in the right direction.

"It is possible to promote a healthy North American economy while at the same time strengthening environmental protection and improving standards of living in the less developed nations of our hemisphere, but NAFTA fails to accomplish this." said Richard Kubiak, president of Great Lakes United. As an example Kubiak pointed to the trade agreement negotiated by members of the European Economic Community, which he said includes minimum worker and environmental protection standards.

"NAFTA," Kubiak said, "amounts to a 'bill of rights' for multinational corporations to search for the weakest environmental standards and the cheapest labor on the continent with little fear of governmental interference. NAFTA is a menace to the Great Lakes ecosystem"

"NAFTA belongs in the 19th century," said Sarah Miller of the Canadian Environmental Law Association, "It belongs to a time when much of humankind was out to exploit nature, not now, when we know our very survival will depend upon our ability to live in cooperation with nature."

"You would think," Miller went on, "that with all of the recent talk about 'sustainable development' and 'green economics' the governments of North America might use the opportunity presented by the trade negotiations to move the hemisphere towards realization of these lofty concepts. Instead they have missed the opportunity and negotiated an agreement that virtually ignores the environment."

Great Lakes United and the other organizations represented at the news conference are particularly concerned that NAFTA could threaten the sovereignty of local, provincial, state, and national

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Details of Great Lakes United Concerns About the North American Free Trade Agreement

- * **Environmental Quality.** Analysts predict that among the industries likely to benefit the most from NAFTA are the plastics, chemicals, machinery, and metals industries. Each of these uses a great deal of toxic chemicals and generates large quantities of hazardous wastes. Great Lakes organizations worry that NAFTA will result in more cross-border trade in toxic chemicals, and might adversely affect local efforts to reduce, reuse and recover hazardous and solid wastes by limiting the degree to which laws implementing such
- * **Natural Resources.** There is concern that NAFTA will hurt regional efforts to protect remaining forests, wetlands, fisheries, and water resources. Some environmental leaders fear that NAFTA could be used to help facilitate the diversion of Great Lakes waters into a continental water supply system.
- * **Agriculture.** The Great Lakes region is one of the world's best areas for food production. There is concern that NAFTA will have a negative impact on agricultural production, the family farm, and sustainable agricultural practices in the future.
- * **Economic Prosperity.** Many Great Lakes communities are working to revitalize their economies, and to create healthy and "green" jobs which enhance the environment. There is concern that NAFTA trade panel decisions and rulings on unfair trade advantages could hurt these local community development initiatives? If local companies that engage in international trade benefit from such initiatives, will they be seen as having unfair trade advantages under a NAFTA regime?

governments because their laws and policies could be challenged and nullified under the Agreement as "technical barriers to trade."

Any government that has signed NAFTA would be able to use this and other provisions to challenge the environmental protection, consumer, and worker safety laws of any other nation that is a party to the agreement. These challenges would be referred to a five-person arbitration panel meeting in absolute secrecy, inaccessible and unaccountable to the citizens of any nation. The panel could nullify the laws or policies challenged, and neither citizens nor governments would have a right to appeal.

Should Mexico choose to challenge it, NAFTA's "barriers to trade" provision also threatens the effectiveness of the 20-year-old Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada, according to Great Lakes United Executive Director Terry Yonker.

"The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement commits the United States and Canada to the goals of zero discharge and virtual elimination of the worst toxic substances in the Great Lakes Basin" said Yonker, "but this may become nearly impossible if Great Lakes governments cannot enact laws and regulations 'sunsetting,' or phasing-out and ultimately banning, the use of those chemicals,"

"By giving an unelected, unaccountable arbitration panel so much power over the quality of life and the quality of the environment, NAFTA could seriously weaken democracy, and that is the true tragedy of NAFTA," Yonker said.

Great Lakes United, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and the Lake Michigan Federation are holding "Citizens Dialogue on the Impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement" to address the many questions and concerns associated with NAFTA. The Dialogue is scheduled for Friday, July 23, 1993, 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM, in The Midland Hotel, 172 West Adams at LaSalle, Chicago, Illinois.

- * **Indigenous Peoples of the Great Lakes.** How will implementation of NAFTA affect existing treaty obligations between the governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and Indigenous peoples and nations?

- * **Democracy.** Under NAFTA as it now stands laws passed by local, state and federal governments can be challenged as being "Technical barriers to trade." These challenges would then be arbitrated by a panel which is unaccountable to the public which fought for and had passed the legislation in question, bypassing democratic policies.



GREAT LAKES UNITED

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**WARNING:
THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IS A THREAT TO
THE GREAT LAKES AND YOUR COMMUNITY**

The proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) threatens:

The Great Lakes Charter - an interstate agreement that discourages diversions of Great Lakes Waters in or out of the basin.

Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement - signed by the U.S. and Canada which has the goal of zero discharge of toxic substances into the environment.

Both these agreements establish conservation and pollution control standards that are tougher than NAFTA, and could be deemed "non-tariff barriers" to trade. NAFTA is not just about the trade of goods and services between borders. The economies of all three countries are already integrated. NAFTA is a bill of rights for transnational corporations who can now plunder our environment, and search for the cheapest labor, without the fear of government regulation. It is about denying citizens a role to determine social and environmental policy.

NAFTA THREATENS TO UNDERMINE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT

Negotiated out of the public eye, trade officials from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. signed on September 6, 1992 an agreement that will create a free trade zone for North America. The governments of each country must rewrite hundreds of federal and state laws to conform to the terms of the agreement. Using phrases such as "standards to be least restrictive", "technical barriers to trade", "missed economic opportunity", any national government can challenge another country's consumer, worker safety, and environmental protection laws. Special trade panels will meet to decide if the laws of each country violate the agreement.

For example, Mexico which still uses the cancer causing pesticide DDT, could challenge the U.S. "Delaney Clause" which prohibits the use of cancer causing additives or pesticide residues on food sold in the U.S. The challenge would be referred to a five man arbitration panel who must meet in absolute secrecy. This trade panel can nullify the Delaney Clause by ruling that zero risk to health exceeds generally accepted international standards of risk: Therefore, restricting free trade. No explanation is necessary, and citizens and state governments have no right to appeal.

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CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS

Already under existing trade agreements:

- * The Marine Mammal Protection Act that bans the sale of tuna caught in purse-seine nets - a practice that kills 20,000 dolphins annually - is now judged a trade restriction.
- * Canadian fisheries conservation regulations that require a sampling of salmon and herring landed in Canada has been ruled a "barrier to free trade".
- * The U.S. EPA has been ordered to revise its ban on asbestos, a material known to cause lung cancer, because it too has been found to be an unfair barrier to trade.
- * In the "spirit of the Free Trade Agreement", Canadian consumers now accept imported food from the U.S. that contains 30% more pesticide residues than allowed under Canadian law.

JOBS AND COMMUNITIES

NAFTA will accelerate the movement of U.S. and Canadian jobs to Mexico creating greater stress on North American Communities.

- * Mexican workers are paid \$5 a day, in the Maquiladora plants along the U.S.-Mexican border. Mexican workers have no safety protection, nor does Mexico enforce pollution controls. Conditions along the border region have been described by one observer as a 2000 mile long Love Canal. ABC's 20/20 has documented an alarmingly high rate of babies born without brains.
- * Since January 1989, when the U.S.-Canadian Free Trade Agreement went into effect, Canada has lost 25% of its manufacturing jobs to the U.S.: Most jobs went to low wage Southern Right-To-Work States like Arkansas.

NAFTA proponents argue that the free trade agreement will raise living standards in all three countries. However, under the current U.S.-Canadian Agreement, the standard of living in both countries have steadily declined. Once Mexico joins the free trade zone, the temptation of cheap Mexican labor, lax enforcement, and the elimination of duties will be too strong for corporations to resist moving south.

Canadian and U.S. communities will be forced to offer transnational corporations a "better business climate". Under threat of plant closing, workers will be forced to take pay cuts. Government revenues from income and sales taxes will decline. Cutbacks in essential services such as education, public health, work place and food inspections, and hazardous waste site clean ups from runaway factories are inevitable. Instead of raising living standards for everyone, American and Canadian communities will approach the conditions found in the Maquiladora.

GREAT LAKES UNITED BELIEVES THAT WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES IN EACH COUNTRY SHOULD NOT COMPETE AGAINST WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. RATHER, WE BELIEVE THAT NORTH AMERICA SHOULD BE A COMMUNITY: WHERE ALL WORKERS HAVE A RIGHT TO A DECENT WAGE IN A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORK PLACE; CONSUMERS CAN BUY SAFE AND HEALTHY FOOD; AND ALL LIVING THINGS HAVE A RIGHT TO THRIVE IN A SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

NAFTA is George Bush's vision of the new world order. Now that he is no longer in office, we must also remove his vision. NAFTA may have been negotiated quietly, but Congress/Parliament must first approve the agreement. Write your local Congressman/Member of Parliament and tell him/her that you are opposed to the North American Free Trade Agreement. Better still, send your letter to the local newspaper. Most politicians assign a staff person to read the local newspaper's letters to the editor page. REMEMBER: Keep it simple. You are a constituent and concerned citizen, not a trade expert. One page is sufficient. Finally, officials give greater weight to handwritten letters.

Send your letter to:

Honorable _____
House of Representatives/Senate
Washington, DC 20515/20510

Honourable _____
House of Commons
Ottawa, K1A 0H3

Dear Representative/Senator/Member of Parliament _____

For more information, contact: Terry Yonker, Executive Director, Great Lakes United, Buffalo State College, 1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14222 (716) 886-0142, Mary Ginnebaugh, Great Lakes United (Canadian office), P.O. Box 548, Station A, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6M6, (519) 255-7141, or Richard Kubiak, President of Great Lakes United at 2534 East 33rd Street, Erie, PA 16510, (814) 824-2345 (work), (814) 899-9676 (home).