

House capitulates to fast track, but fight expands

by Nancy Primack and Ronald Kokinda

The U.S. House of Representatives put its stamp of approval on a policy that will destroy the work forces of Mexico and the United States on May 23, by supporting a "fast track" for a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which George Bush will negotiate with Mexico. The House defeated House Resolution 101, sponsored by Rep. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), which would have denied the fast track negotiating authority, by a vote of 192-231.

Although the Senate could still act to stop the fast track, opposition there has been assumed to be weaker than in the House. As a result, George Bush now has a free hand to push through a trade agreement which is estimated will cost as many as 40% of the jobs of American workers in key industries such as auto and textiles, and spread abysmal living and working conditions in Mexico, as seen in the *maquiladoras* along the U.S.-Mexico border. These conditions, where pay is 59¢ an hour, are so horrendous that Lyndon LaRouche, economist and presidential candidate for 1992, has called it the "Auschwitz below the border." In adopting the fast track, once Bush submits a treaty, Congress will not be able to amend it, but can still reject it in its entirety in an up or down vote.

LaRouche leads the opposition

The political movement associated with political prisoner LaRouche has been leading the opposition to NAFTA, exposing the slave labor that exists in the *maquiladora* plants, detailing the genocidal consequences of Bush's free trade policies, providing the policy alternative to a "free trade" bailout of the major banks, and mobilizing public opposition. LaRouche sent a taped message to a conference held on the final weekend before the House vote, stressing the unique role which he and his associates have played over the last 25 years in exposing the genocidal policies of the Anglo-American establishment. He urged participants, "Get out there and fight!"

At the conference, speakers presented the results of an *EIR* study entitled "Auschwitz below the border," which had been released at press conferences in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City on May 7, which shocked the audience. Over 200 activists including farmers, trade unionists, civil rights leaders, and others, also heard first-hand reports from Mexico and Canada on the devastating effects NAFTA would have on these economies.

Rubén Cota, an executive member of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement, and Alberto Vizcarra, a state congressman from Sonora, Mexico spoke on "Why Mexicans Are Against NAFTA." Cota explained that Mexican President Salinas de Gortari is cooperating with Bush in the "free trade" destruction of Mexico. He described the factional fight in Mexico over the last decade, reporting on Lyndon LaRouche's meeting with then-Mexican President López Portillo, and on LaRouche's subsequent Operation Juárez proposal for reorganization of Ibero-America's foreign debt.

Vizcarra presented the details of the horrifying effects of free trade on Mexico already. He showed how the pattern of illnesses has spread from the poorer areas of southern Mexico to areas in the north where the *maquiladoras* are. Vizcarra said that in many areas, 25-30% of the population has no clean drinking water, and no sewage treatment. Cholera, hepatitis, and AIDS are spreading. The projects for industrial development have been axed by the International Monetary Fund and instead the "free trade" system of slave labor is the norm.

Over 100 activists then lobbied Congress to stop the fast track and NAFTA. Over 125 congressional offices were visited where aides, and several congressmen personally, were put on notice that the free trade bill with Mexico would create a slave labor economy. Many were shaken by the charges as the lobbyists talked about the conditions that already exist in Mexico. Several aides had read parts of the *EIR* Special Report already

or had heard about it through the Capitol Hill grapevine. Others promised to get their congressmen to read it. Although some shouting matches erupted, most offices welcomed the information; some congressmen were particularly grateful to get a Mexican perspective, others that issues which they hadn't considered, such as the spread of disease which will result from NAFTA, were brought to their attention.

Bush Democrats

The choice in the fight over NAFTA is between development and genocide. That the House opted for the latter resulted largely because the House Democratic leadership—the Bush Democrats—were Bush's *loyal* opposition. Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, came out and supported fast track on May 1. House Majority Leader Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) backed the fast track about a week later. They accepted Bush's assurances that the agreement will protect human rights, and that labor, environmental, and safety standards would be met by the Mexican government.

Gephardt, who based his 1988 presidential bid on a platform of Jap-bashing, has no problem with slave labor. The conditions that exist in the runaway U.S. factories, just over the Mexican border, are well known to Gephardt who was sent three times by his labor backers on fact-finding tours of these *maquiladoras*. On one tour, his wife vomited at seeing raw sewage puddles outside the cardboard shacks where Mexican workers live.

As the House leadership led the betrayal, the national offices of the AFL-CIO put out the word that opposing the fast track was a "lost cause." Except for constituents activated by the LaRouche movement, there was no grassroots mobilization. These constituents were told by congressional offices that they were the *only* ones who had pressured them all along. The May 23 *Washington Post* reported, "Other fast track opponents have complained privately that lobbyists for the AFL-CIO, the main component of the anti-fast track coalition, conceded defeat several weeks ago and left the nuts and bolts of knocking on congressional doors to others."

The other reason the fast track passed was the failure to offer an alternative to free trade. The most impassioned speakers against slave labor and labor exploitation could only say, "I'm for Americans having jobs. I support the middle class against the multinationals." No one attacked free trade. They said, "We want fair trade. If we're going to open up our markets, they had better open up theirs," and so forth. Dorgan, the sponsor of the anti-fast track resolution, questioned the worth of a promise from Bush, but wrote in a commentary in the May 20 *Washington Post*, "I am not opposed to negotiating a free trade agreement with Mexico, and I am not opposed to continuing negotiating in the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). I strongly support free trade."

AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland has nominally op-

posed both the fast track and free trade although it is an open secret that Kirkland is a member of the grouping that developed the free trade policy—the Trilateral Commission. He is a director and member, as is David Rockefeller, of the Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs. The National Agriculture Advisory Committee, a subsidiary of this group, has come out strongly in favor of the fast track and has lobbied and testified in favor of NAFTA.

Anglophile armtwisting

Several congressmen have commented privately that they have never seen such White House pressure as on this issue. The Establishment has mobilized its assets, and on May 14, Queen Elizabeth II addressed the issue in her speech to a joint session of Congress, promising that Britain would ensure that continental Europe did not oppose free trade. Bush is anxious to push through NAFTA because the Establishment strategy for keeping its bankrupt financial system afloat rests on the free trade looting arrangements. The pressure is also intense because the opposition at the grassroots level is real. Many of Gephardt's, Dorgan's, and Kirkland's constituents have expanded their fight against the fast track to a fight against NAFTA and free trade.

The United Auto Workers Local 31 of Kansas and Missouri has succeeded in getting several city and county councils to pass resolutions against the fast track, and the resolutions expand the concept to a fight against the free trade agreement. The resolution warns that the NAFTA agreement "will have a long-lasting, unprecedented and enormous effect on our respective economies and every community in North America. . . . We are concerned about the social and economic impact a trade agreement among Mexico, Canada, and the United States will mean to our citizens."

Labor leaders representing thousands of workers from the Northeast have also issued a statement to Congress stating that "we wish to express our wholehearted and unanimous disapproval of the North American Free Trade Agreement, soon to be presented to Congress. . . . It is abundantly clear that the free trade policy is really protectionism for the banks and 'runaway shops.' "

Canadian labor leaders representing over 500,000 workers have also endorsed a still stronger statement to the U.S. Congress: "Canada's loss of 285,000 jobs to 'free trade' should be convincing proof that it does not work. . . . Mexican workers and their families can never hope to rise out of poverty if the slave labor conditions contemplated by the FTA are implemented."

Agriculture groups have joined in the fight, with over 125 publicly opposing the fast track, including the National Farm Organization, the National Farmers Union, the American Agriculture Movement, the National Milk Producers Federation, and the National Peanut Growers. The California Women in Agriculture, representing thousands, voted to oppose the fast track.