Minneapolis hosts free trade meet

Cargill and the cartel crowd push for more looting rights, and are depressing the miserable prevailing wage in Mexico.

Two events in Minneapolis in mid-November highlight the fact that though the administration may change party name, the flurry of activity around free trade agreements continues unabated. The debt burden on the world economy is driving financial circles to impose free trade agreements, in the futile hope that increasing exports, made cheaper by slave labor, will solve the debt payment crisis.

It is no accident that Minnesota serves as a chosen center of organizing for the free trade agreements (the U.N. General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] and the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]), because it is home to the giant grain cartel company Cargill, Inc., and the Cargill-sponsored Hubert Humphrey Institute for International Affairs.

On Nov. 12, these interests sponsored a conference entitled "Southern Exposure: A Business Conference for Firms Interested in the Latin America and Caribbean Marketplace." Various labor groups attempted to get the conference canceled, because they claimed that the state of Minnesota was spending money to sponsor a conference to recruit businesses to move to Mexico and deprive them of jobs.

Just a glance at the agenda confirms such fears. At each of the six sessions, a country was "presented" by national representatives to the assembled executives and managers of Minnesota companies, for the purpose of recruiting their businesses to move to the selected country. The sessions had titles such as "Presenting Brazil," "Presenting the Dominican Republic," and "Presenting Colombia."

The inclusion of so many Caribbean and Central American countries gives credence to what many obervers suspect, that these nations will soon be added to a free trade agreement with the United States, thus placing more downward pressure on labor costs, below even Mexico.

The issue of government backing for the conference became so hot that both the Minneapolis City Council and County Board passed resolutions making it clear that they were not sponsoring the conference financially. However, it seems that the conference was the brainchild of an international trade office which is sponsored by both government agencies.

The public sponsors of the conference included the International Trade Advisory Board, which represents the multinational grain cartels in the government free trade negotiations, and the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, which has been a front for the grain traders since World War I.

Also on Nov. 12, the Minnesota Agri-Growth Council invited Arthur Dunkel, director general of GATT, to keynote its 25th annual membership meeting. Other presentations featured Robin S. Johnson, vice president of public affairs for Cargill, and Dr. C. Ford Runge, a Cargill-allied agricultural economist at the University of Minnesota. Johnson has attended many of the government GATT negotiating sessions.

Dunkel is expected to urge a swift conclusion to the stalled GATT negotiations as an alternative to a new U.S. trade war against Europe.

At the center of the free trade conspiracy in Minnesota is the Minneapolis-based Humphrey Institute, one of the major centers promoting NAFTA. The dean of the institute, G. Edward Schuh, was a spokesman for NAFTA as negotiated by the Bush administration at House Agriculture Committee hearings in September. Humphrey Institute economists promote China as the model for underdeveloped countries seeking to make the transition to free markets and free trade. And it is not accidental that Minnesota meatpacking and food-processing companies have demonstrated a penchant in recent years for the Chinese model of coolie labor in factories.

The packing plants routinely bring Mexican labor in to undercut the state's pay scales. The Tony Downs chicken-processing plant in Madelia was recently exposed for recruiting to Minnesota and exploiting a largely illegal Mexican work force.

The Green Giant plant, a Minnesota company which is an arm of the flour-milling conglomerate Pillsbury, came under scrutiny in a Sept. 24 *Wall Street Journal* article entitled "The Lure of Cheap Labor." Green Giant not only moved its plants to Mexico in search of lower labor costs, but its plants in Mexico pay, at $.83 an hour, less than Mexican-owned food-processing plants. The company is therefore contributing to even lower labor standards than already existed. Green Giant labels its full-time workers in Mexico "seasonal," so they are not eligible for any of the employment benefits of full-time workers. "They are barely able to put beans and tortillas on the table. There is no indoor plumbing, so sewage piles up. Families share tiny huts with chickens and flies buzzing incessantly," the paper reported.