

Miami Civil Society Prepares for FTAA Ministerial

Preparations are well under way in Miami for the FTAA Ministerial scheduled for November 2003. Jorge Arrizurieta, a former Republican fundraiser and United States Alternate executive director of the Inter-American Development Bank, was selected as executive director of Florida FTAA, the group that will organize the Business Forum and provide local support for the Ministerial. Another of its goals is to promote Miami as the headquarters of the Permanent FTAA Secretariat.

But opposition groups too are showing signs of increased activity. A local and statewide coalition of groups concerned with the impact of free trade and other globalization issues has begun to swing into action, with the support of the AFL-CIO. Coordination between the various interests represented by unions, environmentalists and anti-globalization forces has improved.

The growing local resolve to present a counterpoint to the official support of the FTAA and the globalization strategies that it represents was evident at several recent events. On March 29, the Sierra Club used its national resources to hold a day-long training on trade and the environment, with the participation of environmental and other activists in the South Florida area. Next on the agenda, on April 12 and 13, the emerging coalition of union and civic groups will hold a series of events in conjunction with Global Exchange. The trilateral "Lessons from NAFTA" speaker tour features Victor Quintana, campesino organizer, professor and former Mexican congressman; Cheri Honkala, executive director of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and national spokesperson for the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign; and Donald Macdonald, an officer of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. The speakers will dramatize their vision of NAFTA as it relates to the current trade negotiations. The major speaking event in Miami will be held at the First United Methodist Church on Biscayne Blvd. near Bayside at 5 pm on Saturday, April 12. The same speakers will fan out individually for other contacts and meetings throughout the community before going on to Tampa for other presentations. And in May, South Florida Jobs with Justice and the Florida Fair Trade Campaign are planning a "train the trainer" event that combines the grass-roots organizing experience and the educational resources of Project South and United for a Fair Economy. The program will provide the local movements with trained speakers who can effectively educate the community about the downside of free trade policies.

All of these activities and many others in the planning stages face an uphill battle, however. Most South Florida residents have a favorable view of trade and what it means for this community. Much will have to be done to relate free trade policies to other important local issues that will be negatively affected by increased unfettered trade with Latin America and the Caribbean. These are the so-called "new themes" of investment, services, government procurement, intellectual property rights and immigration policies that will undermine the ability of

governments to regulate public health, the environment and the domestic labor market, as well as assure the quality of education and public services. It is a real challenge to make these points in South Florida, where support runs high for basing the FTAA Secretariat in our region. Because of these considerations, arguments that are persuasive in other parts of the country may not be as effective here.