

You want global 'free trade'?

Give us global labor standards, a global minimum wage!

by mim4@mim.org
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We often hear the corporate shills promoting agreements like NAFTA, GATT, and now the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) complain about barriers to the free movement of investments and profits.

But we rarely hear them complain about barriers to the free movement of labor (i.e. people).

This is because monopoly corporations — and the privilege enjoyed by First World countries generally — depend on the depressed wages in Third World countries.

Workers in the Third World earn an average of \$0.48 an hour, while u.s. workers earn \$16.40.(1) How is this possible? Those Third World workers live under death-squad governments, which use force to set wage rates and attack union organizers.

Those regimes which do not use military force are competing against those which do — and they face the threat of covert and overt military aggression. Witness U.S. sponsored coups or invasions in Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam, Chile, etc.

So if the big capitalists are going to clamor for a WTO to protect their “free market” — never mind that the “free market” is dominated by First World monopolies and the WTO is controlled by a few bullies like the united States — we should demand WTO-like protections on a global, free, fair labor market.

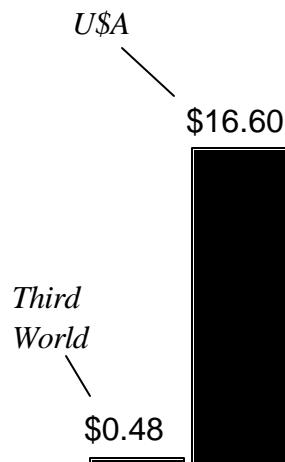
Professor Voradvidh from Thailand has it right: “We need a GATT on labor conditions and on the minimum wage, we need a standard on the minimum conditions for work and a higher standard for children.”(2) Countries that use death squads against union organizers should face severe trade penalties. Unions seeking to obtain wages higher than minimum wage should get to go before a WTO-like body.

Savvy corporate figureheads are already trying to fool us that they are doing something about the real goals of the international proletariat. The former Clinton Administration bragged, “[We have] sought establish a framework for multilateral discussion on how best to promote core labor standards: freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively, nondiscrimination in the workplace, prohibition of forced labor, and elimination of exploitative child labor.”(3)

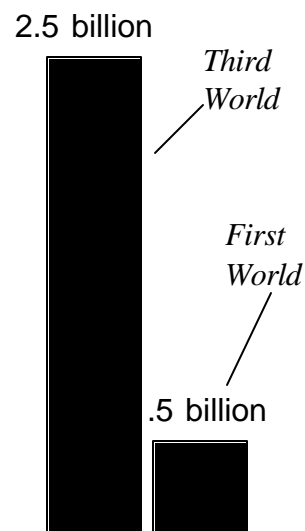
This is all smoke and mirrors — but that just means that we have to expose these charlatan’s schemes and continue to press for real global protections for workers. We shouldn’t cede the field to the imperialists — we should hoist them on their own rhetoric. Militant action recently embarrassed multi-national drug companies to lower their prices for AIDS drugs.(4) We can do the same on the issue of a global minimum wage, protection for union organizers, and the like.

Of course, a global minimum wage and other guarantees for a “free and fair” labor market are reforms within a capitalist system, currently dominated by big monopoly capital from the First World,

Average hourly wage in manufacturing



Number of workers



‘Oppression breeds resistance,’ and ‘the masses make history’ -- so imperialism’s days are numbered!

Chart source: The Class Structure of Imperialism in 1997, Section C.4. (<http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/mt/imp97/>)

a.k.a. imperialism. The Maoist Internationalist Movement believes a revolutionary struggle for socialism — where people’s needs are placed first and individual profit comes last or never — is necessary step to eliminate exploitation and related the evils of poverty, disease, and starvation which kill millions every year.

Anti-imperialist struggle with a socialist perspective in Third World countries can in one fell blow remove those countries from the dictates of First World monopoly capital and all its institutions: The IMF, World Bank, WTO, etc. The best thing we can do here is prepare to topple Amerikan imperialism when the time is right — and make sure it never arises again.

That said, global regulations on labor conditions are a progressive reform struggle. For hundreds of millions of toilers a wage hike can mean the difference between life and death. And, although global labor-market regulations are consistent with capitalism, they undermine the principal prop of modern capitalism: The super-profits sucked out of the Third World.

Notes:

1. Section C.6., Imperialism and its Class Structure in 1997, <http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/mt/imp97/>
2. William Greider, *One World Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, NY:Simon and Schuster, 1997.
3. Chapter 7, Economic Report of the President, 1997.
4. MIM Notes 233, 1 May 2001.

Avoid Amerikan protectionism — let sleeping fascists lie

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The Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM) agrees with many of the specific calls raised by the organizers of the April 21st Border Action, such as shutting down sweatshops, ending the exploitation of peasants and farmworkers, preventing Amerika from pillaging Mexico's natural resources, etc.(1) We do not, however, raise the call "Stop the Free Trade Area of the Americas," for several reasons.

MIM opposes imperialism generally. Many of the problems opponents of the FTAA, NAFTA, neoliberalism, privatization point out are in fact symptoms of imperialism. The commodification of labor, depressed wages, and destruction of the environment predated these policies. Overturning them might mean a shift in the balance of forces and a return to a "new deal" type of social democracy in Amerika — but super-exploitation and other problems built into the capitalist system like monumental waste would continue.

But this is not just a matter of reform versus revolution. We know that reforms — partial demands which can be won under capitalism — are necessary and useful. The question is, what use do we make of reforms?(2)

So what does a positive reform look like at this historical moment of imperialism? Some said for example that the United States should not join NAFTA, because free trade means the abolition or non-enforcement of laws protecting the environment. In 1991, under GATT, Mexico fought the United States and won the right to sell tuna to the United States that Mexican fishers obtained while killing dolphins in their nets. The U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act had banned tuna fishing that could endanger dolphins.(3) For reasons of this sort, MIM was told we should oppose GATT and NAFTA and take up economic nationalism. At best, the reasoning is that it is easier to fight for progressive laws inside one country.

MIM believes that kind of reasoning leads to sharper contradictions between imperialist powers and more wars — many bound to be fought by proxy in the colonies. If Mexico or other Third World countries can go to socialism and protect their nascent industries, that is one thing, and we should do everything possible to support whatever economic relationship they want to the imperialist countries. Asking an imperialist country to take up economic nationalism is another thing. Instead, we should aim our economic demands to be sure they have an internationalist spin.

That's why we support reforms like a global minimum wage and struggles against particular sweatshops.(4)

MIM does not want Mexico to shoulder the burden of losing its tuna fishing business. We want the imperialist countries to hand over the nets and technology to make it possible to fish without killing the dolphins. That is the general formula for environmental demands when they concern the Third World. If the imperialist countries want higher environmental standards, and they should, let them pay for it. Already they do this within the European Union where some countries pay for the use of less-polluting production techniques by poorer countries.

If the whole world lived U.\$ living standards, the species would probably die instantly from pollution, so it is clear the U.\$ people owe the world for their system. "It is epic hypocrisy for Americans to scold the poor for destroying nature while U.S. companies are

still free to dump toxic wastes from American consumption in poor countries. If they intend to reform the world, America and other advanced nations have to take care of their own mess first."(5) The bourgeois economists think their free trade is more efficient? Well, let them use those efficiency gains to improve the environment and inequality between the Third World and imperialist countries.

Because of the current political climate, raising economic nationalism in Amerika is bound to reinforce "Amerika-first" chauvinism. The main reason for this is that it's not just a few fat cat millionaires who benefit from imperialist exploitation. As the organizers of the Border Action note,(6) Americans generally benefit, through cheap prices on imported goods or relatively inflated wages. The campaign against NAFTA fed the usual (incorrect) grouching about "them" stealing "our jobs." The AFL-CIO used Seattle and Washington D.C. protests to bait China — of immediate concern, given the jingoism surrounding the recent spy plane incident.

It is no longer progressive to fight for "30 for 40" in the imperialist countries, because those workers are not exploited. However, demand for a global minimum wage or international labor rights are still entirely progressive and do not increase the existing world war by encouraging imperialist country nationalism.

Notes:

1. <http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/cal/BorderAction.PDF>
2. Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*, Section VII.6.
3. Section C.6., *The Class Structure of Imperialism in 1997*, <http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/mt/imp97/>
4. <http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/mn/text.php?mimfile=mn230/SAMOA.txt>
5. William Greider, *One World Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, NY:Simon and Schuster, 1997.
6. http://parksmanagement.com/border/p_03.htm

What is MIM?

The Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM) is the collection of existing or emerging Maoist internationalist parties in the English-speaking imperialist countries and their English-speaking internal semi-colonies, as well as the existing or emerging Maoist Internationalist parties in Belgium, France and Quebec and the existing or emerging Spanish-speaking Maoist Internationalist parties of Aztlan, Puerto Rico and other territories of the U.\$ Empire. MIM Notes is the newspaper of MIM. MIM upholds the revolutionary communist ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and is an internationalist organization that works from the vantage point of the Third World proletariat. MIM struggles to end the oppression of all groups over other groups: classes, genders, nations. MIM knows this is only possibly by building public opinion to seize power through armed struggle. Revolution is a reality for North America as the military becomes over-extended in the government's attempts to maintain world hegemony. MIM differs from other communist parties on three main questions: (1) MIM holds that after the proletariat seizes power in socialist revolution, the potential exists for capitalist restoration under the leadership of a new bourgeoisie within the communist party itself. In the case of the USSR, the bourgeoisie seized power after the death of Stalin in 1953; in China, it was after Mao's death and the overthrow of the "Gang of Four" in 1976. (2) MIM upholds the Chinese Cultural Revolution as the farthest advance of communism in humyn history. (3) As Marx, Engels and Lenin formulated and MIM has reiterated through materialist analysis, imperialism extracts super-profits from the Third World and in part uses this wealth to buy off whole populations of oppressor nation so-called workers. These so-called workers bought off by imperialism form a new petty-bourgeoisie called the labor aristocracy. These classes are not the principal vehicles to advance Maoism within those countries because their standards of living depend on imperialism. At this time, imperialist super-profits create this situation in the Canada, Quebec, the United States, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Israel, Sweden and Denmark. MIM accepts people as members who agree on these basic principles and accept democratic centralism, the system of majority rule, on other questions of party line.