

Respect the 2006 Fair Trade Mandate -- No to Bush FTAs

Statement by Korean-Americans for Trade

We are deeply disturbed by the secrecy and lack of democratic accountability in the trade negotiations process. Last Friday the Democratic leadership (Pelosi, Rangel and Baucus) -- in a move that labor and progressives were fearing -- struck a deal with the Bush administration that lobbyists for multinational corporations are declaring will pave the way for Congress to pass four bilateral trade agreements, including Korea, and grant reauthorization of Fast Track to President Bush. These Democrats say that core labor and environmental standards will be included in these agreements, but unions will not be able to go to courts to demand the enforcement of labor laws while multinational corporations will be given greater rights to sue governments.

For far too long American workers have trusted Democrats to put forth a trade agenda that protects us from corporate piracy, only to be reminded time and again that many Democrats are beholden to the very same corporations controlling Republicans. In 2006, we elected 37 brand new Democrats who ran on a fair trade platform and in every case, defeated free trade incumbents. Fair traders gave Democrats the majority in Congress, and these Democrats, flanked by other progressives, have demanded a "trade policy which will work for America's working families, farmers, businesses, the environment and our local communities." This "compromise" with the Bush Administration contradicts this promise to the American people, and we must let House Speaker Pelosi, Ways and Means Chair Rangel, and Senate Finance Chair Baucus know that they will have to answer to the base that handed them power and stop ceding it to the Bush administration and the multinational corporations driving these trade agreements.

Ever since the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement negotiations began, it has been shrouded in secrecy, and the deal made by the Democratic leadership with the Bush Administration is more of the same. Americans have heard virtually nothing of this trade agreement, even though it is set to be the second largest trade deal since NAFTA. Six weeks after US and South Korean negotiators claimed to have finished the agreement, not only has the text still not been released to the public, the Bush Administration and the Democratic leadership are attempting to finalize a deal that ensures passage of the FTA in Congress even before the text has been released to the American and South Korean public!

In South Korea, the Roh Moo-Hyun government has quashed dissent by shutting down public hearings, denying the airing of an advertisement produced by peasants and filmmakers about the dangers of the FTA, and outlawing public protest of the FTA. The government broke into nine regional offices of the Korea Alliance Against the Korea-US FTA (KoA), arrested trade unionists and movement leaders, and deployed police violence using clubs and water cannons against protestors. As trade negotiators frenetically worked to sign the trade deal minutes before the April 1 deadline, Heo Seowook, a 54-year old South Korean taxicab driver, set himself on fire in protest of the FTA. Over one week later, he died from second-degree burns. This act of sacrifice symbolizes the desperation felt by working people around the globe due to spiraling housing and health costs, and anxieties over wages and job security -- desperation to be further worsened by

FTAs. In their imaginary world, free traders tout the miracles of neoliberal economics. In the real world, free trade has consistently hurt ordinary workers and farmers around the world. This is why we join millions of workers, farmers, and lawmakers from the United States and South Korea in opposing a trade deal with the Bush Administration that "compromises" the rights and security of ordinary Americans and Koreans, and that paves the way for the passage of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement, as well as Panama, Peru, Colombia and Fast Track reauthorization. Respect the 2006 fair trade mandate and put forth a positive and just trade agenda that respects workers rights, protects the environment, and upholds human rights.