

Editorial

Defeat NAFTA

It is highly possible that George Bush's North American Free Trade Agreement will be derailed prior to the U.S. elections in November. That is not a bad thing. The environmental issues raised by the Democrats in opposition to the treaty are not totally out of place; yet unless NAFTA is attacked on a point of principle, these objections will amount to mere delaying tactics and pre-election gimmickry, and some version of the treaty will be ratified by both parties.

So far, only the independent LaRouche-Bevel ticket is rallying the kind of opposition which can be effective in defeating NAFTA. Bill Clinton and George Bush do not disagree at all on the primacy of the free market over human values. NAFTA cannot be amended or improved; it must be decisively defeated. This, as of now, is not the stance of the Democratic Party or of the Clinton election team.

The true face of NAFTA is seen in the slave labor conditions prevalent in the border *maquiladoras*, the assembly plants which operate as foreign enclaves on Mexican soil. These border free trade zones are the model which supporters of NAFTA wish to see extended to the rest of Mexico, and beyond. In the first stage, the idea is for U.S. and Canadian capital to invest in *maquiladoras* in Mexico. This would force a disastrous fall in wages upon U.S. and Canadian workers, who would be faced with the choice of accepting "competitive" conditions at home, or no jobs at all.

In the *maquiladoras*, the wages paid to young men and women are lower than those paid for manufacturing in the rest of Mexico, averaging \$0.98 per hour, compared to \$1.56, which is standard in Mexico. Not only this, but these young workers are forced to live in barracks conditions without adequate sanitation, and in conditions in which water supplies are contaminated with industrial pollutants as well as untreated sewage. Safety laws do not apply in these work places; nor are benefits of any kind—pension, medical or unemployment—offered to the labor force.

The free trade zone which George Bush wishes to see ratified into law is a mortal threat to the standard of living of the work force in the three countries involved:

Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

What NAFTA means is a return to the brutal working conditions which were prevalent in the United Kingdom in the 19th century, or worse. These camps can only continue to function while there is a supply of relatively healthy, youthful labor available. When this labor supply has been destroyed, through the ravages of cholera and other diseases that flourish in the environment of these slave labor camps, then reality will assert itself too late.

This is the way to the final destruction of the United States, Canada, and Mexico as viable nations. Rather than helping Mexico to become an industrially advanced nation, the United States and Canada will enforce a disastrous technological backwardness upon their own work forces. Even the companies that invest in runaway shops will suffer in the long run, because even as they initially benefit from low wages, in the long run the disastrous fall in productivity which will characterize labor throughout the continent will make U.S. goods uncompetitive on world markets.

During the 1980s, Mexican wages fell by half, as that country's markets were opened up to U.S. investment. The fundamental tenets of the Reagan-Bush, Thatcher-Major, free trade ideology which underlies the North American Free Trade Agreement, are also subscribed to by Bill Clinton. Thus in his economic program "Putting People First," which is effectively subscribed to by Ross Perot also, he emphasizes the primacy of the market place and sees free trade as the driving engine of the economy.

In a recent tour on behalf of the LaRouche-Bevel ticket, vice presidential candidate Rev. James Bevel stressed an opposite point of view: a Christian economics, in which human values are primary. Thus, unlike his opponents, Bevel has taken the position that the real problem in the U.S. economy is the deficit that is being created, when human beings don't have jobs, housing, or medical care, and are thrown on the human scrap heap. It is from this standpoint that he has voiced an uncompromising opposition to NAFTA, and to free market ideology in general.