

**TORONTO & YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2005**

“SOFTWOOD LUMBER, JOBS AND SOVEREIGNTY”

Across Canada, people are reacting with justifiable anger at the arrogance of U.S. ambassador David Wilkins when he tells us to meekly accept the continued American violation of trade rulings around softwood lumber. Staunch supporters of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA are warning that this thug-like attitude threatens to undermine the credibility of the overall free trade agenda. They have good reason to worry, because the destruction of thousands of jobs in the forest products industry has wide ramifications.

In Ontario, we know that communities in the north are severely impacted, but there is also a significant amount of manufacturing and service employment in southern Ontario that are also tied to this sector. As well, other industries have suffered from the new global trade regime that puts capital mobility and property rights ahead of any other social consideration.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and right-wing think tanks are championing the idea of deeper integration with the U.S. through the negotiation of a “North American Security and Prosperity Initiative.” In 1988, these people told us that the Free Trade Agreement would guarantee access to the U.S. market and deliver jobs and prosperity.

Today, the US is breaking the trade rules in sector after sector and collecting lumber tariffs illegally. The FTA has been no protection against mounting job losses in the wake of the rise of the Canadian dollar, and closer integration with the US has not promoted a strong Canadian economy. The relentless drive for corporate competitiveness under continental “free trade” has undermined job security and decent working conditions. Wages have stagnated, and unions and social programs have been under relentless attack.

The Bush Administration demands that Canada fall into line with their views and their policies, especially when it comes to security, defence, and resource issues. The US wants us to acquiesce in the suppression of civil liberties, in the militarization of space, and in their rejection of multilateral and peaceful approaches to securing world order.

It proposes that we should dismantle any remaining control of our natural resources through a formal new natural resources pact, extending to water and electricity. And in all these demands, they are supported by the Canadian corporate elite who believe Canadians should surrender our capacity to shape our own collective future as an independent country.

It is time to take a stand! The federal minority government cannot be allowed to dither on this crucial question. We should demand that the entire unfair trade agenda be scrapped, and replaced with a comprehensive strategy that bases our trade policies on protecting jobs, our culture, our political sovereignty and the environment. This strategy would look to broaden our trade relations with other countries in order to lessen the dependence on one partner. It should fundamentally reject deeper integration into the American economic and political spheres, and promote an active government role in developing our economy and expanding high-quality public services.

The Executive Board recommends that:

1. Prime Minister Paul Martin be urged to immediately recall Parliament to deal with this trade crisis.
2. Labour call on the federal government to give notice to proceed to withdraw from NAFTA and develop a comprehensive trades strategy as outlined above.
3. Labour Council and its affiliate support the measures called for in the Canadian Labour Congress document North American Economic Integration passed by the 2005 Convention.