

## CONGRESSIONAL NIGHT 2011

### Question #11

## Opposition to South Korea and Colombia Free Trade Agreements

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Union members and working people have grown very skeptical about trade agreements. Our experience with NAFTA and China's entrance into the World Trade Organization have convinced us that these agreements are in place for the benefit of multi-national corporations, not for the purpose of creating jobs as they are advertised. We have seen the multinationals take advantage of past trade deals to shift production off shore, while maintaining access to U.S. consumer markets and undermining the jobs, wages and bargaining power of American workers.

The U.S. – South Korea Free Trade Agreement is another flawed arrangement for the following reasons:

- Only 35% of the content of automobiles is required to be produced in South Korea or the United States. The rest can be produced in other countries like China or North Korea which have horrible labor standards and conditions.
- There is nothing to prevent South Korea from creating a devalued currency which would put U.S. products at a disadvantage.
- Multinational corporations could take any disputes about regulations in either country to a secret tribunal. This is another insidious form of corporate deregulation.
- Privatized public services could undermine the efficiency and standards of public services and gain protection for this practice under the trade agreement.

This sounds like more of the same to us – a way to give big corporations the opportunity to operate as they please, at the expense of American workers, our communities and our sovereignty.

We have similar concerns about the Colombia Free Trade agreement because of that country's appalling human rights record. Colombia remains the most deadly nation in the world in which to be a trade unionist. In the past 25 years, more than 2,850 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia. Last year alone, 51 trade unionists were murdered – an *increase* over 2009. Only 4% of Colombia's workers are unionized and only 1% are covered by collective bargaining agreements because of poor labor laws, non-enforcement, and decades of violence.

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The Obama administration will submit the proposed U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement to Congress for a vote subject to Columbia's compliance with the so-called "action plan" which gives the country two months to strengthen labor laws and reduce the level of violence against union activists. The fact is that this plan is a stand-alone agreement not directly connected to the trade agreement so that there will be no leverage for enforcement once the trade agreement is ratified.

For these reasons we ask you to oppose the South Korea and Colombia Free Trade Agreements.