

Sanders Explains View On NAFTA

By **BERNIE SANDERS**

While the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will be a disaster for American and Mexican farmers, the environment and the American taxpayer, I wish to focus my attention today on what NAFTA will do to American workers.

The working people of America are currently facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Real wages have declined by 20 percent since 1973; the distribution of wealth is more uneven than at any time since the 1920s, with



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the richest 1 percent owning more wealth than the bottom 90 percent; and extremely frightening for the future, most of the new employment being created consists of low wage, part-time and temporary jobs with minimal benefits. It is my view that the passage of NAFTA will accelerate all of these negative economic trends, and will benefit primarily the ruling elites of the vast majority of the workers of all three countries.

Why is it that virtually every multi-national corporation in America supports this agreement, and are putting millions of dollars into a campaign to see it passed? Why is it that the Mexican government, dominated by 30 super-rich families who own 50 percent of Mexico's wealth and control 60 percent of their gross national product, are putting an unprecedented \$430 million into a pro-NAFTA lobbying effort? The answer is obvious. If NAFTA passes, corporate profits will soar because it will be even easier than not for American companies to flee to Mexico and hire workers there for starvation wages.

The essence of NAFTA is that American workers will be forced to compete against desperate and impoverished Mexican workers who earn a minimum wage of 58 cents an hour, and an average manufacturing wage of \$2.35 an hour. Already, some 2,000 American companies (AT&T, Ford, General Motors, Zenith Digital, etc.) have thrown hundreds of thousands of American workers out on the streets as they headed south for starvation labor. Under NAFTA, when all trade barriers are removed and it will be even easier to sell Mexican manufactured products back to the United States, the exodus of American jobs will only accelerate.

Some apologists for NAFTA argue that as more and more American manufacturing goes to Mexico, the standard of living for Mexican workers will rise and our 90 million Mexican neighbors will be in a better position to purchase value added products from the United States — creating good-paying jobs here. The theory sounds great.

Despite the creation of 96,000 new jobs in Mexico over the last 12 years by American corporations, the real wages of Mexican workers have declined by 25 percent since 1979, and the gap between Mexican and American workers is far greater today than it was 25 years ago. In the Maquiladora area, a specially designed "free trade zone" for American corporations, average hourly wages are 98 cents an hour: 42 percent lower than in the rest of the Mexico. A General Motors subsidiary there pays 61 cents an hour, while a Zenith plant is far more generous — paying almost \$1 per hour.

Workers who are employed there by American companies live in wood shacks with dirt floors, without running water, electricity or the most minimal amenities. Women are giving birth to deformed children be-

cause of the rampant toxic pollution. These workers, lucky enough to feed their hungry children, are not about to buy "value added" American products.

Defenders of NAFTA, who concede that there will be substantial jobs lost in America because of the agreement, suggest that the jobs lost will be unskilled, low-wage jobs. This is nonsense. The new factories that are being built in Mexico by American companies are high-tech, state-of-the-art plants, which are producing some of the highest quality products in the world with skilled Mexican workers. Mexico, which exported 1.3 million automotive engines last year, now leads the world in that category. Studies have indicated that Mexican manufacturing workers have now reached 80 percent of the productivity level of American workers — while earning 15 percent of the income.

Wages have declined in Mexico, despite the growth of high-tech jobs, because of the low-wage policy established and enforced by the undemocratic and corrupt government of President Carlos Salinas — the leader of the authoritarian PRI Party. The PRI has been in complete control of the government since 1929, never having "lost" an election. Workers in Mexico today are not allowed to organize free trade unions, state and federal elections are rigged, the media is heavily controlled by the government, and dissidents have been jailed and killed. How do you have a "free" trade agreement with a country that is not "free"?

NAFTA must be defeated. The goal of American economics policy must be to raise wages in our country, not lower them. American corporations must reinvest in America, and not exploit desperate Third World workers.

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