

Miami's Trade Troubles

By Mark Engler | November 25, 2003

Jeb Bush wanted a win in Miami, and he got one—or so the White House says. Any honest observer, however, knows that the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) failed before they ever began.

Almost a week before the summit, trade officials announced that none of the substantive issues for the agreement would be on the table for discussion. Negotiations over key matters that have caused conflicts between the U.S. and the nations of the developing world—like agricultural tariffs, intellectual property, and rules for foreign investment—would be postponed until next year. In order to avoid the type of collapse experienced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancún just a few months ago, the U.S. instead promoted a face-saving “FTAA-Lite” that puts a sunshine spin on an impasse.

Has “globalization” ended? Why are mechanisms like the WTO and the FTAA failing? And why have thousands of us gathered outside the Miami meetings to denounce an agreement that effectively lies dead in Florida's Biscayne Bay?

On an immediate level the Bush administration, which maintains its bullying unilateralism even in trade negotiations, deserves credit for sinking the Miami talks. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick has not presented any of the concessions demanded by the Latin American elite—real moves toward the opening of U.S. markets. This makes it difficult to determine a reason for the global South to offer up compromises of its own.

But the global justice movement can also claim a fair part in halting the progress of the FTAA. Uprisings throughout the hemisphere have badly shaken the idea that U.S. economic plans represent an inevitable and welcomed march of progress. Protests have also coincided with increasing defiance from many governments in the developing world,

who are less susceptible than in the past to White House threats.

On the eve of the FTAA ministerial, the Bush administration announced that it would pursue individual, bilateral trade agreements with countries like Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Such one-on-one deals eliminate the inconvenient possibility of a unified Southern trading bloc. Yet, after Miami, the U.S. has lost the key economies of the hemisphere: Venezuela, Argentina, and most of all Brazil. The leftist Brazil government of Lula da Silva co-chaired the talks and participated in the charade of promoting the FTAA-Lite. But it did not budge on the demands that are almost certain to doom future negotiations.

The Venezuelans, who had called the full FTAA agreement a “colonial project that seeks to impose itself over the constitution of every sovereign nation,” were more blunt about Miami's outcome. “This is an extraordinary victory in the struggle against the FTAA,” said Edgardo Lander, a member of Venezuela's Presidential FTAA Committee. “They wanted a full-scale, comprehensive agreement, and they didn't get it. They will never get it. This is not the end of the game. But it is a major, major defeat of the U.S. agenda.”

Our movement, accustomed to warning against the dangers presented by “NAFTA on steroids,” has been slow to take this message to heart. But if we do not applaud the failure of the FTAA talks, we risk aiding the administration's effort to spin its Florida defeat as a stride forward. The truth is that Governor Bush's optimism about FTAA-Lite belies a critical fact: This



Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF)

www.fpi.org
A Think Tank Without Walls

week in Miami, trade ministers ended their talks early because they had nothing to discuss.

Protesters had earned a day in the sun. And more might have taken a celebratory trip to the beach, were it not for the police.

* * * * *

Police Chief John Timoney was a man ahead of his time. Years before the Bush administration invented the doctrine of “preemptive war” and John Ashcroft began dismantling American civil liberties, Timoney was preemptively arresting people who made their protestations public. Most famously, when stationed in Philadelphia, he swept the sidewalks clean of dissenters during Bush’s ascension at the 2000 Republican National Convention. Eighty demonstrators (myself among them) intending to parade with banners and props from a downtown puppet warehouse never made it out the door; we were charged in advance for blocking the streets. Timoney was also a visionary leader in his use of faulty intelligence. When the Philadelphia arrest warrant became public, lawyers found that it contained research supplied with the help of conservative millionaire Richard Mellon Scaife, warning that our “Funds allegedly originate with Communist and leftist parties and... from the former Soviet-allied World Federation of Trade Unions.”

In recent years, as he moved through New York to Miami, Timoney has taken a different tack. Speaking of globalization protests, he has likened demonstrators to Osama bin Laden. He has put citizens on alert for anthrax attacks. And he has argued that wooden sticks used to hold banners and puppets and banners should be banned from downtown Miami, lest they be used to undermine homeland security.

Before we were Communists. Now we are terrorists.

Timoney spent several months putting fear into the hearts of South Floridians. After a day of demonstrations that the *Miami Herald* described as overwhelmingly peaceful, the police chief was typically quoted by the paper as saying, “These are outsiders coming

in to terrorize and vandalize our city.” Needless to say, respecting demonstrators’ right to expression was not the first of his priorities.

A week of teach-ins and local marches culminated on Thursday with a main day of action. A procession of a few thousand young people and many puppets gathered early and was quickly surrounded by police. Ultimately, the protesters negotiated an escort to an area in front of the city’s waterfront amphitheater, where steelworkers with “FTAA Sucks” shirts were arriving for a labor rally. Several union buses were reportedly detained outside the downtown security zone, and some riders never arrived for the event. In the afternoon, the ten thousand people inside the arena joined with the growing carnival on Biscayne Boulevard for a brisk march around the area. Timoney’s forces cut the parade short. They denied access to the planned route near the trade ministerial and instead looped protesters back to the waterfront.

When skirmishes broke out late in the day, the provocations from protesters were slight, where they existed at all. Riot cops used their arsenal of tear gas and rubber bullets to clear the area. The *Herald*, not a bastion of progressivism, reported that “apart from several trash fires set by protesters, no significant acts of vandalism or property damage were reported during the day.” Police were looking for a confrontation with nonviolent demonstrators, and they found it. In the end, there were some 150 arrests, with 50 more the following day. According to the *Herald*, a dozen injured protesters headed to the emergency room at Jackson Memorial Hospital, and over a hundred flooded the mobilization’s first aid facilities, bleeding from welts caused by the rubber marbles and tearing from pepper spray.

“What we saw was a military operation, paid for by military money,” said L.A Kauffman of United for Peace and Justice, noting that the cash-strapped local government had come up with a novel solution for funding its massive police mobilization: \$8.5 million from the \$87 billion package for Iraq had been earmarked for containing the FTAA protests. In an important display of solidarity, AFL-CIO representa-

tive Ron Judd also made a statement to the press that evening at the protest's convergence center. Judd, a veteran of countless demonstrations and (as the former head of the King County Labor Council) a prominent figure in Seattle, nevertheless stated, "This is the first time I felt what it was like to protest in a police state." A higher-ranking labor official, UNITE President Bruce Raynor, speaking before the amphitheater's audience of retired union members, steelworkers, and supporters, made the same complaint: "The FTAA has brought a police state to the city of Miami, and that's a goddamn disgrace."

That was before a portion of his audience was trapped in the bayfront amphitheater as police clouded the area with tear gas. At one point during the day, the retirees attempted to sing the national anthem, but the sound system wasn't too strong, and it was hard to hear them above the sound of helicopters whirling overhead. Two tank-like armored cars rolled around outside.

* * * * *

It is hard to feel victorious after a crackdown, with demonstrators still jailed and police officials gloating. Moreover, some observers of past protests, seeing the collection of young people amassing on the Miami streets, marching with the steelworkers along a route safely distanced from the trade negotiations, and witnessing the police's later use of force, felt that there was little out of the ordinary in the scene.

But the protests were something new for South Florida. The area lacks a strong history of labor organizing and sits far removed from centers of campus radicalism. Holding the FTAA meetings in Dade County was the domestic equivalent of the WTO's decision to conduct negotiations in the isolated Middle Eastern nation of Qatar.

Rallying a crowd as large as 20,000 for a main day of action represented an impressive feat of organizing. And having the bulk of downtown Miami preemptively locked down by a riot-armored police force strongly reinforced the point that, no matter where in

the hemisphere they go, the trade ministers will not again be allowed the back-room anonymity they enjoyed when cutting their deals only a few years ago.

Contrary to Timoney's assertion, local residents spent months rallying their communities. Palm Beach County community activists, students, and area Greens supported street protests. A coalition called Root Cause, made up of grassroots organizations like the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, the Miami Workers Center, and Low Income Families Fighting Together, led a pioneering three-day march from Fort Lauderdale to Miami, highlighting the impact of globalization on people of color in South Florida. And Jobs with Justice and local unions held meetings that shunned reactionary nationalistic solutions to trade and imbued the protests with a spirit of labor internationalism.

With trade talks in a state of disarray, this internationalism will be more important than ever. Our vision of globalization, based on solidarity, fair exchange, and respect for human rights, has not ended. Nor has the global worship of profit that we oppose. Bush is not a globalizer; he is a power-projector, a latter-day imperialist. He will continue a pursuit of corporate interest even without the multilateral trade mechanisms that we have made visible and familiar, and may ultimately present even more difficult challenges for advocates of global justice.

Yet, for now, the prospect that the FTAA will likely dwindle again into obscurity is cause for celebration. The people of the Americas, I suspect, will never miss it.

(Mark Engler, a writer and activist based in New York City is a regular contributor to Foreign Policy in Focus (online at www.fpif.org). He can be reached via the web site <http://www.DemocracyUprising.com>. Research assistance for this article provided by Jason Rowe.)

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at www.irc-online.org) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at www.ips-dc.org). ©2003. All rights reserved.

Foreign Policy In Focus

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to “making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner.” For more information, visit www.fpiif.org.

Recommended citation:

Mark Engler, “Miami’s Trade Troubles,” (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, November 26, 2003).

Web location:

<http://www.fpiif.org/commentary/2003/0311ftaamiami.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Mark Engler

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

p. 4

www.fpiif.org

A Think Tank Without Walls

