

1993, March

NAFTA: What Does it Mean to NC?

by Mia Kirsh

Nearly 200 community leaders, activists, businesspeople and citizens gathered for a conference in Durham at the end of January to learn more about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The conference, entitled "Free Trade Agreements: Impacts on the Carolinas and the Americas," was well organized by a number of local environmental, Latin American, church and university groups.

The majority of the fifteen mostly progressive panelists and speakers sought to amend NAFTA rather than to oppose it. Most progressive groups around the country have opposed NAFTA outright as has most of the population. A recent Wall Street Journal/NBC news poll showed those with an opinion on NAFTA opposed it by nearly 2 to 1. But the conference panelists argued that amending the agreement is potentially more useful.

NAFTA, like its companion global agreement, the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT), is not a "done deal."

There is still time to oppose it or to amend it before Congress votes on it this fall. That is why getting informed about it is so important, and the mainstream media have failed to do the job. This conference was an excellent source of information about NAFTA and its broader implications for our community. But *The Prism* was the only local paper that bothered to cover it.

NAFTA: What it is and who's behind it

In his keynote speech, Dr. Jorge Castaneda, a professor from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and a visiting professor at Berkeley and Princeton, said that NAFTA was originally a corporate idea evolved in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Although NAFTA was "signed" in August 1992 by George Bush, Canada's Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and Mexico's President Carlos Salinas, it is not yet set in

stone. Bush insisted on the lie that this is the only possible free-trade agreement. But there are other ways to do it, according to Castaneda.

The Bush agreement is a typical conservative free-trade plan, with no social or environmental awareness and no industrial policy for the future. Castaneda envisioned an alternative agreement similar to the European Community (EC). This 30-year European plan is more socially and environmentally aware, allows labor mobility, and makes possible the transfer of resources from richer to poorer regions, enabling their greater economic participation.



Garry Morrison

1993, May

Lesbians and Gay Men More Visible, More Victimized in North Carolina

by Jeremy Raw

In the wake of a hugely successful march on Washington DC in support of equal rights for gay men, lesbians and bi-sexuals, the North Carolina Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCCGLE) released its annual report on May 4 in Raleigh. The report, entitled "Homophobia and Human Rights in North Carolina," chronicled bigoted violence and discrimination against lesbians, gay men and people with AIDS. Human rights abuses ranged from hate crimes to discrimination by government agencies, including harassment, entrapment and false arrest by law enforcement officers.

NCCGLE documented a total of 578 anti-gay incidents in North Carolina in 1992. Of these, 104 qualified as hate crimes under federal guidelines, a marked increase from the 61 hate crimes documented in 1991. NCCGLE compiled its statistics from data collected in 1992 by a statewide network of lesbian and gay service agencies.

Anne Burlein, coordinator of NCCGLE, commented, "1992 marked many breakthroughs as lesbians and gay men played

increasingly visible public roles in both national and state elections, as well as in local churches and schools. Right-wing activists responded with a backlash of violence and harassment intended to intimidate people back into silence."

Burlein also stated that "The National Lesbian and Gay Task Force estimates that 80% of anti-gay incidents go unreported. When lesbians and gay men report crimes, they risk losing family, friends, employment, housing and health insurance" because of their sexual orientation. "Institutionalized homophobia means that police and government agencies often seem part of the problem rather than a resource," she added.

Nevertheless, Burlein noted that the tide is changing and that North Carolina courts are becoming more responsive to lesbians and gay men.

Significant discrimination continues to afflict lesbians and gay men. The NCCGLE report pointed out the vulnerability of lesbians and gay men to "witch hunts" that target and root out employees simply because they are rumored to be homosexual. Such discrimination is not yet illegal because lesbians and gay men are not yet included in federal or state civil rights laws.

The activities of the police create another significant problem. Accounts from Charlotte indicate that police "sting" operations have harassed, enticed and falsely arrested gay men, in violation of the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal protection under the law. According to civil rights attorney Anita Hodgkiss "Few heterosexuals would tolerate" enforcement of the crime against nature law comparable "to that being pursued against gay men."

The law criminalizes oral and anal sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Under this law, approximately 90% of the state's population are felons. The law is applied in a discriminatory way against lesbians and gay men, and remains one of the strongest pillars supporting a climate in which anti-gay bigotry seems acceptable.

NCCGLE also documented discrimination due to fear of AIDS, much of it by institutions such as the NC Department of Social Services, which refused to remove HIV-positive children from abusive homes because the children "were going to die anyway." Children have become the victims of homophobia in other ways as well. One of the cruellest effects of the crime against nature law is its use to deny lesbian mothers and gay fathers access to their children in custody disputes following di-

voice. An alarming rise also occurred in homophobic abuse among youth and on campuses, making youth and schools the area of sharpest increase in documented anti-gay incidents in 1992.

The Coalition called in its report for repeal of the crime against nature law; for the state to re-enter the National Organization of Victim's Assistance, for attention by high school and college campuses to the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth; for law enforcement to stop selectively enforcing the crime against nature law and to abandon entrapment techniques; for civil rights protection for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals; for maintenance of anonymous AIDS testing and state-supported AIDS prevention programs; for an end to the US military's ban on homosexuals; and for training members of the bar in gay/lesbian issues in family and criminal law.

Said Burlein, "We hope this report will contribute to the growing movement among concerned citizens to create a new climate in North Carolina that resists all hate violence and discrimination."

1993, July-August

UNC Housekeepers Movement Building Steam

by Matt Stiegler

Sometimes it takes a disaster to reinvigorate a movement. Other times, you need a victory to rekindle a sense of momentum. The UNC Housekeepers Movement recently got both.

Hard on the heels of news of an important court victory for the housekeepers' class action grievance against the university came the outrageous firing of housekeepers leader Eric Browning.

Good news and bad, it all adds up to a stronger, more unified, more visible Housekeepers Movement.

September Hearing Set

The good news is that the housekeepers' class action grievance will get a full hearing. That hearing, before an Administrative Law Judge in Chapel Hill, will be the final two weeks in September. Ninety-one housekeepers are currently signed on to the grievance.

In a motions hearing in April, Judge Brenda Becton brushed aside university administration attempts to cripple the grievance. A motion to dismiss the grievance, a motion to force the disclosure of all grievants' tax returns, and a motion to dismiss evidence of the university's history of maintaining unequal treatment for "black jobs" — all were rejected.

The judge also expressed willingness to hear housekeepers' ideas for redress, including back pay, front pay, and meaningful training opportunities.

Legal expenses for the grievance are expected to run over \$5000.



Housekeeper Eric Browning with two of his five children.

Conversation ... or Retaliation?

The May firing of housekeepers leader Eric Browning was a shock to the entire movement. Browning, an outspoken member of the Housekeepers Association Steering Committee, was given as the reason for his firing an emotional conversation he had with his job counselor. Movement leaders think the firing stems from retaliation, not a conversation.

Browning, a father of five, worked for four years as a UNC housekeeper. In that time, he filed 13 applications for better paying jobs.

He has three years of college, consistently good job reviews, recognized leadership ability, and got along well with his co-workers.

He was denied on all 13 applications. Sometimes they would tell him he used too much of his sick time. Many times his applications would be lost. Once he was given the obligatory interview after the job had already been filled. Only once did he even get the notice of denial guaranteed all employees.

He had more than leadership in the Housekeepers to make him a target for the administration. Browning also had won victories in the employee grievance system when he was treated unfairly. At the time he was fired, he had two grievances in process, dealing with training and promotion. Both were stopped by the firing.

Browning may have further imperiled his job by meeting with Jesse Jackson when he was here in April. *The Prism* ran a front page photo of the two shaking hands just days before the firing.

Browning and the Housekeepers Association held a widely-covered press conference on June 24 to announce his decision to contest the firing. That will begin with a university hearing on July 21.

About the Movement

Over 90 percent of the 300 plus housekeepers at UNC are African American. Over 70 percent are women. They are in the lowest pay grade in the state system; the starting pay

of \$11,800 per year puts them well below the poverty line. Most clock in at 3:50 in the morning. They have to ask permission to use the bathroom. They get no half hour break for lunch. Their "training opportunities" are an insulting litany on "policy and procedure." Ten year veterans work in daily fear lest they be suspected of "speaking up." Their supervisors are often undertrained or arbitrary or worse. The assistant superintendent of housekeeping is known for hiding in the bushes to spy as housekeepers come in to work to single out those more than four minutes late.

This is a movement whose significance transcends our neat "issue" categories of race or gender. It lies at the intersection of our society's viciousness and neglect towards African Americans, towards women, towards the poor and less educated. It is a movement of people who insist only on being treated as persons.

It is about simple ideals, ideals like dignity and fairness and justice and respect.

Take some time now, while you are still thinking recklessly about justice. You can afford \$10; maybe you can afford more. Without immediate support from our community, our grievance will die, our newsletter will fall silent. Send a check to the UNC Housekeepers Association, Campus Y, CB # 5115, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC, 27599.

The Housekeepers Association holds meetings at noon every Thursday in the Campus Y at UNC. Supporters are welcome.

Stiegler is the acting editor of the Housekeepers newsletter, *We Are All Housekeepers*.