

April 3, 2009

Mr. Michael Ignatieff, M.P.
Leader of the Official Opposition
House of Commons
Ottawa,
ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Ignatieff,

I am writing to you on behalf of 120,000 public sector workers who are members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). In light of last week's announcement that the Harper Conservative government has introduced legislation to implement the Canada Colombia Free Trade Agreement, I am appealing to you and your Liberal Party members to join with the other opposition parties to block this agreement.

It is unconscionable for the Canadian government to provide legitimacy to the Colombian government, a government which is condemned throughout the world for its continuing human rights abuses. It is also unconscionable that the government introduced this legislation immediately following meetings with a delegation of four human rights activists who clearly outlined how a free trade deal would only exacerbate the situation in their country.

OPSEU co-hosted this delegation from COMOSOC (the Colombian Organization of Social Movements) which included legitimate leaders of social movements representing women, Indigenous peoples, working people and their unions as well as faith based communities. At great risk to their personal safety, they confirmed that Colombia is still today the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist or human rights activist.

More labour leaders are killed there every year than in the rest of the world combined and this kind of terror keeps unions weak and wages down. Of course in this climate it is attractive for foreign investment and much of it comes from Canadian resource extraction companies. Few of the crimes committed against trade unionists ever get investigated and there is a 97% chance of impunity. In such a climate, workers will never benefit from any economic activity generated by a trade deal.

In complete contrast to what Stockwell Day said about how the trade deal would be of mutual economic benefit to Canada and Colombia, signing this deal would make the Canadian government and Canadian investors only more complicit in the violence and human rights abuses committed on a daily basis.

I urge your party to join with the other opposition parties to halt the ratification of this trade deal.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "T".

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, OPSEU