

The Trans-Pacific Partnership: Stop the TPP and Other Rigged “Trade Agreements”

Solidarity Will Build the Power Needed to Transform Trade so People and Planet Come Before Profits

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The moment facing the Trans-Pacific Partnership and its sibling the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (known as ‘TAFTA’) and the future approach to trade is reaching a critical stage. The TPP and TAFTA are attempts to get past the failed World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, but like the WTO, these new agreements are meeting significant opposition and obstacles. We are poised to stop these attempts to rig the international economy in favor of multinational corporations and move to a new model of trade that respects the rights of people and nature, but it will take a coordinated effort. We must be prepared for moves to thwart that effort and organize to avoid them.

The TPP and TAFTA represent a new era of deception and back-room dealing to pass laws that have nothing to do with trade, but that hand even greater power to multinational corporations to profit from everything no matter the consequences for the health of people and the planet. For the first time, the text of the agreements has been classified and they are being negotiated in secret with hundreds of corporate advisers and minimal involvement by Congress. In order to complete the agreements without transparency and public input, the President has asked Congress to grant him the authority to sign them, ‘Fast Track,’ a form of Trade Promotion Authority.

As elections get closer, Democratic Party leaders in Congress are getting the message out to inside-the-beltway activists groups that they are unifying to support giving President Obama some form of Fast Track. Recent letters from member of Congress to the President indicate support for trade with particular stipulations, but the overall message is to continue negotiating. Washington advocacy groups believe that they must also show support for Fast Track or they will find themselves without access or influence.

Rather than kowtowing to the usual ‘on the table’ threat from the corrupt bi-partisan Congress, the movement needs to tell them that the only thing on the table is a complete transformation from the failed global trade that rigs profits for big business at the expense of the ecology of the planet and the necessities of the people. It is time to declare the TPP, TAFTA and [the Services](#) agreements as dead, develop a new approach to trade and begin to renegotiate past trade agreements like NAFTA that are [doing ongoing damage to the economy](#), planet and people.

Congress be warned: The people are watching and are onto the rigged trade corruption scheme. Members of Congress will pay a political price, with the end of their careers, if they continue to force their failed trade strategy on the nation and the world.

Challenges for the TPP

For more than three years the President's US Trade Representatives have sought Fast Track trade authority. Fast Track means that Congress would give up its constitutional responsibility "to regulate commerce between nations." The movement for fair trade has fought back and pushed Congress to not give President Obama the authority he needs.

More than 3,150,000 have signed a [petition to stop Fast Track](#). At the critical moment in January and February when the President and "free" traders in Congress (note: [whenever you see "free trade" think "rigged trade"](#)) were set to push Fast Track legislation, the people responded with over 40,000 phone calls and 600,000 emails to Congress. There were also [protests across the continent](#). As a result, that Fast Track bill died.

The opposition is global. At the same time people were acting in the US, [65,000 people protested the TPP in Mexico](#) and [more than 1.8 million in Australia](#) called for the text to be made public. President [Obama was greeted with TPP protests](#) when he visited Asia as was Vice President [Biden when he visited Japan](#). We just returned from an economic conference organized by [the Center for Global Justice](#) that included people from the US, Mexico, Australia, China, Israel, Guatemala and other nations, and the top area where people agreed to work together was to stop the TPP and transform global trade.

This occurred because the TPP has been [a matchstick](#) that has [united people](#) into a 'movement of movements' of more than 150 organizations (including our project [Popular Resistance](#)) that worked together to [Stop Fast Track](#). Activists concerned about food safety, worker rights, health care, finance, the environment, Internet freedom and more have organized scores of rallies and protests throughout the nation and [around the world](#). There have been protests at [trade negotiations](#) even when they try to hide the location. The negotiators have become so fearful of protests that for the last negotiating session [they fled 2,650 miles](#) across Canada in an attempt to avoid them. The retreat failed as [protesters exposed the TPP](#) and [brought 19,000 voices](#) to the negotiations.

In this [audacious protest](#) last September, which we helped to organize, activists climbed up on and covered the US Trade Representative national office near the White House with four large banners to expose the secrecy.

In response to mobilization against the TPP, Congress in an election year has sent a variety of letters to the president on the shortcomings of the TPP. These include: [153 members of Congress calling for stronger labor standards](#), a bi-partisan letter signed by 140 members of Congress opposing the agricultural provisions of the TPP, and [120 members of Congress signed a letter](#) saying they would not support a trade agreement with weak environmental standards and 35 members of Congress writing concerning the human rights violations in Vietnam, and Brunei adopting Sharia law. While these sound good, voters should be on alert to these election year actions. Language could be added to the TPP which sounds good but changes nothing as has occurred in previous trade deals. There is no form of the TPP that can actually protect the people and planet. Corporate lawyers have been writing the TPP for four years. The only response is to defeat the TPP.

Message to US Trade Representative, Obama and free-traders in Congress: If you have to be secretive, and fear protesters because your agreement is so unpopular, you need to start over. The process should be open, transparent and participatory. Simple message: Stop the Secrecy! This is supposed to be a democracy.

Desperate Attempts to Salvage the TPP

It has been evident that there is synergy between the movement's success in stopping 'Fast Track' and the weakening negotiating position of the Obama administration. As protests have escalated, negotiators have become [emboldened to stand up](#) to the bullying of the United States.

Advocates of the TPP are beginning to face reality: the TPP negotiations may never reach completion. Last December, [Wikileaks published documents](#) that revealed there were wide chasms of dispute between the nations negotiating the TPP. Countries were unwilling to give transnational corporations as much power as the United States was demanding.

Now some advocates of the TPP believe that [the TPP may be over](#). Negotiators have missed three deadlines to conclude the talks. Countries are recognizing that the TPP is skewed in favor of one country, the United States, and its transnational corporations. They also see the reality that the WTO has been stalled since the Seattle protests in 1999 and has been unable to reach any agreement in the Doha Round.

Advocates of corporate trade agreements realize the people are connecting globalized trade to the wealth divide, lowering of labor standards and destruction of the environment. And, there is near universal opposition to investor state rights to sue in rigged trade tribunals for loss of expected profits. Transnational corporate globalization is hitting a wall of opposition.

More opposition to rigged trade is developing: [LGBT groups have demanded](#) the US stop negotiating with Brunei because of its brutal treatment of a penal code that targets women, LGBT and religious minorities; others are protesting how the [TPP will worsen inequality](#) and the [wealth divide](#), result in [lost jobs](#), lower wages and [expand the income divide](#), give corporations unusual [new power under the guise of intellectual property](#), will [make NSA spying easier](#), force [policing of Internet users](#), and result in [more fracking in both the United States and Europe](#), as well as [off-shore drilling](#) and other extreme energy extraction.

The Movement Should Not Compromise

We know that the transnationals and their corrupt congressional representatives want the TPP, TAFTA and Services Agreement to become law. It will result in concentration of wealth and political power in their hands and result in laws that could not be openly passed through legislatures to become law. We know they are not ready to give up on the trillions in profits they will reap from rigged trade.

We also know that the movement of movements that opposes rigged trade has shown some power and is capable of mobilizing even more people. As the push for rigged trade and a new form of Fast Track moves forward, if we are not fooled by false promises in Fast Track legislation, the movement to end corporate trade will grow even stronger.

Message to our allies: This is the time for continued solidarity, it is not the time for the movement to compromise, nor is the time for countries to give in to US demands. It is time for opposition to rigged corporate trade to take an even stronger stand: oppose the trade agreements that are currently being negotiated, refuse to enact any form of Fast Track and demand a transformation of trade to rules that provide for the necessities of the people and planet as the top priorities.

Labor has hopefully learned the lesson that merely improving the language in trade agreements that claims to protect workers will not protect labor, will not prevent the loss of jobs and will encourage the downward decline in wages. Environmentalists must have learned that trade agreements will encourage extreme energy extraction, ecology-destroying mining and destruction of the oceans and other waterways. The USTR knows the political importance of environmental protection and has been [caught lying about the issue](#).

People concerned with the power of big corporations must now know that rigged trade makes corporations more powerful than governments and will undermine democracy, food security and safety, clean water and air as well as health care among other basic necessities.

Senator Ron Wyden, the chairman of the Finance Committee, has signaled that he will be pushing for what he calls "[Smart Track](#)," an embarrassingly obvious false marketing term designed to fool people. This is a trade authority that if enacted is very likely to allow the TPP, TAFTA and Services Agreement to become law. Wyden has been told by his constituents as well as [tech companies](#), who are a key part of his base, that they oppose any form of Fast Track. [People are not falling for this re-labeling](#) and Wyden-marketing.

We need a new form of Trade Promotion Authority, but we cannot negotiate a new trade regimen until the current agreements: TPP, TAFTA and the Services Agreement are defeated. If the so-called "Smart Track" becomes law, what happens to these three agreements that have been negotiated for years? A new approach to trade cannot retroactively apply to agreements that are so far along in negotiation.

New Trade Era

What would appropriate trade look like? The goals of trade must be clearly stated. The first priorities for trade are meeting the necessities of people and benefitting their lives. This means trade must reduce wealth and income divides, raise wages and the standards of working conditions and ensure people have access to clean water, safe foods and high-quality healthcare. Second, trade must benefit the planet. The world needs to move toward clean, sustainable energy sources and stop the extreme energy extraction of carbon polluting energy as well as uranium for nuclear energy. Trade needs to be designed to move the planet to a [carbon-free, nuclear-free energy economy](#). Ecology protecting trade means there should be less trade so that local communities can be self-sufficient, with small family farms thriving instead of being overcome by highly subsidized crops that allow large agribusiness to destroy traditional agriculture. Relying on transporting foods thousands of miles when they can be grown locally is bad for local economies as well as for the environment and climate change.

And, the process of negotiating trade must be very different. While each country has different legislative and executive processes, the basics must be transparency in the negotiations and participation by the public and elected representatives throughout the process. In the United States this could mean that as trade is negotiated chapters are shared with responsible committees and the public so we can weigh in on whether the chapter is supported. It also means that when the full agreement is reached, it is published with sufficient time for the public and legislators to read and review it. Further, the Congress should be able to hold hearings and make final amendment suggestions that the USTR will then bring back to other countries before the agreement is signed by the president.

These are transformational changes in the goals, purposes and process of trade

agreements. To achieve these changes the movement of movements must show solidarity and defeat the TPP, TAFTA and Services Agreement. This show of political power is the only approach to bringing Congress and the president to our perspective.

The next steps for the movement are to organize locally to broaden the movement. We urge people around the world to put in place "Trade Justice Zones" where local governments pass laws and resolutions that make it clear – [we will not obey trade agreements that are negotiated in secret](#) without a democratic process. Local communities need to keep control of their sovereignty so they can protect the environment and people in their communities. See e.g. actions taken by [Madison](#) and [Los Angeles](#).

The next big push by the Obama administration and Congress will come around the G-20 summit being held in Sydney, Australia on November 15 and 16, during the lame duck session of Congress. This is an opportunity for the world's citizens to tell the leaders of the world – we oppose rigged corporate trade agreements and want a new approach to trade that puts people and planet before profits.

No doubt, some in Congress will take action to strengthen President Obama's negotiating position before the G20, perhaps by promising Fast Track will pass during the lame duck or making it look like Congress is moving in that direction. Civil society must take [united action across the Pacific and Atlantic](#) just before the summit to show our opposition to rigged corporate trade; and during the summit with a worldwide day of action opposing globalized trade for transnational corporations. [People of the world must unite](#) against corporatization and in favor of real democracy.

In the United States, opposition to rigged corporate trade has [made these trade agreements increasingly toxic](#). That toxicity needs to continue to build so that no elected representative thinks they can get away with supporting TPP, TAFTA or the Services Agreement, no matter how good they try to make it sound.

The movement has shown it is capable of [educating each other despite a corporate media blackout](#) of these corporate trade agreements. By sharing articles like this one widely we can educate and mobilize a growing mass movement for a new form of trade. To stay informed, take the pledge at our campaign, [FlushTheTPP.org](#).

Now is the time to recommit to not compromising with the corporate-dominated governments that ignore our interests. If we do so, we can stop Fast Track, defeat corporate trade, transform it to a people and planet form of trade and begin to build the new economy essential to humankind and the planet.

This article is produced by [Popular Resistance](#) in conjunction with [AlterNet](#). It is a weekly review of the activities of the resistance movement.

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