

A GLOBAL CORPORATE COUP IN THE MAKING

By Nancy Price

Do you know that President Obama and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk are secretly negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) “free trade” agreement? If the TPP is passed by Congress under Fast Track Authority and signed by the President, our hopes for peace and freedom will be dealt a crushing blow.

The TTP is the largest, most dangerous commercial agreement since the founding of the World Trade Organization in 1995 and defeat of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in 2003. After the original countries have signed, the TPP will remain open for any country to join. This is a draconian effort by the corporate and wealthy 1% to create global governance enforced by a supra-national tribunal system to protect corporate investor rights over the rights of people and nature.

Who is at the Table?

These secret closed-door negotiations are with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Peru, Chile and now Japan is joining. These countries have signed an unusual secrecy agreement that no draft text would be released until four years after negotiations are completed to prevent strong opposition and protest as in the past.

Presently 600-plus corporate advisors from the largest financial, insurance, healthcare, manufacturing, big Agriculture and Pharmaceuticals, oil and gas corporations, the Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have “security clearance” to the negotiating documents.

Our own congress members cannot participate. Senator Wyden, Senate Trade Sub-Committee Chair, had to file legislation for the right to see the text over which he has oversight, though as a Senate Intelligence Committee member he has security clearance to nuclear secrets! Although, stakeholders from civil society groups can make presentations, they actually have no official standing or access to the text.

Trading Away Our Rights

Lori Wallach, Global Trade Watch director, emphasizes: This agreement requires every signatory country to conform all its laws, regulations and administrative procedures to 26 chapters of very comprehensive rules, only two of which have anything to do with trade, while the others set out new corporate privileges and rights that handcuff governments.¹

The TPP will offshore millions of American jobs, free Wall Street bankers from oversight, and counteract government procurement policies to Buy Local or Buy

America to rebuild our economy or promote sweat-free and recycled-content products to create green jobs. It will decrease access to medicine and lower prices through group buying plans, flood the U.S. with unsafe food and products, infringe on Internet freedom, and allow corporations to attack our public health and environmental laws.

Justice for the 1%?

The TPP commits all countries to a trade tribunal system of three lawyers who rule on corporate claims that a country’s domestic laws and regulations, from the local to

national, have harmed current or future corporate profits and assess fines. The Transnational Institute reports that “a small club of international law firms, arbitrators and financial speculators are fuelling an investment arbitration boom that costs taxpayers billions of dollars and prevents legislation in the public interest.”² Under NAFTA, for example, \$350 million has been paid to corporations by governments over toxics bans, zoning laws and timber rules.³

President Obama on Trade and Fast-Track

In the 2008 campaign, Obama said NAFTA should be amended because it had cost tens of thousands of jobs, that human rights should be part of the “trade equation” and he “would use trade agreements to spread improved labor and environmental standards around the world and



Rally outside the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations in Addison, Texas. Courtesy of Arthur Stamoulis.

stand firm against agreements that fail to live up to those important standards.” But he reversed himself. He did not open up NAFTA to add labor and environmental protections and signed the South Korea, Panama, and Colombia Free Trade Agreements negotiated by Bush.^{4,5}

Now Obama wants Fast Track Authority—lapsed in 2007 under Bush—to push this extreme TPP, which Global Trade Watch calls a “one-percenter power tool that could rip up our basic needs and rights.” Under Fast Track, Congress has only 90 days to analyze an enormously complicated, detailed text already approved by the President and is permitted only a “No” or “Yes” vote; no amendments are allowed.



March outside the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations in San Diego. Courtesy of Arthur Stamoulis.

Look for Action Alerts to stop Congress from renewing “Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority” and for the TPP text to be “liberated” to shine a light on what is being negotiated.

Footnotes:

¹ Lori Wallach, “NAFTA on Steroids,” *The Nation*, July 16-23, 2012 at <http://www.thenation.com/article/168627/nafta-steroids#> Citizens Trade Campaign TPP Watch at <http://tpp2012.com/>; **Democracy Now Interview, June 14, 2012** at http://www.democracynow.org/2012/6/14/breaking_08_pledge_leaked_trade_doc and Jacob Chamberlain, Corporate CEO ‘Extremists’ Target Social Security, Medicare, <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2013/01/17-3>

² Cecilia Olivet, *Profiting from Injustice*, Transnational Institute, Nov. 2012.

³ Discussion of leaked TPP investment text at <http://www.citizenstrade.org/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/gtwtppinvestmentanalysis.pdf>

⁴ John Nichols, “Obama Goes Soft on Tree Trade” http://www.alternet.org/story/88754/obama_goes_soft_on_free_trade

⁵ Brian Knowlton, “Obama Doesn’t Plan to Reopen Nafta

Talks, *The New York Times*, April 21, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/21/business/21nafta.html?_r=0

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