



The Trans-Pacific Partnership: A Harmful Trade Agreement that Congress Must Oppose

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a huge, proposed trade and investment agreement between the United States and eleven other Pacific Rim countries: Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Canada, Mexico, Peru, and Chile. After more than five years of planning and negotiation, the multi-thousand page treaty has been finalized and President Obama has signed it. But it is not binding on the United States until Congress ratifies it. Congress must oppose the TPP.

Throughout the years when the treaty was being written and negotiated, the general public and the media were denied access to the content of the treaty. Even Congress was excluded. But while labor, environmental, consumer, food safety, global health care, and other civil society groups were largely shut out, hundreds of “advisors” working for corporate interests were present, influencing the process.

The TPP follows the pattern and incorporates many of the provisions we first saw in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This 1994 treaty between Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. has led to rising inequality in all three countries including stagnant or falling wages for many and job losses in the U.S. as corporations moved plants to Mexico and then on to China and other Asian countries in a search for the lowest wages, fewest regulations, and largest subsidies. NAFTA and other trade agreements like it are one important reason that corporate profits have been at record highs.

Over the past 25 years as globalization’s impact on our lives has expanded, so have national and international economic concerns. Income inequality has increased in the U.S. and in most other



countries; despite great wealth, poverty entraps millions in the U.S. and billions around the world; and the degradation of creation accelerates. Economic globalization is certainly not the sole cause of any of these grave conditions but it has played an important role. In 2003, the UCC’s General Synod expressed concerns about globalization in a Pronouncement titled “A Faithful Response: Calling for a More Just, Humane Direction for Economic Globalization.”

In 2004 the international Church expressed its deep distress about the state of the economy and the earth. Meeting in Accra, Ghana, the World Communion of Reformed Churches – a fellowship of 57 million Christians in 214 member denominations located in 107 countries, a group that includes the United Church of Christ – approved the “Accra Confession” which states,

The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment. ... This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization ... a global system that defends and protects the interests of the powerful. It affects and captivates us all. Further, in biblical terms, such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Luke 16.13).

This document was subsequently affirmed by the UCC’s General Synod and recommended to the whole church for prayer, study and discernment.

Most of the TPP does not address traditional trade concerns but instead deals with other issues such as environmental standards, food safety, financial regulations, protections for workers and consumers, patents on pharmaceuticals, and energy policy. Under the guise of a trade agreement, treaty negotiators are writing and re-writing the rules of the national and international economies, behind closed doors and in a very undemocratic process. Safeguards and protections enacted into law in past decades, often only after hard struggle, are being undone.

There are many very troubling features of the proposed agreement.

- Under the “investor-state dispute resolution” provisions, a multinational firm may sue a local, state, or federal government if a public policy (for example, to ban an environmental toxin or limit the threat from unsafe food) reduces a firm’s “expected future profits.” The lawsuit would be heard by a special, secret three-person tribunal whose decision cannot be challenged and that is authorized to order payment of unlimited sums of taxpayer dollars. The United States already has rules established through democratic processes that govern lawsuits against the government. A new extrajudicial process is unnecessary and opens wide the door to abuse. More <http://www.citizen.org/documents/isds-law-economics-professors-letter-Sept-2016.pdf>
- Protections for workers and the environment are weak and, in some cases, relax and erode existing standards.
- Buy American and Buy Local preferences are prohibited.
- It does not include the currency safeguards demanded by a bipartisan majority in Congress that would prevent known currency manipulators like Vietnam, Japan, and Malaysia from devaluing their currencies to gain an unfair trade advantage over U.S. firms.

If Congress approves the TPP, this legislation will replace and supersede existing U.S. law. Some of our current protections for workers, consumers, and the environment, and restrictions on corporate power and practices would be undone. Legislation that citizens have spent years getting enacted into law – to regulate banks, protect consumers, ensure workers’ rights, safeguard the environment, etc. – could be overturned. Trade agreements have become a way for multinational corporations to gain rights, repeal regulations, and expand opportunities for profit. They are a way for corporations to write and rewrite the rules of the U.S. and global economy. Congress must oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Join the efforts to defeat the TPP.

Sign up at ucc.org/join_the_network.

Join the UCC Economic Justice Movement at ucc.org/ejm



More about the Trans-Pacific Partnership

- A more detailed review of the TPP from UCC Justice & Witness Ministries <http://tinyurl.com/kjnaswo>
- From Public Citizens’ Global Trade Campaign: <http://www.citizen.org/documents/basic-tpp-talking-points.pdf>

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