

Oppose “Fast Track” and the Trans-Pacific Partnership

*Statement from the UE General Executive Board
January 24, 2014*

The Obama administration is disgracing itself by its current efforts to enact two dangerous “free trade” measures. It is seeking to revive “fast track”, an undemocratic procedure to enable a U.S. president to quickly shove new trade agreements through Congress with almost no congressional input or debate. If it succeeds in that effort, it plans to use fast track authority to railroad through Congress the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement being negotiated with 11 Pacific Rim countries. TPP would give corporations even more power to run roughshod over workers’ rights, environmental and health protections, and the ability of the U.S. and other countries to regulate corporate behavior.

Under the fast track legislation now before Congress, a president could initiate free trade negotiations with any country or countries with 90 days notice to Congress. The president could then unilaterally sign such trade agreement and Congress would get 90 days to vote yes or no on the agreement. No amendments would be permitted, and only 20 hours would be allowed for debate. The president could also unilaterally decide to change any U.S. law, claiming it interferes with the free trade agreement, using a similar fast track procedure to push the changes in law through Congress.

The administration can’t find a Democrat in the House of Representatives to co-sponsor fast track legislation, so the bill is currently sponsored by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) and Republican leaders of the Senate and House. While the president is hard-up for support within his own party, big business loves what he’s doing. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers, Business Roundtable, and major corporations are sponsoring newspaper ads and intensely lobbying members of Congress for fast track.

The immediate goal of fast track is to grease the skids for rapid approval of TPP. While it’s called a “free trade” agreement and would cost us jobs, TPP is mostly not about trade. It’s about protecting investments, increasing the power of multinational corporations and placing them above the law. TPP would give corporations equal status with national governments and enable them to undo laws and regulations they don’t like by suing governments before corporate-dominated international trade tribunals. Most

details of TPP are not known because it is being negotiated in secret – even members of Congress have been told very little. What we do know about TPP is very frightening.

These developments come on the 20th anniversary of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement between the U.S., Canada and Mexico. NAFTA has done tremendous harm to workers in all three countries. The U.S. has lost some 700,000 jobs and seen a decline in wages because of NAFTA, and for Mexico it's been even worse. Its economic growth has been stagnant, the poverty rate has not improved, and millions of its citizens have been forced to emigrate to the U.S. to seek work because NAFTA devastated Mexican agriculture and many Mexican-owned businesses.

UE opposes fast track and TPP and calls for Congress to defeat both initiatives. Many labor, environmental and other groups are also organizing against fast track and TPP. One of the best sources of information is Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, citizen.org/trade/. We urge all UE members to sign Public Citizen's online petition, and to make their voices heard against these latest "free trade" attack, through petitions, letters, demonstrations and other means.