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Trans-Pacific Partnership of Corporate Oligarchs

Anarcho-Syndicalist Review

2015

The so-called “Trans-Pacific Partnership” treaty was recently “fast-tracked” by Congress, would giving President Obama a free hand to finish negotiating this deal behind closed doors. (House Democrats united with far-right Republicans to delay passage by stripping the Senate bill of provisions to assist workers who lose their jobs because of TPP. So the Senate approved this even-more-anti-labor version; nothing can stand in the way of the bosses’ ability to enrich themselves.) Under fast track, Congress will not be allowed to change the final treaty, but only to approve the entire thing after a brief period for public comment. Americans will have to suffer the consequences of another NAFTA/CAFTA “free trade” agreement that makes it even easier for U.S. manufacturing to move to the sweatshops of Vietnam, Bangladesh and China (which is not part of the current negotiations, but could be added to the treaty later).

What makes the TPP different than previous “free trade” treaties is the enforcement provisions, which allow multinational corporations to go before a non-elected tribunal of cor-

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Retrieved on 28th January 2021 from syndicalist.us
From Anarcho-Syndicalist Review #64/5, Summer 2015

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porate judges (who work as lawyers for the bosses in their day jobs) and sue governments for “future damages” that may be caused if an environmental law, food safety regulation or worker protection is enforced. Citizens of these countries could be taxed to pay for hypothetical losses that have not yet happened. (A chapter of the treaty draft obtained by Wikileaks includes a provision specifying that it would not be made public until four years after the agreement is implemented. The treaty draft is being kept secret from citizens and unions; members of Congress are allowed to read it but not to take notes – however, hundreds of corporate “advisors” have special access.)

This is nothing short of a power grab by the multi-national corporations that will result in lowering labor and health standards down to the level of the poorest countries in the world. Future government leaders will be bound by whatever terms the multi-national corporations dictate. Although President Obama and the leaders of the other countries involved will be giving up some of the national sovereignty they now have, they know what they are doing. Obama and his supporters (in both the Republican and Democrat corporatist parties) are playing the role of corporate hit-men, and will be handsomely rewarded for their betrayal. The six hundred corporate lobbyists who are helping write this treaty will be gaining a lock on future governments and the international economy, creating a bulwark against workers who might follow the example of Greece and Spain to fight austerity policies.

The business union leaders of the AFL-CIO have not been silent about TPP. Although they have been shut out of the secret negotiations, they know from past experience with NAFTA and CAFTA what “fast-track” means – more jobs losses to global sweatshops. The so-called environmental and labor protections will never be enforced. What will be enforced are patent and copyright protections that are there for the drug companies and media companies to stop production of low-cost generic medicines and to police the internet.

The provisions of Stop Online Piracy Act that were rejected after a public outcry because they would have criminalized unauthorized use of copyrighted material (by, for example, posting a video of you singing a copywritten song), blocked internet sites accused of hosting copyrighted material from appearing on search engines, and allowed media conglomerates to go after internet providers for allowing their users to share “copyrighted” information have been reintroduced through the back door as part of TPP.

This is the brave new world order in the making. The mainstream labor movement’s efforts to block the deal by pressuring Democrats (many of whom rely on unions for campaign workers and money) have failed. Even the Republicans’ much-ballyhooed hatred of the Obama administration was not sufficient to peel off enough Republicans to join the tiny handful of Senate Democrats who tried to block fast-track. The social democrats in the Democrat Party are too few in number to make a difference, even if the corporations were willing to tolerate democracy. The one principle upon which nearly all politicians can agree is the supremacy of capital over all.

If we want a different world, or even to preserve the limited protections won through past struggles, we can not rely on the Democrats. Our power lies in our organization – in our refusal to submit. It is time to organize and take back our lives.