

Calls for **TPP Transparency Grow Louder** at Home and Abroad



by **Stuart Trew**

Canada joined the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations in October 2012 and the Harper government has said almost nothing about the massive corporate rights deal since then.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is 12-nation free trade and corporate rights deal that is being led by the United States, but also includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Thailand, the Philippines and South Korea have also expressed interest in joining the talks, which would eclipse the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the ways democracy would be constrained to cater to the interests of multinational corporations.

It is a broad and far-reaching deal that has been shrouded in secrecy. It's as if the government is deliberately keeping people in the dark on this agreement. But in Canada and globally, calls to end the TPP secrecy are getting louder. Activists promoting trade justice, access to medicines and fair copyright rules won't stop until the entire text of the agreement is made public. The pressure is producing results from Canada to Chile to Malaysia.

"The TPP is a sweeping agreement covering issues that affect many areas of Canada's economy and society – including several areas of policy that have never been subject to trade agreements before," said Opposition International Trade Critic Don Davies at the end of August, as negotiators from the 12 TPP countries met again behind closed doors in Brunei. "By keeping Parliament completely in the dark on negotiations the Conservatives also leave Canadians in the dark and, for

an agreement of this magnitude, that is abnormal and unacceptable."

The Council of Canadians and Common Frontiers have issued a joint statement demanding that TPP countries make public the full TPP negotiating text – just as in 2001 the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement was published by the U.S. government in an "unprecedented effort to make international trade and its economic and social benefits more understandable to the public," according to the United States Trade Representative at the time.

Our joint statement pointed out that compared to the FTAA's eight chapters, the TPP contains 26, with only two of them pertaining to "trade" as most of us understand the word. The other 24 chapters involve restrictions on governments' abilities to make health policy, the criminalization of everyday uses of the Internet, new limits on access to affordable medicines, prohibiting "buy local" policies, encouraging privatization, discouraging the creation of Crown corporations or new public utilities, and empowering corporations to sue governments in private tribunals that operate outside the court system when they're unhappy with environmental or other measures that lower profits.

Internationally, calls for TPP transparency are also growing. Chilean senators have officially demanded "timely and accurate" information about the negotiations, and have called for a public debate on the agreement. In Malaysia, the lack of information and debate risks destroying any popular or political support for the deal whatsoever.

Following a TPP ministers' meeting in Brunei on August 23, Malaysian Trade Minister Mustapa Mohamed wrote of

the "growing discomfort domestically arising from Malaysia's participation in the TPP negotiations, the outreach activities that had been undertaken and the concerns raised by the various stakeholders, specifically on the issue of lack of transparency and disclosure of information on the texts being negotiated." Mohamed said he "amplified these concerns during the bilateral meetings with my counterparts from New Zealand, Japan, Mexico, Canada, Singapore and the U.S. and exchanged views on how best to take this forward."

From one Malaysian minister, we have more information about Malaysia's position on the TPP than the Harper government has told us of Canada's position in the past year. Requests by federal trade committee members for Canada's cost-benefit analysis of the TPP were ignored, possibly because it would prove how little Canada has to gain through the deal. Unfortunately, it's more likely the government hasn't done any assessment at all. Malaysia is only now performing its own, also because of widespread public pressure.

On August 29, as the last round of TPP negotiations was ending, the Council of Canadians, Common Frontiers, CUPE, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines, OpenMedia and local allies held rallies against TPP secrecy in Toronto, Montreal and Nanaimo. The rallies, part of a global week of action on the TPP, were inspired by similar actions in the United States against the TPP by trade justice activists and the Occupy movement. These rallies and actions will continue until the full negotiating text is made public or the TPP negotiations fall apart – whichever comes first.

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