

As Secret Trade Talks Reveal Cracks, Demonstrators Aim Death Blows at TPP

Pacific trade deal opponents hope that if Atlanta round fails, pro-corporate TPP could be knocked off track indefinitely

By [Deirdre Fulton](#)

Global Research, October 02, 2015

[Common Dreams](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

Image: A poll released Wednesday by the Coalition for Better Trade shows that a clear majority of voters who can offer an opinion about the proposed TPP say they oppose the deal. (Photo: Citizens Trade Campaign/Twitter)

As trade ministers from around the world continued meeting in Atlanta on Thursday for [final-stretch negotiations](#) on the corporate-friendly Trans Pacific Partnership ([TPP](#)), civil society groups [demonstrated](#) on the streets in a final salvo against a deal they describe as “a wholesale auction of our rights, our freedoms, and our democracy to multinational corporations who put profits over people.”

High-level officials including Japan’s Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister [Akira Amari](#) and New Zealand Prime Minister [John Key](#) have warned that if the talks do not wrap up this week, the 12-nation trade agreement could be put on ice for years. “They’re getting close, but we can stop them,” reads the Citizens Trade Campaign’s [call-to-action](#). “If we do, and the Atlanta round fails, many believe the TPP could be knocked off track indefinitely.”

“The window of opportunity to complete [the] TPP is closing so you wouldn’t say it’s impossible to complete the deal if it doesn’t take place in Atlanta, but it does become more difficult,” Key told the Asia Society in New York this week.

Citing such remarks, organizers of Thursday’s demonstration declare: “Very rarely do protests have as much potential for immediate results as this one.”

To coincide with Thursday’s action, activists from [SumOfUs.org](#), MoveOn.org, and [ActionStation](#) ran a [full-page ad](#) in the local alt-weekly *Creative Loafing* slamming the secretive trade deal.

“In a final effort to strike a TPP deal, companies and governments have once again tried to organize secret closed-door negotiations to lobby against the interests of workers all around the world,”

said Jon Lloyd, campaign director for SumOfUs.

“All the secrecy means we don’t know the gory details of what it contains, but we do know they’re planning attacks on internet freedom, environmental

protections, and affordable medication and that is unacceptable.”

In particular, activists in Atlanta are [highlighting](#) how the TPP could slash access to affordable medicines. As the *Japan Times* [reports](#), drug patents, tariffs on automobiles, and market access for dairy products remain among the “thorny issues” for negotiators.

“U.S. negotiators are pushing for the TPP to include 12 years of data protection for life-saving biologics,” wrote Marc Perrone, international president of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), in a [letter sent Tuesday](#) to U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman. “This demand puts the profits of big pharmaceutical companies above the health and welfare of every American family and effectively risks lives by delaying access to lower cost generic drugs.”

Perrone continued: “For U.S. negotiators to insist that the TPP protect these high drug prices rather than the hard-working Americans who buy them is completely unacceptable.”

The AARP, which advocates for people 50 and older, chimed in, with senior legislative representative KJ Hertz [explaining](#) on Thursday that anti-competitive provisions within the TPP proposal “would extend brand drug patent protections through ‘evergreening’ drug products that provide little to no new value.”

These intellectual property provisions

“also [prolong high prescription drug costs for consumers](#), link approval to market generic or biosimilar drugs to existing patents in a way that protects only brand drugs, and increase [data exclusivity periods for biologics](#) that further delays access by other companies to develop generic versions of these extremely high-cost drugs,”

Hertz added.

However, TPP opponents are [quick to point out](#) (pdf) that even if a deal is reached this week, Congress will not debate and vote on it until late winter because, as per the Fast Track legislation [passed](#) earlier this year, President Barack Obama cannot sign the deal without giving lawmakers 90 days’ notice.

As the *New York Times* [notes](#), that timeline would put a TPP vote right “in the heat of the states’ presidential nominating contests.”

In a [memo to reporters](#) (pdf) circulated late last week, Public Citizen’s Lori Wallach called that scenario a political “nightmare”—at least for the corporate forces pushing the pro-corporate trade pact.

“Ten Presidential candidates have pushed anti-TPP messages in their campaigning, stoking voters’ ire about the pact,” Wallach said. “The political costs of an unpopular ‘yes’ vote for the TPP would increase with every passing week in 2016.”

Meanwhile, a poll [released](#) (pdf) Wednesday by the Coalition for Better Trade shows that a clear majority of voters who can offer an opinion about the proposed TPP say they oppose the deal.

“Voters are opposed to TPP, and the Administration and Congress should listen to what they have to say,” said Khristyn Brimmeier, communications director for the group, which is made up of labor, environmental, and public health advocacy organizations.

“Rather than continue to push for a deal based on 25 years of failed policy, the Administration and Congress should heed the public demand for a trade policy that’s transparent rather than one developed in secret and at the hand of global corporations, and one that will keep good jobs at here at home.”

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