

Third World America's Trade Agreements

By [Charles Sullivan](#)

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The corporate media would have us believe that the nation is in the midst of an economic recovery.

In the shadow of the approaching mid-term elections, the president cites the number of jobs created and speaks optimistically about America's economic future. The future is indeed bright, but only if you are among the wealthiest one percent of the population.

For instance, since the 2007 recession, the greatest crisis of capitalism in 75 years, corporate profits have risen, CEO salaries and bonuses are at record levels and the stock market is soaring. By contrast, workers' wages have stagnated for more than four decades, benefits are either few or non-existent, and workers are encumbered with debt that forces them to perform multiple jobs— if they can find them—in order to survive.

Jobs that offer long-term security and a living wage are scarce even for those with university degrees. Adjusted for inflation, today's workers are worse off than they were in the late 1960s.

Whose economic recovery is this?

According to economic forecaster Gerald Celente, 90 percent of the jobs created in 2013 were part-time, most of them paying low wages and providing no benefits. Student loan debt exceeds \$1.1 trillion, a number that surpasses the combined credit card liability of the nation.

These debts cannot be discharged through bankruptcy. The big banks and corporations that finance political campaigns have no such restrictions placed upon them.

Even the unemployment figures are deceiving. According to the latest government data, unemployment is at 6.7 percent. In reality, that number is probably closer to 17 or 18 percent, according to economist Richard Wolff.

The government does not count people whose unemployment benefits have expired or those who have given up looking for work. A cashier working 10 hours a week at Food Lion is counted as fully employed.

We have students, many of them burdened with immense debt, entering a job market that makes it difficult for them to earn a decent living. This is the economic minefield that workers across America must navigate. A little truth might help them find their way and comprehend why this is happening.

One of the many reasons we face such a bleak economic future is the implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

In 1992, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented between the governments of the United States, Canada and Mexico. NAFTA was fast-tracked through Congress by President H.W. Bush and signed into law by President Clinton. NAFTA was promoted in the commercial media as an engine for job creation in the United States, an assertion that is contradicted by the facts. According to Wolff, more than 700,000 jobs fled the country as the result of NAFTA, many of them providing middle class incomes and benefits.

Those jobs are never coming back. It is not just the number of jobs created that matter, it is the quality of those jobs that is a predictor of economic success.

Furthermore, the mass movement of U.S. corporations to Mexico wrecked the already struggling Mexican economy, particularly its sustainable, locally-based businesses. The situation initiated a mass migration of immigrant Mexican workers to the U.S. in search of better-paying jobs than were available to them in the homeland. Multinational corporations seeking a source of cheap labor and a climate of deregulation are the primary benefactors. The quantifiable effect that NAFTA has had on the U.S. workers is staggering job loss, reduced wages and increasing economic disparity.

Now, with the backing of corporate lobbyists, yet another FTA—the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—is being fast-tracked through Congress. Both Democrats and Republicans are enthusiastically backing the legislation.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation describes the process: “The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a secretive, multi-national trade agreement that threatens to extend restrictive intellectual property (IP) laws across the globe and rewrite international rules on its enforcement.” TTP is currently being negotiated between nine to 12 nations.

If enacted, TTP will permit privately-owned corporations to have hegemony over the governments of sovereign nations. For instance, if the state of West Virginia were to ban the use of genetically modified soybeans, Monsanto Corporation could either overturn the decision or extort billions of dollars in remuneration from their projected loss of profits. FTAs belligerently put corporate profits before the legitimate needs of the people and the welfare of the biosphere.

The implications for students and working class people will be profoundly detrimental.

Hundreds of thousands of jobs will flee the country, wages will fall yet again, autonomy will be lost, and the job market will resemble the wreckage of the Hesperus. FTAs are the means by which the power elite are turning the U.S. into a Third World economy.

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Articles by: **Charles Sullivan**

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