

International trade agreement opposed by many factions

By Eric Collins
Freelance Reporter

Few causes can sit environmental activists next to labor-union promoters, citizens for government accountability next to congress members trying to be accountable.

But all factions were present and opposed Tuesday night to a worldwide trade agreement that would open up trade barriers to all countries involved at a potential cost of environmental restrictions, labor organizing and local laws.

More than 100 concerned citizens joined U.S. Representative Peter DeFazio and members from

Western Ancient Forest Campaign, Citizens for Public Accountability and Lane County Central Labor Council, among others, to discuss the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which would open up free trade to all countries that ratified it, allowing companies throughout the world to buy, sell and move businesses and assets globally.

The agreement, which has been developing since May 1995, is scheduled for completion in May, but won't take effect unless the legislatures of countries accept it.

But, as DeFazio said, free trade

has a high cost. DeFazio, who has been a strong opponent of prior multinational trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), said the MAI scares him since it would give private business the ability to sue governments in an international tribunal if the business felt the country had violated the agreement. In America, DeFazio said, this could mean private business could sue over environmental restrictions, for example, even though they were a part of U.S. law.

"It's brazen. It's bold. It's extraordinary...and it's frightening." De-

Fazio said. "This is a coup against all democratic governments of the world by those who own capital."

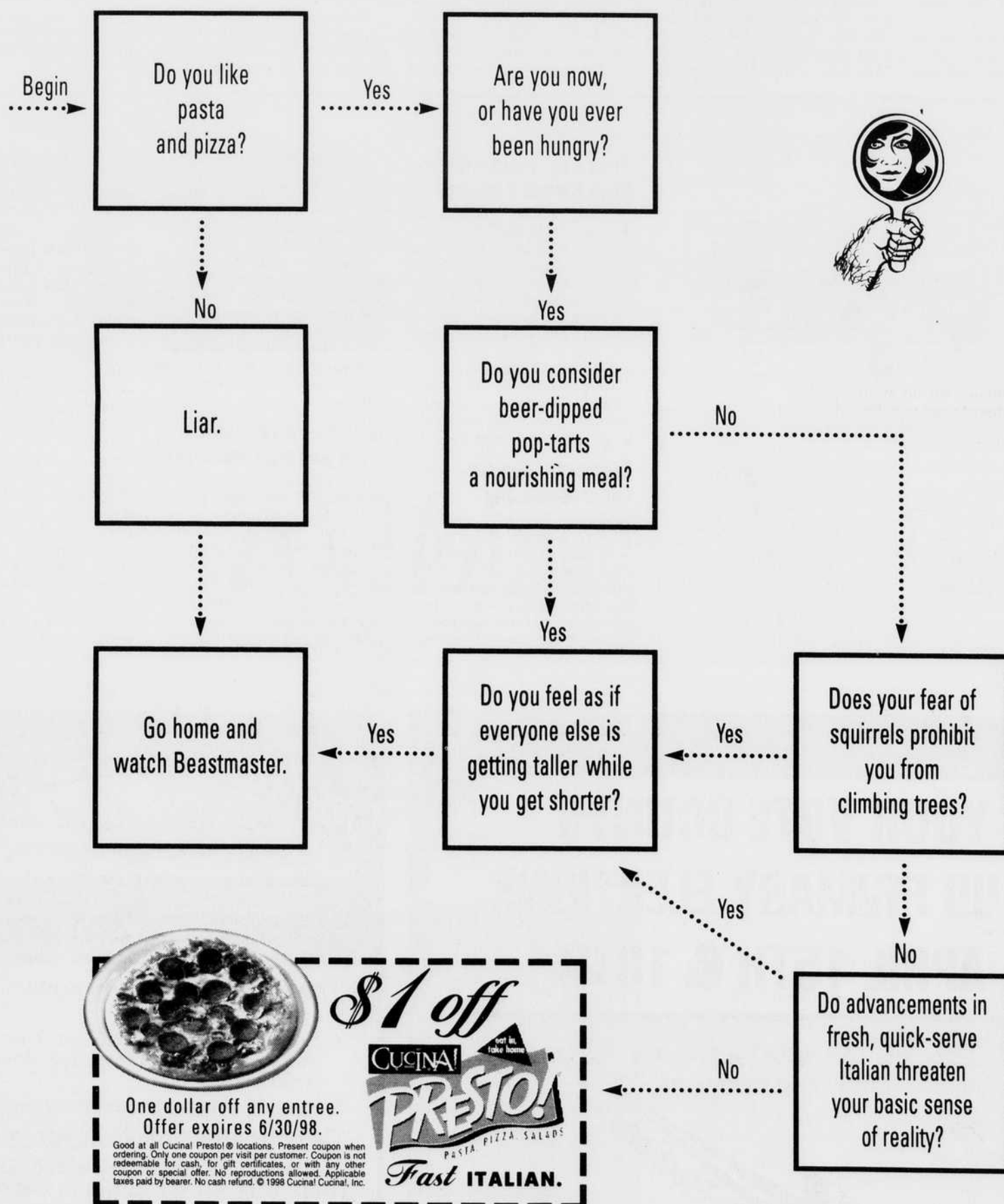
Proponents of the MAI say international business will increase and become more efficient if countries become involved, which would in turn benefit businesses, consumers and workers worldwide. The MAI would additionally redistribute wealth between developed and Third World countries, supporters contend, since trade between nations would increase.

But this fails to mention the potential for harm in worker's rights, said Alan Moore, a member of the

Lane County Central Labor Council. Many companies today threaten to move their operations elsewhere if workers begin to organize into unions, Moore said. Under the MAI, companies would have even greater incentives to find cheap labor in other countries if trade restrictions were dissolved, crippling the ability of any union to achieve negotiations.

DeFazio said the MAI hasn't created a stir on Capitol Hill yet, but with meetings like Tuesday night, he said he hopes the agreement will have a very "noisy and bloody" end.

SELF EVALUATION 4B: WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT CHANGE



PROGNOSIS: APPLY MEGADOSES OF PASTA UNTIL CONDITION STABILIZES • OPENS DAILY AT 11:00 AM • 13TH AND ALDER IN UNIVERSITY DISTRICT