

# The 'last war' rages on against same-old trade agreements

By STAN SORSCHER

The other day, President Obama spoke to 100 top CEOs from the Business Roundtable. He was asked about two huge new trade deals favored by global companies, known as TPP and TTIP. The President taunted critics of our failing trade policy, telling them, "Stop fighting the last war."

That sounds patronizing. Is it true that companies trying to manufacture in America, workers, communities and environmentalists need the President to explain their interests to them, as if 25 years of lived experience with NAFTA-style trade deals haven't been sufficiently clear?

Another interpretation is that the President believes his huge new trade deals really are different — that they are the 21st century agreements he has been promising. In this interpretation, his message is, "Trust me! These deals will be great."

Let's consider that. He is negotiating these deals in secret. He spoke in a room of 100 top CEOs, defending their interests. The precise language is being written under the guidance of legions of corporate lobbyists, who advise the U.S. Trade Representative. Congress and a few non-business specialists have very limited access, but almost no influence, and they are sworn not to reveal what they see.

If a deal is finished, advocates for these failing trade policies want an expedited Congressional approval process, with no time to explain the terms of the deal, no realistic public hearings or political engagement to educate the public and no opportunity to modify the deal. Putting the deal on a "Fast Track" to railroad it through doesn't inspire trust.

Leaks to date show that these new deals follow the NAFTA template in their basic features — expanded corporate rights; special corporate-friendly tribunals to settle disputes without accountability to any national government; the interests of global investors will take priority over public interests; and global businesses will be free to seek the lowest wages and weakest civil society protections around the world. These provisions are opposed by the libertarian Cato Institute, the governor of Washington — arguably the most pro-trade state in the union — five key members of the House Ways and Means Committee that deals with trade, and hundreds of civil society organizations in America and Europe.

Multinational companies have other interests in play. The deals say nothing about currency manipulation, which is great for global companies already producing in China. However, currency manipulation hurts American produc-

ers and encourages offshoring. Bipartisan letters signed by 230 House members and 60 Senators sought action on currency manipulation.

These deals will have illusory and ineffective options for environmental and labor protections and human rights. Another letter from 153 House Democrats asked for stronger labor rights.

The deals will restrict access to medicines for millions in developing countries and will limit prudent financial regulation. Patent rights could be expanded to include surgical procedures.

In the American legal tradition, our threshold for regulation is that it must serve a public good and have a rational basis. Multinational companies prefer a "necessity" test, where national and state governments would need to prove to a corporate-friendly trade tribunal that no other option is possible.

Opposition has been raised on many issues important to regular people. Those objections have been brushed aside.

Clearly, these aren't "trade" deals. They are really about global governance. Corporate lawyers will sit on shadowy tribunals and hear cases about

the environment, labor rights, human rights, public health, food security, internet freedom and financial regulation. But they will base their decisions on the corporate values and corporate-friendly language in the trade deals. They will take no account of the Constitutions or legal traditions of the U.S., Canada, Australia, Japan or any other country. Language in these "trade" deals becomes the new governance standard for the world.

These deals consolidate power relationships that favor global investors. The values and priorities in these deals bring more wealth and power to those who already have plenty.

These deals will determine how life is organized in 2050.

Every President since Gerald Ford has promised prosperity from each new trade deal. In our lived experience, we've lost millions of jobs, de-industrialized our economy, weakened bargaining power for every worker in America, run a cumulative trade debt approaching \$10 trillion and we've lost our strategic advantage in manufacturing to Korea, Japan, Singapore, Germany, Denmark and China.

When President Obama pleads with

us to trust him, I hear Chico Marx' joke from Duck Soup; "Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?" My eyes see the lived experience from every deal since NAFTA.

I'm not sure what the 21st Century looks like to President Obama. Maybe he has wonderful new 21st Century language in the deals that everyone will love. If so, he should show it! He should publish it tomorrow and boast about it. Repeatedly.

I'm 100 percent in favor of trade. My job depends on trade. We should have a good trade policy, which would be very different from our current failing trade policy.

It's completely appropriate to fight the last war on trade policy. Thea Lee at the AFL-CIO put it this way in the Washington Post, "We promise not to fight the last war, if he promises not to put the last [flawed] version of the trade deal on the table."

It is ironic that President Obama, speaking to CEOs from the Business Roundtable, tells the rest of America to trust him. It makes much more sense for him to speak to environmentalists, workers, communities and companies trying to manufacture in the U.S. Show us why these deals will be good for us, when the opposite has been true up to now.

*(Editor's Note: Stan Sorscher is labor representative at the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, IFPTE 2001. This column originally appeared in Huffington Post, and was reprinted in the Washington State Labor Council's The Stand.)*

## AFL-CIO to take 'Raising Wages' campaign to key states, cities

At the AFL-CIO's National Summit on Raising Wages Jan. 7, President Richard Trumka announced new campaigns to expand the raising wages agenda.

This spring, the federation will sponsor Raising Wages summits in four states. Additionally, the AFL-CIO will organize projects in seven cities to focus on raising wages in those locales.

AFL-CIO state labor federations in the first four presidential primary states — Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire and South Carolina — will take place in the spring. These summits will bring together diverse voices to lay out the

entire raising wages platform and establish state-based standards of accountability.

The AFL-CIO identified the seven cities for raising wages campaigns where they could have the most impact. The cities are Atlanta, Columbus, District of Columbia (Metro), St. Louis, Philadelphia, Minneapolis and San Diego.

"Raising wages is the single standard by which leadership will be judged," Trumka said. "That means accountability, and it starts with something we all understand — presidential politics."

## ...Warren tells unionists, 'the game is rigged'

(From Page 1)

"Instead of building an economy for all Americans, this country has grown an economy that works for some Americans," Warren said.

"That is a huge structural change in this country," she continued.

Warren told union members, "If we're ever going to un-rig the system, then we need to make some important political changes."

She said the best place to start is the Wall Street banks, and those responsible for causing the crash of 2008.

"We know that democracy doesn't work when congressmen and regulators bow down to Wall Street's political power — and that means it's time to break up the Wall Street banks and remind politicians that they don't work for the big banks, they work for us!" she said.

"Changes like this aren't easy," she continued. "But we know they are possible. We know they are possible because we have seen David beat Goliath before ... Change is difficult, but it is possible."



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