

Unifor stands firmly in opposition to Trans-Pacific Partnership

January 23, 2018

Reports have surfaced today suggesting that Canada has agreed to terms on a revised Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. Although details are sparse, this is a deeply concerning development, to which Unifor stands firmly in opposition.

Unifor's criticism of the TPP agreement has been unwavering. The original pact, signed in February 2016, was deeply flawed. Major concessions were made by Canada that would have negatively affected our country's auto and dairy industries, our cultural sector, access to affordable medicines, and other areas of major concern.

The TPP, like other so-called "free trade" agreements, directed minimal attention to broader social and economic development issues. It failed to meaningfully address the negative consequences of greater trade and investment liberalization, including rising inequality, environmental sustainability, job displacement and lower work standards. In fact, the language embedded in the original TPP labour chapter has been proven so weak as to render it entirely ineffective at protecting and enhancing worker's rights.

It has been our view that the TPP represented the worst of what trade agreements have to offer, including extraordinary privileges afforded to investors, enabling them to use private courts to sue governments (for unlimited sums of money) over rules and practices that limit profit.

Breaking from the TPP could have purposefully signaled a new direction on managing global trade and investment – one that aims to serve the needs of people. Instead, Canada chose to participate in the TPP's revival, despite the U.S. announcing its withdrawal. Assurances of close consultation and collaboration have not been met. In fact, dealings over the past months have been mired in secrecy.

As early as yesterday (January 22), Unifor National President Jerry Dias met with International Trade Minister François-Philippe Champagne to discuss the union's concerns on the TPP deal. There was no indication from the Minister, at that time, that a final deal was imminent.

There is nothing remotely progressive about the TPP, despite a cynical attempt to change the agreement's official title to the "*Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership*" – a slap in the face to the trade union and civil society activists around the world who have spent decades pursuing an alternative, more humane model for truly progressive international trade and development.

Not only does the TPP fail to advance progressive values, it moves us in the wrong direction. Unifor will actively and aggressively oppose ratification of this deal.

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