11-30-2013

Resist Newsletter, Sept-Oct-Nov 2013

Resist

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/resistnewsletter

Recommended Citation
https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/resistnewsletter/395
Dismantling the Free Trade Regime

Walking a Path toward Global Justice

By Sara Mersha

In January 1994, the Zapatistas - autonomous indigenous communities who organized themselves in a system of liberated zones within Chiapas, Mexico - emerged out of the jungles with a clear and unified voice in opposition to the system of neoliberalism being imposed upon their lives through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). A trade deal between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, NAFTA instituted a set of regulations that made it easier for transnational corporations to make profits across borders, no matter what the costs or consequences to people and the environment. As a result, thousands of workers in the US lost their jobs as companies moved their operations to Mexico where the costs of production were cheaper. Millions of Mexican peasant farmers and indigenous peoples lost their livelihoods, as they could not compete with the low prices of subsidized agricultural commodities from US corporations that flooded Mexican markets. Prices that Mexican farmers receive today for maize (corn), their main crop, are 75 percent less than they were 25 years ago, before NAFTA was passed. As a result, many of these peasants and indigenous peoples found themselves forced to either work in maquilas (factories), or to migrate north to the US to try to find work, in both cases often under extremely exploitative conditions. And Mexican consumers are no better off – because US corporations, like Cargill, have set up special relations with large Mexican companies, they have established a monopoly that drives up prices to consumers, even as prices paid to farmers have drastically fallen.

Since then, the neoliberal corporate free trade regime has moved forward, creating new agreements and regulations building on the NAFTA model. In 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was founded, completing the triumvirate of International Financial Institutions (along with the already existing International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). In some ways, the WTO may be the most powerful of the three (also known as the Bretton Woods Institutions). While the IMF and World Bank do a great deal of damage to Global South economies under the guise of “development,” the WTO is explicit about its role in protecting the profits of transnational corporations, above all other considerations – including national sovereignty.

Social movements from a variety of sectors understood early on how the WTO’s corporate agenda posed a dangerous threat to their constituencies – including labor, environmental groups, and small-scale farmers around the world. Thanks to the efforts of these and other movements, such as the organizing that happened at the WTO meetings continued on page two
Dismantling the Free Trade Regime continued from page one

in Seattle in 1999 and Cancun in 2003, and other spaces, movements have been successful in preventing the WTO from deepening its hold even further through the attempted but stalled Doha round of negotiations.

However, governments influenced by transnational corporations have found ways to work around this obstacle, pushing forward an increasing number of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), passed in 2006, borrowed a great deal from the NAFTA blueprint. In recent years, it has been used by transnational companies such as the Canadian-based Pacific Rim Mining Corporation, to sue the El Salvadoran government for millions of dollars in profits that it claims it lost the ability to make from gold mining, after the government passed an executive order to place a moratorium on metallic mining. In the eyes of CAFTA and the WTO, the fact that the government passed this regulation as a result of community struggles to protect their water, whose contamination from gold mining was causing a great amount of sickness and death among local communities, is irrelevant.

Two trade deals currently being negotiated between the US and other countries are the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Trans Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA). The TPP has been called NAFTA on steroids. It is currently being negotiated by 12 countries, and covers 40 percent of the global economy, with options for other countries to become signatories in the future. Negotiations are highly secretive, with members of Congress not even being able to access drafts of the agreement, even though several corporate actors have not only been able to read but also influence the draft text. TAFTA is no better – it stands to put many important worker and environmental protections (including recent European regulations against genetically modified organisms, or GMOs) at great risk, in the name of corporate profit.

Which Way Forward for Social Movements?

This month, a group of twenty international social movements put out a statement linking the issues of free trade and climate change. Organizations such as La Via Campesina, Focus on the Global South, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, and the Indigenous Environmental Network, among others, identified the particular ways that the free trade regime is being used to advance corporate profit in the face of climate change, otherwise
RESIST's Newest Team Member!

Welcoming Miabi Chatterji

We are extremely excited to have Miabi Chatterji join the staff of RESIST. Here we bring you a conversation between our long-time co-director of grantmaking for the eastern region, Yafreis Majia, and Miabi, who will join Yafreis as our new co-director of grantmaking for the western region.

YM: The world wants to know...tell us a little bit about yourself!

MC: I should start about 120 years ago, when some folks traveled from somewhere in Bengal, during British colonial rule over India, to a province further south, Orissa. They settled in the famed beach city of Puri, known for its Jagannath Temple and yearly Rath Yatra festival. Those are my foremothers. Perhaps that story might take a little more room than we have thought to get to 2013. My people are from the Northeast of the subcontinent and the Northeast of the US - New Jersey. But I was made for the heat of the world’s Souths. I grew up in a suburban New Jersey town, Berkeley Heights, and after college made my way to the city of my dreams, New York, where I spent 10 years getting my PhD, working with movement organizations, teaching, building community, and rousing some rabble. I am very serious a lot of the time, highly goofy some of the time, and a big softy all of the time.

YM: When did you first build a relationship with RESIST?

MC: My first experience with RESIST was through my work with Youth Solidarity Summer (YSS), a yearly political education program for South Asian American youth. YSS was created by desi leftists to counter the insidious summer camps that were emerging in the US run by Hindu fundamentalists – but billed as a place for young Indian Americans to “get in touch with their roots.” We wanted to provide a place for young people who were interested in community-based justice, social change, and the global fight against capitalist dominance to get together and learn that there is a vibrant life on the left. RESIST was YSS’s only foundation money, and we truly counted on that $3,000! We were so happy that RESIST existed to fund groups like ours, which was all volunteer-run, was not a 501c3, and raised funds in a very grassroots way.

And when a friend of mine in New York City, Becca Howes Mischel, left the board of directors for a year of research in Oaxaca, México, she recommended that I be recruited to the board. I was invited to join about 6 years ago, and served as president of the board for the past few years. Being on the board was a wonderful learning and leadership development experience. I went from being the youngest person on the board, having never been on the funding side of the table and feeling unsure of my place at that table, to having a deep dedication to RESIST and its long and healthy future.

YM: What inspires you?

MC: I recently went back to my favorite play, Angels in America by Tony Kushner. When I was in high school, this was my first (and only) taste of how theatre could be politicized – could tell a part of history (in this case, 1980s U.S. when AIDS in the gay male community was killing more than a generation of our people) in a way that talked about power and privilege. It closes with a character named Harper saying, “Night flight to San Francisco... I saw something only I could see...Souls were rising from the earth far below, souls of the dead, of people who had perished, from famine, from war, from the plague, and they floated up, like skydivers in reverse, limbs all akimbo, wheeling and spinning. And the souls of these departed joined hands, clasped ankles and formed a web, a great net of souls... Nothing’s lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we’ve left behind, and dreaming ahead. At least I think that’s so.”

YM: And now you are the co-direct of grantmaking for RESIST! What do you enjoy about Grantmaking?

MC: Too much! For example, the prison abolition movement. I don’t come from a community of heavily incarcerated people, but sometimes I think of it in this way: if the people I grew up with were policed and targeted in the ways that poor and working-class black and Latin@ men are, doing the same activities we all did when growing up, I would know so many people behind bars. My whole family and community life would look differently.

One thing that has affected me a great deal in the past decade is how gay marriage has taken over mainstream GLBT organizations as the focus of so much money, hours, and lobbying power. Meanwhile issues like violence against queer and trans* people in prisons, shelters, the foster system, by police, and on the streets is a frantically urgent issue. This reminds me how trends in funding – which issues become ‘hot’ and sometimes change the direction of a movement – can affect the left in this country in deep and problematic ways.

But when it comes down to it, I’m really looking forward to connecting with folks, building relationships, supporting new groups, and playing a role in building our community and grassroots power.
Dismantling the Free Trade Regime
continued from page two

is at stake, as humanity along with other living beings on this planet.

In the short term, the twenty social movement groups who authored the statement — which collectively represent literally hundreds of millions of people in countries in almost every continent around the world — have put forward a call to action to unite movements around fair trade and climate justice around the upcoming WTO Ministerial Meeting, to take place in Bali in December 2013. Through a combination of mobilizations in Bali and around the world, the voices and actions together have great promise to raise the profile of these issues, and hopefully to prevent the corporate green economy agenda from advancing even further.

Over the longer term, it will take a great variety of actions and creative resistance to achieve the goal of a fundamentally different social and economic system, based on respect for people and life on this planet over profit. In thirty years of working with social movements from the Global South, many of the partners of Grassroots International — a Boston-based ally of Resist with long-standing relationships with movement building groups around the world — have important lessons to share. For example, the Zapatistas, one of the earliest groups in organized resistance to free trade, have provided one of the most inspiring examples of resistance to global capitalism ever since their original uprising. Their model is based on the wisdom of the most impacted communities being at the center of their work, exercising discipline in developing collective leadership and deep democracy, and putting their indigenous vision for “living well” into practice by building their own communities based entirely upon what they need at the local level, even as they courageously oppose what is wrong with the global economic system. Other groups such as La Vía Campesina — an international network of family farmers, peasants, fisher-people, and other small-scale food producers — teach us important lessons about the importance and strength of global solidarity. Uniting over 250 million members from 70 countries around the world under the banner of food sovereignty as resistance to global capitalism, La Vía Campesina’s slogan makes the meaning of their struggle clear within both hearts and minds: “Globalize the Struggle, Globalize Hope!” Both of these examples — and countless more — illustrate the importance of deep connection to place, to land and territory, to Mother Earth, and to one another, as critical components of what will make it ultimately possible to reach a vision of a society structured around global justice. We look forward to continuing to walk this path together, along with RESIST and so many of your inspiring grantees.

Sara Mersha is the director of grantmaking and advocacy at Grassroots International.

On September 23, activists decended on the US Trade Representative’s office in Washington, DC, to protest the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal.
Why We Should Oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership
Because it’s trade deal for the one percent

By John Kinsman

There are always winners and losers in free trade. The winners are the one percent — the wealthy at the top. The losers are the ninety-nine percent — the rest of us.

The latest free trade deal that is now being rushed by President Obama through Congress is known as the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Thirty years ago the first free trade deals were enacted under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO), followed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the Australia US Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA), and many more. During this time, global economic crisis accelerated at an alarming rate, with only the one percent reaping the profits. This ongoing crisis will not end until these destructive free trade agreements are repealed and fair trade becomes the norm.

Most recently, the Korea US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) was signed over the objections of many labor, farm, and consumer groups in both countries. According to the February 8 edition of the Korea Times, the leader of the Democratic United Party (DUP) vowed to nullify this deal once in power, and it is predicted the DUP will win this year’s general election. In an open letter to President Obama, Vice President Biden, and House Speaker Boehner, the DUP called upon the US “to reconsider the KORUS FTA in order to truly strengthen the long-term relationship between our countries. If our cordial and earnest request is overlooked by your administration, we will have to take all measures possible to freeze the implementation of the KORUS FTA.”

Why would anyone expect anything but another race to the bottom in terms of farm prices, worker wages, environmental standards, and human rights with passage of the TPP? We need only look at what happened in the years following NAFTA: Over two million commit suicide by jumping off factory rooftops, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the horrific conditions that are spawned by these free trade deals.

Who else will lose under the TPP? US dairy farmers fear they will go bankrupt as cheap foreign powder imports like milk protein concentrate (MPC) flood the domestic market. US consumers will likely face more contaminated products — whether it is pet food laced with melamine or children’s toys coated with lead paint. US pharmaceutical giants are poised to undermine access to generic drugs by imposing their expensive patents on Australia and New Zealand where people currently enjoy better and more affordable health care than is found here. Japanese farmers and consumers will be forced to accept genetically engineered crops and hormone-tainted meat exported by US agribusiness. So much for freedom under free trade.

As Congress considers the TPP, we need to express our opposition — not only to convince our elected officials that this will just lead to more economic chaos on top of the current crisis, but to also let our friends across the Pacific know that they are not alone in opposing free trade deals that are only designed to profit the one percent. Those of us in the ninety-nine percent will end up losers if we do not repea KORUS and stop the TPP. We could ALL be winners if we worked together in constructive cooperation for a new global economic system based upon fair trade instead.

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Madison, Wisconsin this past August to protest the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, included members of Veterans for Peace and Family Farm Defenders.

Mexican farmers driven off their land by subsidized US corn dumping. Risking their lives, farmers migrated across the border in search of work — families torn apart as fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters disappeared. Some died in the desert, others were murdered by traffickers (coyotes) and rightwing vigilantes. So devalued as human beings, their lives were not even worth counting. Similarly, in the US and Canada thousands of family farmers and small business owners have seen their livelihoods sacrificed on the altar of greater corporate profit.

Those in the one percent who are now pushing the TPP hope to take advantage of the huge supply of cheap labor and natural resources to be found in the Pacific Rim. The recent expose of the Chinese sweatshops behind Apple’s iPhones, where workers regularly commit suicide by jumping off factory rooftops, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the horrific conditions that are spawned by these free trade deals.

John Kinsman is an organic dairy farmer and forster who lives near Lime Ridge, Wisconsin. He is president of Family Farm Defenders, a RESIST grantee. This article was originally published in the Capital Times newspaper in Madison, Wisconsin.
Globalization and Grassroots’ Discontent
Activists have been engaging in direct action to stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal

A massive banner was dropped by activists to expose and protest the TPP at the Trade Representative’s office in Washington, DC.

Hillary Clinton, who was Secretary of State at the time, played a role in drafting the trade deal and was also a target of anti-TPP protests.

“The only thing worth globalizing is dissent.” - Arundhati Roy

HIV/AIDS activists, including grantee Student Global AIDS Campaign, have been organizing, educating, and protesting the TPP for the effects it would have on critical and affordable medicine that is needed in the global fight against HIV/AIDS.
"This is being rammed down the throats of the populations of the world by state and corporate power acting in tandem, and so we can make guesses to what it's likely to be."

- Noam Chomsky on the dangers of the Trans-Pacific Partnership

RESIST co-founder Noam Chomsky has been highly critical of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal. A recent internet meme (above) swept across social media and has quickly help frame the issue among activists as well as the general public. The website www.ExposeTheTpp.org has also been collecting photographs from individuals on why they are opposed to the TPP. The site succinctly defines the trade deal: "The Trans-Pacific Partnership n. 1. A 'free trade' agreement that would set rules on non-trade matters such as food safety, internet freedom, medicine costs, financial regulation, and the environment. 2. A binding international governance system that would require the United States, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and any other country that signs on to conform their domestic policies to its rules. 3. A secret trade negotiation that has included over 600 official corporate 'trade advisors' while hiding the text from Members of Congress, governors, state legislators, the press, civil society, and the public."

Support grassroots social justice organizing today.

Your contribution to RESIST supports hundreds of progressive groups across the country. Please send what you can, as often as you can. The groups we fund count on us, and we count on you.

RESISTance Wear Order Form

☐ Protest Hat: $16. How many? ___
(price includes shipping)

Please fill out contact information below and include credit card info or send payment with your order.

Name

Phone or email

Address

City / State / Zip

MC / Visa / AmEx Card #

Exp. date

Signature

☐ I want to become a Pledge! I’ll send you my recurring gift every
☐ month ☐ quarter ☐ six months ☐ year.
Enclosed is my first pledge contribution of $_____.

☐ Please automatically deduct my pledge from my credit card (note card information below).

☐ Here is a one-time contribution of $______ to support your work.

☐ Yes! Sign me up to receive e-mail updates from RESIST.

Email address

Cut out and submit form to: RESIST • 259 Elm Street, Suite 201 • Somerville • Massachusetts • 02144
Donations are tax-deductible.
RESIST awards grants to hundreds of the most critical activist organizations across the United States who are on the frontlines and are organizing for social, economic and environmental justice.

Below are four recent grant recipients.

For more information on RESIST’s grant program, please visit: www.resistinc.org/grants or like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/calltoresist or follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/calltoresist or follow us on Tumblr: www.calltoresist.tumblr.com

Arise for Social Justice
Springfield, Massachusetts
http://ariseforsocialjustice.blogspot.com

Arise for Social Justice began in 1985 as a welfare rights group and by 1987 it formed into a multi-issue, poor people’s rights organization focused on providing space for low-income folks to fight back. A multi-year grant of $4,000 will enable Arise for Social Justice to continue to push for equitable rebuilding efforts, organize tenants in the foreclosure crisis, and provide support and base for working toward economic justice for all.

Blue Skies Campaign
Missoula, Montana
http://blueskiescampaign.org/

Blue Skies was founded in 2011 by a group of volunteer activists who wanted to use “creative direct action and traditional grassroots organizing tactics” to protect communities in Montana from the negative environmental, health, and socioeconomic effects of coal mining, transportation, and exports.

A $3,000 RESIST grant will support their organizing efforts across the state.

Public Higher Education Network Massachusetts (PHENOM)
Amherst, Massachusetts
www.phenomonline.org

Phenom was founded to unite the higher education community-students, staff, faculty, alumni, parents to fight for five basic principles; Fund public higher education so it can serve the Commonwealth, make higher education affordable, make higher education accessible to all, hire more teachers, researchers, and staff, and lastly—honor and expand democratic institutions of governance for public higher education.

A $4,000 grant will support Phenom’s goal of building a mass militant student movement.

Seattle Young People’s Project (SYPP)
Seattle, Washington
www.sypp.org

SYPP is youth-led, adult-supported social justice organization that empowers youth to express themselves and to take action on the issues that affect their lives.

A $4,000 grant (they were also awarded the honorary “Hell Yes! Grant”) will help with the multiple issues that young people are working on in Seattle, while focusing on leadership development, empowerment, skill-building, and educational justice.